

Trees In South Africa

Trees are important because:

- They supply oxygen that we breathe and they take in carbon dioxide which we do not need;
- They provide shade for humans, houses, animals, birds, and smaller trees or shrubs;
- They provide food for domestic animals (goats, cows, donkeys) and wild animals (giraffes, impalas, elephants, etc). Humans also eat fruits from the trees;
- Trees are used for firewood which is used for cooking and heating in winter;
- Many indigenous trees are used as medicine to cure diseases;
- They protect the soil from erosion and shelter our houses from the wind;



Types of Trees

There are different ways to classify trees



Seasonal classification:

Some trees are evergreen and some are deciduous, which means that some trees keep their leaves in winter while others lose their leaves.

Botanical classification:

Two main groups are relevant here, namely trees that produce flowers and fruits (also called broad leaved trees or hardwoods) and secondly, trees that do not produce flowers such as conifers (also called softwoods).

Origin:

With regards to origin, trees can be classified as either indigenous or exotic. Indigenous trees naturally occur in South Africa, eg. Acacia Karoo also known as the Sweet Thorn Tree. The Exotic species do not occur naturally in South Africa but are introduced from other countries.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry as the custodian of water and forestry in South Africa has to ensure that South Africa's people use water and forests for the lasting benefit of all. The two resources are used to promote social and economic activities in a manner that promote growth, development and prosperity for all people in order to achieve social justice and equity. The Department is the regulator of the forestry sector, and has the mandate to formulate forest policy and legislation.

The Department has to ensure that forests are managed sustainably for the lasting resource benefit of all the people in the country, and also in a way that will benefit the environment.

The vision of Forestry: "Forests are managed for people and we need to create an enabling environment for economic and social development through sustainable forestry, especially at the local level".

The Department's forestry chief directorate assists people who want to start their businesses with information, presenting business opportunities and assisting them to ensure that they do not destroy the forestry resources.



The Balancing Act

There has to be balance between the USE and PROTECTION of forests.

USE

There are two ways in which use in the State forests is allowed and they are the "Visit" and "Remove" ways of using the forests.

1. Visit: This means going into a forest to enjoy it. No forest produce or product is taken or removed. Permission is given to people to visit the forests for the following purposes: Educational; Spiritual; Recreational; and/or Cultural
2. Remove: This use of forests calls for regulation because forest produce and products must not be overused (i.e. must be sustainable). This use is regulated either by Exemption or Licences. Exemption means that communities living near or around State forests can enter them without a licence but only to take forest produce or products which they will carry on their own and use for domestic purposes and not for selling, and still within other stipulated conditions.

A DWAF official may issue a licence which will state what the applicant may do and how much of a specified product he/she may remove from the forest. Sometimes a licence fee has to be paid.

PROTECTION

There are various ways to protect forests against offences that may totally destroy them, which are:

- Controlled use of State forests
- Declaring an area a State forest
- Protection for natural forests
- Protected areas
- Protected species
- Controlled forest areas
- Compliance and Enforcement

If an activity (with which a license or an exemption is required) is carried in a forest without such a licence or an exemption, such an activity is an offence according to the National Forests Act, 84 of 1998. DWAF aims at achieving compliance with the objectives of and the provisions in the National Forests Act, 84 of 1998, by allowing the use of forest resources. Where forests are under threat due to offences in terms of the Act, DWAF must take appropriate action of enforcing the law.

This is done through the following compliance strategies:

- Working with communities
- Awareness campaigns
- Arresting offenders (as a last resort strategy that DWAF will embark on for contravention of the Act)

