Fire Management in Botswana – Efforts of the Department of Forestry & Range Resources *

S.R. Ngakane¹, G.J. Mafoko¹, J. Ramonthso¹ & A.A. Hoffmann¹

Abstract
People in Botswana have been using fire for hundreds of years to prepare the land for agriculture purposes, hunting, pest control and various other reasons. However, the higher frequencies of fires in Botswana cause increasing apprehension with regard to the negative impacts on the environment and human welfare. Fires can destroy crops and houses, and often kill livestock and even people. Depending on the frequency fires may lead to vegetation degradation and related biodiversity loss; resulting in immediate and long-term impacts on the livelihoods of local communities and upstream impacts on national and local economy. The 2006 fire season has affected approximately 5.7 million hectares of land resulting in various damage levels and degrees with yet unknown effects. However, fires are also needed to maintain healthy ecosystems and biodiversity of African savannas. Moreover, fire in Botswana is a necessary tool for the attainment of land management objectives such as restoration and improvement of rangeland to stable and productive conditions for livestock production and wildlife purposes. In this context Botswana faces the challenge to introduce fire as an economical viable tool to combat increased bush encroachment, which in turn lowers biodiversity and leads to loss of rangeland productivity for the cattle industry, one of the major pillars of the national economy of Botswana. The Department of Forestry & Range Resources as the lead agency in fire management under the Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism strives to implement a comprehensive fire management strategy that covers fire information, prevention, and suppression.

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¹ Department of Forestry & Range Resources, Botswana, Private Bag 00424, Gaborone, sngakane@gov.bw