

Wildlife maintains training areas

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The policy of the Department of Defence (DOD) on the environment is consistent with national and international legal and other requirements and, among others, includes the protection of species and habitats, the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources, as well as the protection of the environment against disturbance, deterioration, poisoning or destruction as a result of military activities and structures.

The Department is in control of a number of military training areas for the training of personnel and the evaluation and testing of equipment in order to prepare forces for domestic and international deployments. These areas are inclusive of buffer and security areas associated with training areas and air force bases and consist mostly of large tracts of relatively unspoiled natural land where there is a lower military impact. All military activities practised on such training areas can cause damage and deterioration of the environment, and thus the necessity for sustainable environmental management of future training. Incorporating environmental best practices into military procedures and operations will enhance the utilisation of such areas and reduce costs associated with actively managing habitats.

Therefore, to ensure maximum military utilisation of training areas, it is necessary to maintain the ecological integrity and sustainability of the



environment by applying sound ecologically and scientifically based methods, such as the keeping of wildlife. The DOD is not in the business of game farming or the management of zoos. Game and other wildlife is only utilised as a scientific habitat management measure for natural areas of more than 1 000 ha in size and an approach of minimal intervention is applied.

Game on defence-controlled properties is managed in accordance with the draft of the DOD Instruction (DODI) on Game Management, DODI 47/2002, which is in the process of approval. This management takes place strictly in accordance with the approved Game Management Plan of the military area in terms of resettlement, relocation and/or alienation of species historically indigenous to the area. Game is therefore only managed at 60% of the grazing capacity of the habitat. Alienation of game takes factors such as military utilisation, ecological management objectives and financial consideration into account to prevent overutilisation of the habitat or to adjust imbalances in the ratios of sexes, species or populations. This takes place on the recommendation of the base environmental officer, in conjunction with an external ecologist from the relevant provincial government, and not according to the needs of any individual within or outside the Department. The alienation of game is recommended on the basis of the following prioritised methods:

- Relocate within the DOD.
- Capture and relocation by external organisation in terms of an agreement.
- Capture and sale by public tender.
- Internal harvesting by shooting (culling not applicable to the DOD) as the last option or as required by the characteristics and infrastructure of the military area.

Sometimes the shooting of game is motivated as the only option of disposal in areas where safety and security or topography of the area make the capture



of game impractical. This takes place either by means of public tender or is specified for execution by approved military members. The internal harvesting of game by shooting is only allowed if permitted by the Disposal Approval Committee at Chief Logistics. Under no circumstances is any game, bird or wild animal on defence-controlled properties to be harvested or shot for the purpose of providing rations for any military, private or any other function, occasion or individual.

The implementation of alternative measures for maintaining the ecological integrity of the military environment and reducing the fire and flight safety hazards includes the following:

- Block burning to reduce the biomass;
- Manually reducing the biomass by bush and brush cutters; and
- Active management of grazing by cattle.

These measures will therefore place a demand on resources such as personnel, time, funds, and equipment and increase financial requirements not associated with the core business of the DOD. Wildlife on defence controlled properties must therefore be appreciated and conserved as this helps conserve resources for the Department and ensure the sustainable utilisation of our military training areas.

* For more information please contact Maj Leoni Baird on (012) 339 5337. 