

Lions River Fire Protection Association



Baloyi Thusi, Bobby Hoole, Khulekani Madlala and Nelson Maduna

The Lions River Fire Protection Association (LRFPA) is situated in KwaZulu-Natal and is responsible for the coordination and management of rural fire activities undertaken within the boundaries of the uMngeni and Impendle Municipalities. Fire protection officer (FPO), Bobby Hoole said, "The mission of the LRFPA is to provide a cohesive, enthusiastic fire protection association trained and equipped to meet the needs of the community in an efficient, effective and professional manner."

The LRFPA was established in 2005 in terms of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act 101 of 1998 with offices based in Curry's Post. The aim of the LRFPA is to allow the participants to enhance effective fire prevention, protection, suppression and other fire control measures within the respective areas at risk from uncontrolled fires for the good of the local community in general. The LRFPA is responsible for ensuring facilities and resources are available for the reduction, readiness, response and recovery from any forest or rural veld fire incident.

Structure

There are six local municipalities within the Umgungundlovu District, of which there are four active FPAs within the district and their area of operations covers the majority of the district par the city and immediate surrounds of Pietermaritzburg.

All FPAs work closely together. Lions River FPA is a paid up affiliate of KwaZulu-Natal Fire Protection Association (KZN FPA) and KZN FPA assists with facilitation and coordination functions per its obligations and in respect of large fire incidents in the area. KZN FPA is located at the Sappi Shafton Airfield in the Karkloof area of KZN Midlands, approximately six kilometres away from Lions River FPA.

Area of operation

The area of operation is centred on the town of Howick and with the rural areas of Hilton, Bimamwood, Merrivale, Karkloof, Curry's Post, Mount West, Tweedie, Lions River, Dargle, Lidgett, Balgowan, Nottingham Road, Fort Nottingham, Lower Lotheni, Boston and Impendle forming the subareas within the area of operation. The total area of the uMngeni and Impendle region is approximately 250 000 hectares. Howick, itself is a thriving rural town enjoying a strong and varied industry and retail base and primarily incorporates a service based population. The area of operation is made up of both light and heavy industry, dairy processing, furniture manufacturing, timber related agribusiness, hospitality, commercial agriculture as well as large tracts of commercial timber plantations and open grazing lands.

The area has had an increase in rural residential and smallholding subdivision development in the past

few years, which has resulted in a change of the demographics of the traditional farming base. The rural population is reducing to an extent and an increasing number of people are finding employment off farm. This is making it increasingly difficult for fire services, local government as well as private entities, to respond to incidents within a satisfactory timeframe in order to provide the highest level of protection to the community. Generally response to fire incidents is made by the commercial timber growers as well as commercial farmers in the area, with very limited assistance being offered at present from the local municipal fire service.

Risk profile

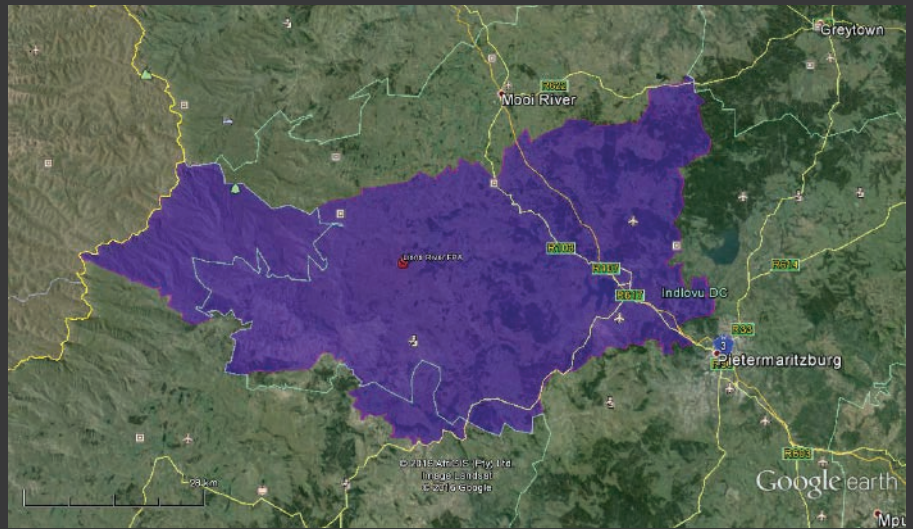
The risk profile of the region includes commercial forestry 25 percent, veld grazing and nature reserves 70 percent and large dairy pasture areas assist with risk mitigation. The area of operation is predominately undulating agricultural grasslands, which are used mainly for grazing with cropping carried out in various parts of the area as well as large tracts of timber plantation, all high risk with regard to the spread of fire. From 1 June to 31 October, it is generally the dry winter months with peak risk period late July and the month of August. Drought conditions have resulted in veld grasses turning very quickly after light frost. This has increased the risk for 2016, especially with the onset of the fire break burning season.

