

Invasive alien species emerge as a threat to farms in grasslands

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According to the National Environmental Management of Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), invasive alien species are those plants and animals that are not indigenous. Invasive alien plants cover some 10,1 million hectares or 7% of South Africa's land. This has a detrimental effect on the productive use of land and thus the country's food security.

South Africa is one of the world's seventeen megadiverse countries, mainly due to its plant diversity and endemism. Its grasslands biome harbours an exceptionally rich indigenous floristic diversity, second only to the Cape Floristic Region. This is under threat from invasive alien plant species. Grasslands contain significant biodiversity and provide many of the essential ecosystem services required to support human life and wellbeing.

Another key impact on grasslands biodiversity is agriculture. Hence the Grasslands Programme has joined hands with various partners including AgriMpumalanga to ensure that biodiversity matters make it onto their Congress's agenda, which is targeting farmers in Mpumalanga.

The AgriMpumalanga Congress will be held two days prior to International Biodiversity Day, a campaign themed 'biodiversity and invasive alien species'. This year the goal of the campaign is to educate farmers and the general public about the impact of invasive alien plants on biodiversity.

The Grasslands Programme, WWF, AgriMpumalanga, the Working for Water Programme and partners plan to table the biodiversity stewardship initiative to farmers. They will also inform them about various invasive alien plant species found in Mpumalanga as well as methods of eradicating them.

Biodiversity stewardship initiative

With only 2% of grasslands formally conserved, the Grasslands Programme and partners have identified the biodiversity stewardship initiative as a tool to ensure that grasslands are protected and conserved for current and future generations.

Biodiversity stewardship formally recognises the role played by private and communal landowners in the conservation of biodiversity. It includes the securing of:

- Biodiversity on private and communal lands through partnership with relevant landowners and land users, and
- Sustainable livelihoods through the effective management of the resource base.

Among authorities responsible for biodiversity conservation outside of state protected areas are the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA); the Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Environment (GDACE); Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW); and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

For more on the stewardship programme, please see the attached fact sheet.

Media Enquiries:

Horst Filter, a Mpumalanga farmer practicing biodiversity stewardship, discusses the negative impact degraded grasslands will have on SA's water supplies.
082 628 7702

Mr. Bosman of AgriSA Mpumalanga believes farmers are keen to balance farming practices with sustainable land use. Hence the second day of the AgriSA Congress focuses on sustainable farming mechanisms.
082 388 3000

Grasslands Programme elaborates on the biodiversity stewardship initiative.
Anthea Stephens, Grasslands Programme Manager, 083 564 6061

Kathleen Saunders of the Working for Water Programme in Mpumalanga points out that habitat destruction provides a good opportunity for invasive alien species to infest land.

Ends.