

Fynbos can breathe again

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There is jubilation all around after a successful ecological burn at Rheenendal, in the buffer zone of the Garden Route National Park.

The landowner of Candlewood Farm, John Stanwix, supported by the local Fire Protection Association, the Knysna fire brigade, Working on Fire teams and SANParks set the fynbos alight last week.

Fire is very important in the lifecycle of fynbos. Certain plants, including some proteas, do not germinate if the veld is not burned at least every 20 to 30 years and the species become moribund.

Maretha Alant, environmental planner of the Garden Route National Park explains: "Knysna Sand Fynbos has become critically endangered because of the lack of regular burns. Forest or thicket takes over, as has happened in and around many plantations and in areas where fires are suppressed.

"Our buffer zone has become so built up and fragmented that ecological burns seldom happen. We were delighted when we were approached by a private landowner who was willing to burn the fynbos on his land to promote biodiversity conservation, as the Garden Route shale fynbos is already listed as vulnerable in terms of the Biodiversity Act."

The burn was seen as a great success, attributed to the cooperation of all involved.

Land owner John Stanwix says the fynbos in Candlewood was last burnt 20 years ago. The area – about five hectares – is rich in biodiversity.

"In the mid 1990s, this area was overgrown. We burnt it in 1992, and that resulted in a fabulous revival of fynbos plants and flowers," Stanwix remembers.

Of the world's six floral kingdoms, fynbos

is the smallest yet richest per unit of area. A major threat to fynbos in the Southern Cape Region remains the spread of invasive alien species, such as wattle and acacia.

Locals are thrilled at the prospect of a full show of colour come spring.

"Hopefully this will encourage other landowners to follow suit," Alant said.



Sedgefield Fire Captain Donald Muller patrolling the fire perimeter.



Candlewood farm's John Stanwix supervises the controlled ecological burn on his property.

Photos: MARETHA ALANT