

Talking Conservation

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Knysna has sympathy for the people of Los Angeles

“For the moment, overshadowed by President Trump’s inauguration, the full impact of the Los Angeles (LA) fire disaster is fast unfolding, and the hearts of the Knysna and Plettenberg Bay communities who endured a similar experience in 2017 go out to the people of LA,” says Cobus Meiring of the Garden Route Environmental Forum (GREF).

From the Knysna experience, trauma and loss experienced by all those who lived in the LA burn scar and the city as a whole, is something that will take time to fully manifest and much hardship lies ahead for all affected.

Fire damage done to LA is seemingly obvious but only time will tell how bad it will be for the environment given that the toxins and debris from 12 000 burnt structures are severe. Because of the toxins present, homeowners are currently banned from cleaning their own property. It is feared that toxins are already finding their way into the ocean through rain water running down seep lines and stormwater systems and dispersed through wind, and is expected to have a detrimental impact on marine life.

Globally experts agree that the severity of wildfires has been growing because of climate change. This has put more homes in danger.

Over time the Garden Route will burn again and again and as long as invasive alien plants on the landscape prevail, the fire danger rating will



Photo: Remains of a Knysna homestead following the June 2017 wildfire disaster – (Cobus Meiring)

remain unnecessarily high and rapidly increase. As a result of climate change and unpredictable weather, the regional fire season is now all-year round impacting on the sparse resources of those tasked with firefighting.

GREF would like to urge landowners at risk to clear their land of invasive alien plants and in the process prevent an imminent repeat of the 2017 Knysna disaster.

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