

WESTFORD BRIDGE PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE TRUST (WBPVRT)

UPDATE ON POST-FIRE REHABILITATION ACTIVITY

(Issued on behalf of the Trustees (Alan Crocker, Pierre Cronje, Bob Strain, Dion Gaylard))

The Trustees would like to keep Home Owners updated on activity in the Trust land since our last bulletin and the recent meeting held at Belvidere Manor.

INSURANCE CLAIM: We are pleased to report that our insurance claim was paid in full (R231,000) without so much as a query, which has allowed us to proceed with our rehabilitation plans.

FENCING: 400m of “farm fencing” has been erected along our Rheenendal Rd boundary, including +-85m abutting Maddie Buttler’s property and +- 100m abutting Wedlake’s property. Appropriate signage is expected to be completed and in place by early next week.

GLASS & DEBRIS: Most of you who visited the Trust land after the fire would have noticed the glass and other debris strewn across certain areas where it is assumed farm workers and “bywoners” lived in years gone by. No less than 1 ½ tons of glass was picked up by our team of labourers, not to mention the odd “potjie”, cast-iron oven, enamel basin, old wire fencing etc. You will be pleased to know that this was all deposited at the recycling depot in town.

PHANTOM PASS Rd: The clearing/chipping and replanting with num-num in identified areas between the road and fence has been completed. Just over 300 new num-num plants, and a few other varieties where appropriate, were planted (See details below per Pierre Cronje). PGS will be watering these on a weekly basis. Compost was used in the planting and they have been given a dose of fertilizer to help them on their way. Hopefully we shall see some growth this spring.

As you know, the planting process along the western side of the Phantom pass road has now been completed . In addition to the many Carissa Bispinosa (Num-Num) we have also planted several Searsia (Rhus)crenata, a Diospyros whyteana (Bladdernut) and some Dovyalis Rhamnoides (Kei Apple). The latter three trees which can, possibly, though not always, grow to a substantial height have been placed where they will not impede the view of residents living along the lower reaches of the road.

It is now critical that these plants be monitored carefully. Neville has undertaken to have them watered by way of the Bosvark every Wednesday with PGS staff. As time goes by we will have to undertake regular pruning to keep all of this to bush size.

Roderick Appels has today given each plant a very small dose of Fertilizer 3:1:5 as recommended by New Plant Nursery. I emphasized to him to keep the application small so as not to burn the roots at this tender stage.

INTERNAL ROADS: Clearing/chipping on the South Rd and 3-Dams road is all but complete, with one further day’s chipping near the 3-Dams picnic site planned in the next week or two. For practical (and financial) reasons certain cuttings are to be left where they are. In some instances they have been placed in depressions and ditches to assist with containing erosion.

BOARD-WALK: Reconstruction work has been in progress and is scheduled for completion early next week. The picnic table/bench will follow soon after.

TRAILS: All trails have been cleared and are “walkable”. Hikers should take care in some areas where fire damage was particularly severe, such as the upper reaches of the Forest Trail. Recent rains have also made some areas slippery underfoot.

Work will start this week on replacing the +- 680 damaged (gum-pole) steps along all trails as well as repairing some damage caused by erosion. With limited labour resources available this is expected to take a month or two to complete.

Once the steps have been completed work will start on cutting the proposed new trails as discussed at the meeting.

Wooden “boardwalks”, such as over wet or marshy patches on the Leopard trail, will be replaced once the areas in need of such are identified, (ie. seepage from heavy rains).

Once the work on the trails has been completed the signage will be replaced.

NEW PICNIC SITE: A new picnic site is currently being considered to be positioned on Morgan’s Knoll. The view from there is quite spectacular now that the alien growth on our neighbouring property has been burned. The feasibility of preparing a short portion of the South road suitable for two-wheel drive vehicles, leading up to a small parking area at the entrance to the Morgan’s Knoll trail, is being assessed. Details will follow as soon as available.

TREE-FELLING: The three big gum trees that kept watch over our effluent dams have finally been felled. The exercise went as planned and the trunks and larger branches have been positioned parallel to the Porcupine Ridge walking trail. In time fynbos regrowth will no doubt cover them, but for the moment they are very visible. We have no plans to cut up the wood as it would be costly and from an ecological perspective they will aid in containing erosion.

REGROWTH: Those of you who walk the trails will have noted the new growth that is appearing in many places, particularly the north facing slopes, as



2 new shoots sprouting from trees that appeared to be dead

per the pics below. It won’t be long before some definition among the new fynbos will become evident.



1 Bobartia aphylla (Biesie) - found on “frequently burnt ground”...

There are however some areas that show no signs of regrowth at all. We shall have to be patient. Nature will eventually prevail.

It is important though not to disturb the tiny shoots that are appearing so please keep to the paths and roads (including dogs, which should be on a leash anyway).

TREE-PLANTING: It has been suggested that to celebrate WB's 20th anniversary some indigenous trees should be planted. A good place to start could be the 3-Dams picnic site which took quite a hammering from the fire. Suggestions for this initiative are welcomed.

ALIEN VEGETATION: As discussed at the recent meeting fires are notorious for stimulating growth of alien plant species, in our case blackwood and black wattle in particular. We will be monitoring their development closely and will take the necessary steps to eradicate them when they are ready to be dealt with. We may be able to encourage home owners to participate in "alien pulling" sessions? However not much can be done for the next three months until they are of a size that can be pulled.

BRACKEN (Fern): Bracken is popping up in dense patches in many parts of the reserve. There is currently active debate among the various professional advisors and ourselves as to what action we should take, if any.

It is not an alien plant, however some of us feel it should be eradicated as, although green and attractive in the initial stages, it soon dies off and one is left with dense clumps of ugly brown "fire fuel".

The "greenies" on the other hand advise that it should be left alone and let nature take it's course??

