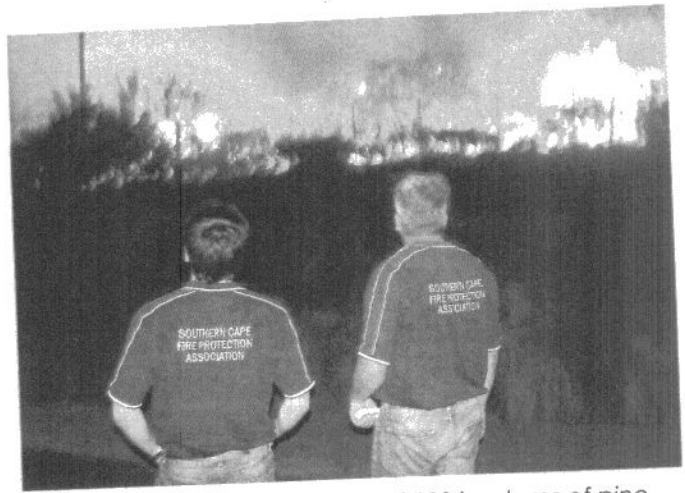




The North-West extended its fire season from 31 October to 30 November in 2013



The Southern Cape lost a total of 600 hectares of pine plantations in 2013

►Owing to the favourable reports of conducting aerial operations, the UFPA is looking at a second chopper and spotter in the province in an agricultural region in Christiana for the 2014 season, reports Dr Roux.

"It can help in the Northern Cape, Northern Free State, as well the southern side of the North West Province. The FPAs also made use of the common 'bakkie sakkie' units, WoF teams and farm labour," mentions Roux.

A total of 521 fires were recorded in the province this season. Around 20 000 hectares burnt across the region, with the majority of this being grassland. The North West fire season was marked by very low fuel load and lower than average wind speed in August and September.

The province had four fires that exceeded a 1 000 hectares. The main cause of fires has been arson, as well as negligence of certain landowners.

Roux says that strategic fire breaks had a significant impact on the prevalence of wildfires in the province this season. "It stopped quite a number of fires that had the potential of becoming a disaster. The communication between the different FPAs, owing to a very effective umbrella organisation, has also been a contributing factor to the small amount of fire," commends Roux.

District umbrella FPAs were created by the North West Province in 2103. Roux says that this move has made communication much easier

and helped to centralise specific problems more efficiently.

He adds that the disaster managers in each province came on board in negotiations with the different district umbrella FPAs to assist with operations including funding of equipment and training.

The cross-border relationship and working together of different FPAs was one distinguishing factor in the regions operations for 2013, which differed from previous seasons.

#### Southern Cape

Chairperson of the Southern Cape FPA, Paul Gerber, provided a report of the region's fire season that runs all year, saying that there have been 852 fires recorded for the period, January through October.

A total of 30 000 hectares burnt in the Southern Cape, which experienced greater cases of Berg wind conditions, when compared to 2012. However, the Southern Cape acquired additional resources last year to mitigate the impacts of fires and hazards in the province.

Gerber says that the main cause of fires is attributed to negligence and arson. He says that many houses were threatened, but there were no houses or building destroyed in the fire incidences in the province. However, the region did lose about 600 hectares of pine plantations in 2013.

The cost of all fire fighting operations in the province in 2013 was about R2 million, which included aerial operations, mentions Gerber.

The most devastating fire in the province occurred in July 2013 at the Lottering plantation in Tsitsikamma, where about 450 hectares of pine trees burned.

Gerber says the fire started early in the morning and swept through the plantation in a couple of hours. Two Huey choppers were utilised as air resources and Cape Pine supplied the ground forces to suppress the fire. "Due to excellent work done by Cape Pine Forestry, the fire was contained," says Gerber.

During the winter months, the FPA successfully implemented the Advanced Fire Information System (AFIS) to detect fires in the province.

"Since then, the SCFPA received an AFIS field terminal, a satellite dish to identify fires almost immediately, as well as other functions like burn-scar mapping. We hope for the system to be functional in the next year (2014)," states Gerber.

He says that various ground and aerial resources were utilised over the season, namely seven WoF teams, as well as two choppers and one spotter.

"Currently, we are busy launching an awareness campaign in conjunction with Eden District Municipality. We applied for additional WoF teams and aerial resources for the following year and a discussion was held with Provincial Disaster Management Centre to co-fund additional resources during the winter months," reports Gerber.►