

Talking Conservation

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Garden Route environment is key to its prosperity, but wildfires remain a threat

“Thousands of tourists from all over flocked to the Garden Route over the 24/25 holiday season to experience one of the most beautiful places on earth, and in doing so, they made a vital contribution to the regional economy,” says Cobus Meiring of the Garden Route Environmental Forum (GREF).

Unfortunately, during this same festive season, the Garden Route suffered from increasingly frequent wild fires which kept authorities busy in actively fighting and monitoring blazes scattered all over the region. This ever-present threat will only increase as summer temperatures are set to rise to record highs in 2025. The GRDM team responded to a total of 17 emergency fire incidents across the district, with the majority involving vegetation fires in areas such as Melkhoutfontein and Jongensfontein near Still Bay, Korinterivier in Riversdale, the Swartberg Mountains in Oudtshoorn, and Kammanassie and Buffelsdrif Mountains in the northern parts of George.

Through coordinated efforts, including rapid response, public awareness campaigns, and partnerships with local communities, farmer organisations and other fire management agencies, the team continues to mitigate



Wild fires kept authorities busy this festive season.

risks and manage the impact of wildfires.

The devastating fires presently raging through Los Angeles will surely be giving local residents a stark reminder of the Knysna wildfire disaster back in June 2017. The fact is that as climate change shows its teeth, the danger of regional wild fire disasters is clear and present and on the increase. Indeed in many respects, there are correlations between the factors which contributed to the ferocity of the LA and Knysna wildfire disasters.

Garden Route regional and local government and conservation bodies consistently go to great lengths to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to ensure a well-managed environment for all to enjoy. Whilst these efforts do come at a cost for those responsible for

managing the environment, the return on investment is high and the jobs created through the tourism sector are vital to the quality of life for all those living in the region.

Whilst Garden Route regional authorities and professional firefighting entities such as the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (FPA) are better prepared than ever to prevent and manage wildfires, the Los Angeles disaster has shown that despite man's best efforts and equipment, when nature unleashes its full fury, nothing will stop it from destroying everything in its path.

The Garden Route Environmental Forum (GREF) is a public platform for environmental managers and a climate change think-tank (www.grefscli.co.za)