

Fire Protection Associations

Fire Protection Associations (FPAs) are legally recognised associations formed by landowners to address potential wildfire risks to their land and property. FPA's facilitate the implementation of Integrated Fire Management (IFM) principles through the prediction, prevention and suppression of wildland fire by pooling resources and having access to expert assistance.

They work within Provincial Umbrella Associations that operate in terms of the Veld and Forest Fire Act. The Umbrella Associations maintain close links with Provincial Disaster Management Centres, District Municipalities and WoF dispatch and coordination centres to ensure access to the resources required to minimise wildfire risk. These include weather forecasting and monitored satellite observation of vulnerable territory and WoF ground and aerial fire fighting resources. All WoF base partners are members of FPA's, and WoF crews are deployed extensively for prevention purposes – such as constructing firebreaks and clearing excess fuel loads – as well as assisting with the suppression of fires.

WoF crews can be contracted through their base partners by other members of the FPA's to perform these fire prevention tasks in compliance with the National Veld and Forest Fire Act. Membership of Fire Protection Associations by landowners is actively encouraged by Working on Fire.

The Future

WoF is an integral part of the South African Governments' future planning for the custodianship of South Africa's natural environment. Speaking in the South African Parliament in April 2011 the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Minister Edna Molewa said *"The environmental sector is a major contributor to job creation and the fight against poverty."*

"In the 2011/2012 financial year, through programmes such as: Working for Water, Working on Fire, Working for Wetlands as well as Working for Coasts and People for Parks, we plan to provide almost 5 million person-days of employment. As pivotal as the job creation abilities of these programmes is, it is important that we also emphasise that these programmes have many other positive social and economic benefits."

Awards

In 2005 WoF was awarded a Platinum Award, the highest accolade, by the Impumelelo Innovations Trust that recognises exceptional achievement by government-initiated projects that are sustainable and can be replicated.

In 2009, the remarkable work done by WoF in reducing the impact of unwanted fires on people and the environment was acknowledged when the programme received the Kamoso Award for Best Environmental Programme.

In March 2010, Working on Fire was awarded a Certificate of Merit by the Impumelelo Awards Trust for its KwaMemela Firewise Community project, which has successfully pioneered community-based fire management concepts in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

International

WoF enjoys a close association with similar wildland fire fighting entities in Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North and South America. WoF wildland fire fighters have enjoyed exchange programmes with their counterparts across the globe, sharing wildland fire fighting strategies and training programmes.

Implemented by the FFA Group

The WoF programme is administered by the FFA Group, which specialises in integrated fire management internationally. Through FFA Aviation, the FFA provides a fleet of aerial fire fighting aircraft ranging from purpose built Dromader water bombers to helicopters and fixed wing spotter planes, that act as vital 'eyes in the sky' communicating with the ground based Incident Commanders. These aircraft work in tandem with WoF wildland fire fighting crews and other resources to suppress unwanted fires wherever they might occur, be it in the mountains of the Western Cape, the forests of Mpumalanga or the Free State grasslands.

The FFA also provides Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and support vehicles to the programme.



WORKING ON FIRE

Alleviating poverty - Conserving the environment - Improving lives



The Working on Fire Programme (WoF), funded by the South African Government, is one of South Africa's most successful poverty alleviation, job creation and community upliftment initiatives. Through the programme young men and women are recruited and trained as skilled wildland fire fighters to be deployed throughout the country to reduce the personal, economic and environmental harm caused by unwanted wildfire. There are currently more than 3000 people deployed at more than 100 WoF bases across South Africa.



Recruiting and Training

After passing a stringent fitness test, recruits are put through rigorous training which equips them to work as wildland fire fighters. They are deployed in self-styled "hotshot" crews of between 22 and 25 people under the supervision of crew leaders, at bases near to areas in fire prone areas across the country. Thirty percent of WoF wildland fire fighters are women, the highest proportion of women wildland fire fighters in the world.

WoF hotshot crew members are recruited from disadvantaged communities and deployed – where possible – at a base close to their homes.

They are not limited to their local region: should an unwanted fire occur in another area, even another province, crews are transported in custom-designed vehicles with their Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and necessary wildfire fighting equipment to where their services are required.

WoF wildland fire fighting crews are typically called to assist at local wildfires - as well as to potentially catastrophic wildland fires - to assist local fire fighting efforts. For this reason many of the WoF bases are established in partnership with organizations such as SANParks, CapeNature and District Municipalities. Out of fire season, base partners are able to assist with fire prevention measures such as the cutting of firebreaks and removing fire-prone alien vegetation.

Improving Skills

Throughout their time in the programme the wildland fire fighters are offered the opportunity to attend courses to improve their skills.

For those that excel, there is the possibility of promotion, as well as specialisation through additional training courses. Leadership potential is fostered through management training within the programme and, each season, these experienced fire fighters share their fire fighting experience with new recruits, passing on the vital knowledge necessary to maintain the high levels of safety and discipline required to fight wildfires.

After initial training, all WoF crew members are encouraged to apply for posts within the programme or to utilise the skills they have learned to secure jobs outside the programme.

These positions may include work with base partners, municipal fire fighting crews and forestry companies, as well as many other national and private sector concerns.

Of Service

When they are not fighting unwanted wild or veld fire, or implementing integrated fire management initiatives – such as burning fire breaks and clearing fuel loads – these highly trained wildland fire fighters

work in local communities helping rural people and school learners to understand fire, and to appreciate the potential benefits of responsible custodianship of their environment.

They also instigate and participate in community initiatives such as beadwork, crafting and market gardening to help uplift the communities from which they are drawn and in which they operate.

Incident Command System

WoF hotshot crews are often deployed in times of large fires under the USA pioneered Incident Command System (ICS). This system establishes a single authority at time of disaster under which all resources are coordinated and deployed. A number of senior WoF managers have undergone ICS training courses in South Africa, under the authority of North American ICS specialists invited to South Africa for this purpose.

In 2007 when South Africa experienced devastating veld and forest fires, the CEO of Forestry South Africa, Mike Edwards said: *"these fires caused damage estimated at R3.6 billion. The damage would have been twice as much were it not for the efforts of the wildland fire fighters in the Working on Fire programme."*



CONTACT US

For more information please contact Working on Fire at:
 Tel: +27 13 741 6400
 E-mail: info@wofire.co.za
 Internet: www.workingonfire.org