

AFRIFIRENET CIRCULAR

13 September 2002

Dear colleagues,

Introduction

After the serious wildfires South Africa experienced during early July and late July/early August 2002, the situation during the previous 4 weeks was relatively quiet. However, we know that the fire season in the summer rainfall area of Southern Africa is far from over, and we have to embrace ourselves for wildfires that still may occur before the spring rains are starting. In other parts of the world wildfires continue to threaten human lives and properties. In Moscow smoke from uncontrolled wildfires, burning at various locations around that city, pushed up carbon dioxide levels in the air inside the city centre to four times higher than normal. One can only guess what the short and longer-term affects on the health of humans will be under such conditions.

Afrifirenet is now having its own website under the Global Wildland Fire Network, thanks to the hard work put in by the Head of the GFMC and Inter-Regional Fire Network Coordinator, Johann Goldammer and his Deputy, Alex Held. Congratulations to the two of you! We know that you have been hard at work in prescribed burning experiments in all sorts of vegetation types all over Germany (real exhausting, pioneer work that is!), while still finding the time to get the **Afrifirenet** web going. Africa is now the first continent that is actively “on-line” as part of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks. Obviously there are some sites still “under construction” (Rome was not build in one day either!), but I would like to invite all members to visit the website for our Region at <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/> or directly to the Regional Wildland Fire Network for Africa south of the Sahara at:

<http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/globalNet.html>

Please take note of e.g. the following sites under the Global website, and our Regional Wildland Fire Network:

1. **Emergency hotline**, to be used for international fire emergencies only.
2. Under “**Subnetcontributors**”, soon there will be an update (in the mean time I have attached the updated version for your information).
3. Under “**Country Focal Points**” there will also be an update of the Afrifirenet membership list soon (update also attached to this circular for your information).
4. **Country Reports (National Wildland Fire Reports)**. This is where the representatives of the countries on Afrifirenet should place major wildfire events in the future - or present other important (fire-related) country issues, for our information (note: please send contributions directly to me and the Head/Deputy Head of the GFMC).
5. **African Scientific Network**, where news and information on fire science, technology, research and education in our Region can be distributed through our

network. It is here where our various specialists should consider sharing their knowledge (also see the attached list of subnet contributors).

6. And many more, not to mention the numerous other websites provided!

Afrifirenet Membership

A warm welcome to our new members Nagmeldin Goutbi Elhasson from the Sudan, Krista Virtanen and Jarno Hämäläinen (two Finnish foresters now working in Moçambique) and Patricio Agustin (an Agronomist from the Philippines), working for World Vision. Also welcome to the W. Cape Ukuvuka organization (through our contact Nolvuvuyo). To Krista and Jarno: Maybe you can share the new Regional Forest Fire Strategy for Moçambique with us, now that our website is in operation.

I know that some Afrifirenet members are still investigating links to some “missing African Countries” such as Kenya, Somalia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Malawi and Zambia (Mike Jurvélius is one of these “searchers”, while at his new job as Forest Fire Specialist for the FAO, in Rome), and all I can say, is that we should continue to look for suitable members from these and other countries, where we know wildfires are occurring from time to time.

Ethiopians on a study tour in South Africa

The South African Fire Community had the pleasure of hosting messrs. Goshu Sakata and Daniel Dana Kaba from the Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopia, for a month-long study tour in this country. The tour was sponsored and financed by the FAO (UN). During this tour (from mid-August to mid-September 2002), they visited various people and organizations in the Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal and Western Cape Provinces, guided by experienced (local) fire managers, educators and researchers. I am happy to report that the tour was a tremendous success, and we certainly have not heard the last of this visit. We are looking forward to the “tour report”. I am sure there will be many positive developments thereafter in connection with various aspects of fire management and forestry aspects (both visitors are foresters, and obviously we touched on this subject – linked to fire management – as well!).

El Niño

While some predicted outcomes of El Niño could cause above-average precipitation in some parts of Africa within months, it is also known that some other regions (south of the Sahara) could indeed experience significant below-average rainfall, and subsequent serious droughts and wildfire problems. I would like to request Afrifirenet members - involved in monitoring the situation - to keep an eye on developments, and keep member countries updated through our net. We must make sure that these countries are warned in time to make early action possible, should this be required.

From the fire desk at the most southerly point of Africa,

Best regards to all of you,

Neels de Ronde