

*Southern Africa Fire Network (SAFNet) of the Global
Observation of Forestry Cover (GOFC)*

Southern Africa Fire Network (SAFNet) Updates

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The Southern Africa Fire Network (SAFNet) had a very successful meeting at the University of Botswana, 29th July to 1st August 2002. The meeting was attended by Southern Africa delegates from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique representing Meteorological Departments, National Parks, Range/Forest Fire sectors, University and Research institutions as well as NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) concerned with environmental issues. There were also delegates from the University of Maryland in USA linked to NASA and the Global Observation of Forest Cover Fire project.

The Botswana Global Change Committee (BGCC) based in the Department of Environmental Science at the University of Botswana hosted the SAFNet meeting. The meeting was opened by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and closed by the Director of the Department of Meteorological Services. Funding for the meeting was from the Global System for Analysis Research and Training (START), the University of Maryland and the UNDP/GEF/ Small Grant Program.

The goal of SAFNet is to foster effective and appropriate fire management policies and practices in Southern Africa through the use of remote sensing, GIS and other geospatial information technologies. The meeting had over 30 presentations covering background fire issues, reports from relevant international meetings that some of the delegates attended, ongoing SAFNet projects and so forth. A significant amount of time was spent redefining the role of SAFNet, its link with the international community, policy makers, NGOs and the general community. The interaction with NGOs and CBOs representatives facilitated a discussion on introducing geo-spatial technology for fire control at the community level.

There were also hands-on sessions. One session was on fire rapid response system, which is Internet based and is being developed at the University of Maryland. It is expected that a Southern Africa fire rapid response system will be set up at the University of Botswana to provide near real time information on fires in the region. Another was on validation of MODIS fire products through the use of field survey and Landsat ETM plus data, which is an ongoing SAFNet project funded by NASA.

A visit to the Botswana Meteorological Department highlighted the need for structured training in space technology and GIS methods for fire control. As a result SAFNet is forging links with the Environmental Information Systems Education and Training Sub-program known as SETES to establish a training program in Remote Sensing and GIS tools for fire. The SETES program is coordinated at the University of Botswana and is funded through USAID.

Delegates were briefed on the UN workshop on the use of space technology for disaster management in Africa, 1-5th July 2002, Addis Ababa. It was decided that SAFNet members have to commence the process of working on a proposal to be submitted to OOSA as one of the proposed pilot projects in Africa.

In addition, there was a session on preparations for exhibitions at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), 26th August - 4th September 2002 in Johannesburg. Subsequently a SAFNet flyer was developed for distribution at WSSD and a fire rapid response system was set up for exhibition. Three SAFNet members attended WSSD. Reports indicate that delegates and the public in general showed great interest in the near real time active fires occurring in Southern Africa during the WSSD period.

Find the SAFNet web site at www.safnet.net. Arrangements are ongoing to produce a mirror site at the University of Botswana.
