

## MEDIA RELEASE - 6 February 2003

<< back >>

### **PULLING THE PLUG ON INVASIVE ALIEN VEGETATION**

The *Working for Water* programme has embarked on an innovative media campaign at all national parks to raise awareness on the importance of the eradication of invasive alien vegetation.

Called *Pulling the plug on invading alien plants*, the campaign targets the one area in all national parks that almost all tourists will visit during their stay - the restrooms. As part of this campaign, eight colourful and informative posters explaining the threat that invasive alien vegetation pose to indigenous plants in national parks, will be placed behind each toilet door.

The campaign will also entail the use of stickers and striking yellow basin plugs to help drive the message home. The distinctive plugs, carrying the words *Working for Water*, will also be on sale in some of the parks at a nominal price for those tourists who wish to take home an original and worthwhile souvenir.

Working for Water is a Department of Water Affairs and Forestry project, aimed at the eradication of alien invasive plants that pose a threat to indigenous vegetation. Since 1996, South African National Parks (SANParks) has been working in partnership with the *Working for Water* programme to tackle this problem.

Administered by a project manager, and liaising closely with the parks' management structures, the Working for Water teams operate in a structured way to rid the parks of these alien plant species. Areas are first surveyed and mapped, and the best control methods are determined. Then, the teams go in to do an initial clearance and, after a suitable period, return to do crucial follow-up clearing.

In the 2002/2003 financial year alone, teams in the various national parks will do a planned total initial clearance of 102,931 ha and follow-up clearing work of another 131,934 ha at a cost of about R37-million.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

#### **What is Working for Water?**

The Working for Water programme is a multi-departmental programme to clear alien invasive plants. The aims of the programme are as follows:

- To enhance water security
- To protect and restore biological diversity
- To invest in the most marginalized sectors of society
- To promote the sustainable use of natural resources
- To facilitate training, economic empowerment and develop secondary industries.

#### **Why remove invading alien plants?**

Invading alien plants

- reduce biodiversity;
- consume more water than indigenous species;
- out-compete and replace rare and endangered plants;

- diminish habitat for indigenous insects, birds, and other wildlife;
- deplete food sources for wildlife;
- alter natural ecological processes;
- change the frequency and intensity of natural fires;
- increase erosion along river banks and roadsides;
- transform characteristics of soil structure and chemistry.

They are a direct threat to the integrity of our national parks.

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