



CapeNature

www.capenature.co.za

MEDIA FACT SHEET 1, 27 MARCH 2009

CAPENATURE REVEALS CAUSE AND IMPACT OF JONKERHOEK FIRE

(Manor House, Jonkershoek Nature reserve, just outside Stellenbosch) Today, Fanie Bekker CapeNature's Executive Director of Operations has during an event here confirmed that a fire which broke out at a popular local picnic and swimming spot on 4 February this year, was caused by three youngsters - reported to have been smoking a hookah pipe at the swimming spot.

"The report on the cause and origin of the fire by independent fire investigators initiated by CapeNature last month has revealed that the three youths (two from the Jonkershoek valley and a third from Calvinia – all of them under 20 years old) had gone to swim and smoke the hookah pipe – as they prepared to leave, one of the youths flicked the still glowing coal unintentionally into a palmiet plant" Bekker said.

"CapeNature is exploring ways to deal with the findings as contained in the report"

Bekker said: "Some of the lessons learnt from this unfortunate experience include the need to emphasise to all citizens their responsibility to not only prevent starting fires they can't stop, but also to report any uncontrolled fire at an early stage when it is easier to manage."

"There is also a need for improved co-ordination of all parties involved in fire management especially as it is predicted that the Western Cape's fire season (during summer) will in future be for a longer period, and will be hotter and drier due to the effects of climate change. More frequent fires of a higher intensity, burning over larger areas may become a reality. "

Bekker has also confirmed that a fire summit would be called with the entire 'fire family' to discuss the lessons (both positive and negative) learnt from the recent fires to ensure that an integrated fire management strategy becomes a reality. Awareness raising will also be high on the agenda.

"However there is no doubt that fire fighters from the entire fire family did a sterling job to save lives and property under trying circumstance. We commend them for an excellent show of service to the communities of the Western Cape Province" Bekker said.

BACKGROUND

Jonkershoek Nature reserve, which includes the smaller Assegaaibosch and which comprises of 14 527 ha in extent, functions as a mountain catchment area, providing water to Stellenbosch and surrounds. Following the recent fire, all day trails are closed whilst the Assegaaibosch picnic area and the historical Manor house remain open to the public.

The following botanical description of palmiet provides information that alludes to the combustible properties: Palmiet (*Prionium serratum*) is a robust, evergreen, semi-aquatic shrub that grows up to about 2m high. The main stem is 50-100mm in diameter and is usually covered with dark brown, fibrous remains of old leaves. The leaves are leathery and pale grey-green with toothed edges. The flowers are branched inflorescence about 500 mm. They are brown and small and occur from September to February.

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF FIRES

Although fire at intervals of around 12 years is an important natural disturbance regime in the fynbos to ensure regeneration (and avoid senescence), too frequent fires are very destructive to the unique biodiversity. When young fynbos burns the ecological damage is severe not only on plant and animal species, but also on natural processes and ecosystem services. The unnatural disturbance of a healthy vegetation cover of the fragile fynbos soils, may lead to soil structure damage. This will inevitably lead to poorer water retention potential of the soil and a resultant higher risk of soil erosion. The damage caused by a large fire may have an impact on the water production ability of the catchment areas. Scientific research has confirmed a reduction in water runoff from these areas of more than 50% in extreme cases. **End**

MEDIA FACT SHEET 2, 27 MARCH 2009

CAPENATURE ANNOUNCES RE-OPENING OF POPULAR ALGERIA CAMPSITE

Today, at an event hosted in Jonkershoek Nature Reserve by CapeNature and Cape Town Routes Unlimited (CTRU) Sheraaz Ismail, CapeNature's Director of Business Development, has confirmed that almost all tourism facilities managed by CapeNature situated in the mysterious and beautiful Cederberg Mountains are once again open for visitors - following two months of closure after a recent fire.

"Thanks to a financial injection of R2 million from the Department of Local Government, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, CapeNature was able to use a portion of that funding to restore the damaged infrastructure – visitors are once again welcome to visit a number of self-catering cottages, the Algeria campsite or camp in the Wilderness Area." Ismail said.