The areas where fires mostly occur seem to move from area to area, depending on local circumstance. Labour and other land disputes have also caused a few unwanted fires. With over 85 percent of all landowners in the FPA area being a member of the FPA, fire events are generally small and well attended to by all.

The primary causes of fires include fire break operations, burning on the day prior to bad fire weather, which is generally accounted to a non-member, fire breaks escaping from the fire crews, Eskom line sway, which causes an arc and sparks or labour and land disputes.

Previous annual losses due to wildfires and forest fires include:

- 2013: 103 uncontrolled fire events, 2 772 hectares burnt
- 2014: 103 uncontrolled fire events, 4 313 hectares burnt, with 1898 hectares being burnt on three days of high fire danger
- 2015: 74 uncontrolled fire events, 1 407 hectares burnt, with one fire of 700 hectares burning on one day of high fire danger
- 2015: one fatality as a farm manager suffered from smoke inhalation and a heart attack whilst attending to an uncontrolled fire event around the homestead.



The Lions River Fire Protection Association's area of operation

Management and staff complement

The LRFPA employs a FPO, namely Bobby Hoole. The FPO manages the FPA, monitors compliance, assists members and ensures compliance. The chairman and executive committee is responsible for the management of the FPA. The administrator is responsible for all database base management and finance management. The FPA also employs four fire fighters.

Other resources are either contracted or supplied via volunteers such as local farmers and landowners to ensure that an effective and efficient service is provided across the area of operation. The LRFPA is governed by an executive committee, which has representatives from various stakeholder groups such as agriculture, forestry, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and landowners. The

committee is responsible for the governance of the association and the service delivery is delegated principally to the fire protection officer. Coalface service delivery is currently limited, contractors and volunteers, however, plans are afoot to increase the offering to members and the community in general.

Key partners to LRFPA include, Firehawk Electronic camera detection, the uMngeni Municipality, the Umgungundlovu District Municipality and the KZNFFPA. All organisations provide essential services such as communication centres, equipment and training resources. The LRFPA is legislatively empowered not only to set standards to which landowners within the area of operation must adhere to but also has a key support and audit role.

Equipment

Fire fighting equipment managed by the LRFPA, include:

- One three ton 2 000 litres bulk water carrier with fire equipment,
- Two fully equipped 4X4 vehicles,
- Two equipment trailers,
- Three fully equipped LDV drawn water carriers,
- A farm radio network and 24/7 control room for emergencies, members are linked to this network.

Furthermore, the LRFPA camera detection area recently installed a new high definition (HD) camera at a new location, bringing the number of cameras monitoring for smoke and fire to 17 in the area, primarily within the forestry areas but with good visuals over extended areas of the FPA.

Fire risk mitigation objectives of LRFPA

The fire mitigation objectives of LRFPA include, dedicated person(s) to drive the objectives and strategy of the FPA as well as the aim for 100 percent participation from all landowners to be a member of the FPA. Furthermore, the ability to talk to a collective and that all landowners sing off the same hymn sheet. Compliance, monitoring and enforcement of Act 101 and the rules and regulations of the FPA is of paramount importance as there needs to be consequence for poor actions.

LRFPA aim to assist landowners with assessing their risk and therefore communication is key. As a result of coordinated efforts and collective buy in, 2007 saw 29 000 hectares burnt versus 2015, in which 1 407 hectares was burnt



The camera detection control room

► The LRFPA is focused on the achievement of the following objectives:

- To inform and train the community on the risks of fire and to ensure fire prevention and planning is used to mitigate fire in the area
- For the LRFPA area of operation to enjoy the respect and support of our community
- To ensure planning and resources are in place to proactively ensure communities within the LRFPA area of operation are appropriately protected in the context of rural fire reduction, readiness, response and recovery
- To ensure fire suppression is coordinated and effective
- To ensure minimum equipment and personnel standards are met or exceeded while not compromising operational efficiency or effectiveness
- To ensure landowners are educated about forest and rural fire prevention
- To implement a personnel fire fighter training programme, from a minimum of basic training to crew leader and specialised courses
- Provision of quality maps to our committee volunteers and/or fire wardens to assist them in their work
- Radio network coverage across the Midlands to effectively combat emergencies and for the protection for the members and the general community.

- Establish relationships and management systems with sister agencies such as provincial government departments, commercial forestry and local government fire services and to ensure appropriate levels of hazard reduction are achieved
- Manage and coordinate all fire suppression operations within its area of operation
- To develop joint development control arrangements with our municipalities to ensure the LRFPA and the local municipalities work together efficiently to plan low risk developments
- The executive committee made

up of landowner members work as a team that is a passionate and progressive, ensuring a proactive organisation, which has an increasing profile and making a significant contribution to the regional fire initiative.

Challenges

Some challenges faced by LRFPA include funding, state landowners not compliant with legislation, which are generally non-members of the FPA. It is noted that the local municipality has been a member of the FPA since 2008 and provide a grant in aid to the LRFPA, this is a vital lifeline to ensure the ongoing existence of the FPA. 🚒



The incident command centre