

STRICT KWAZULU POLICY TO PROTECT FORESTS

News from the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources

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KwaZulu is often described as a land of rolling hills and lush forests. In fact the indigenous forests of KwaZulu used to number well over 200. These ranged from small forests of a few hectares in mountain catchments to large forests such as the well known Manguzi, Malangeni and Gwalaweni forests in Maputaland.

However, a recent survey has shown that 80% of the indigenous forests proclaimed between 1942 and 1952 have been chopped out totally or so damaged that they will never recover. This disappearance is due to the increasing pressures for combustible wood and for agricultural land and even as you read this, the destruction of forest trees, some of which are hundreds of years old continues.

This is alarming since forests exercise considerable control over



patterns of climate and the water cycle. The destruction of forests leads to the drying up of once perennial springs. In the present drought situation this factor alone must give rise for concern. However forests are also a source of valuable products such as medicines and wild fruits and if developed as tourist attractions, they could ensure a source of income for the local people.

With these facts in mind the KwaZulu Government's Bureau of Natural Resources is forced to adopt a strict policy with regard to

forest protection. KwaZulu's Conservation Act makes provisions for the protection of almost all trees and plants. This means in effect that there are people daily violating KwaZulu's laws when they cut down trees for one purpose or another. This does not mean that it is the intention of the Bureau to prosecute all people found making use of indigenous trees. The primary aim of the Bureau of Natural Resources is to manage KwaZulu's fauna and flora in the best interests of the Nation. If individuals wantonly ignore the interests of the Nation as a whole, they should not expect leniency.

Recently some people have been charged in the law courts for destroying protected trees. This is unfortunate, but necessary if our beautiful and valuable forest are to be maintained for the use and enjoyment of future generations.