Ismail explained that a fire in February this year has destroyed the old CapeNature office as well as the gatehouse preventing access to the campsite and other facilities.

"The 71 000 ha Cederberg Nature reserve is one of CapeNature's most popular among both local and international visitors. The adjacent 12 000 ha Matjiesrivier nature reserve (also managed by CapeNature) is renowned for its majestic sandstone formations - the most popular include the Stadsaal Caves, Wolfberg Arch and the Maltese cross, but basically the whole place is one stupendous rock formation offering visitors a unique adventure experience and an opportunity to see ancient art forms from our first peoples" Ismail continued to say.

Calvyn Gilfellan, CEO of Cape Town Routes Unlimited added: "Most visitors to Cape Town and the Western Cape say the same thing: 'Wow, it's beautiful!' In a recent AC Nielsen survey on the Western Cape as a travel destination conducted amongst domestic travellers, a staggering 51.9% of the respondents described the region as 'beautiful'. Paris may have its romance, New York may buzz, Rio de Janeiro may be one long carnival, but the one thing that all visitors to our Province respond to, is her breathtaking beauty.

"Specifically in international destination marketing you need a bragging factor: one single characteristic or message that sets your brand apart from the others. For Cape Town and the Western Cape it is our destination's scenic beauty. This is our marketing currency.

"For this reason it is absolutely imperative that in looking after brand Cape Town and the Western Cape, its diverse floral kingdom and natural treasures are protected and sustained. The recent fires were a harsh reminder of the need for everyone to take action. Although not on the scale of the wild fires which devastated parts of Australia, the recent fires especially in the Boland Mountain range have provoked concerned calls from tourism agencies internationally.

"Together with CapeNature, Cape Town Routes Unlimited is committed to finding solutions so that we can truly *Keep the Cape Beautiful*. There is no doubt that visitors to the Western Cape enjoy its splendour, and that this is a major driver for encouraging them to return to what is a long haul destination for foreign visitors. Tourism and the protection of the brand bring much needed capital and foreign currency into the region. The growth of the tourism industry is, and will be in the future, a primary driver in the growth of sustainable jobs and business opportunities for the people of this Province."

RECENT CEDERBERG FIRE PROVED TO BE CAUSED BY PROVIDENCE

The recent Cederberg fire has sparked speculation from many quarters - therefore CapeNature has initiated an investigation by independent fire investigators to determine the cause and origin of the fire which broke out in the mountain on 6 February 2009, Executive Director of Operations Fanie Bekker said.

"The report has revealed that the fire was caused by "an act of providence - in the form of a massive falling sandstone rock, producing sparks as it tumbled".

"In spite of speculations that the fire had been inadvertently caused by buchu poachers and despite careful search in and around the area of origin of the fire, no signs of buchu or incendiarism were found" Bekker confirmed.

"An analysis of the sandstone rock sample by the University of Cape Town has confirmed that the possibility of such a rock causing a fire is directly dependant upon the foreign content contained within the specific rock, such as veins of iron. When the independent investigators went back to the site they found a number of pieces of rock exhibiting signs of iron content as well as a significant amounts of quartz."

“According to the report the Cederberg sandstone rocks would most definitely be capable of producing showers of super heated sparks as well as shards of quartz when the mechanisms of impact is as violent as this one proved to be” Bekker said.

BACKGROUND

The precise mechanism that causes fires during rock falls may be as the result of two separate mechanisms, namely;

1. Sparks and super-heated fragments being shot into vegetation during the violent impact that occurs when large rocks, moving at great speeds, hit stationary rocks down-slope; or
2. As a result of extremely high friction forces that are exerted during these impacts, the friction alone may cause massive heating thus providing an ignition source that could precipitate a fire of this nature.

ISSUED BY:

Liesl Brink

Public Relations and Media

Tel: 021 659 3446 Mobile: 072 488 6768 Email: lbrink@capenature.co.za