

Initiative seeks to combat alien species

Government has launched a five-year programme worth R2.67bn to implement the Working for Water Programme, which aims to eradicate invasive alien plants in communities.



Image source: Jean van der Møulen from [Pexels](#)

Addressing the launch of the Gauteng Working for Water Environmental Programme in Heidelberg, Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Barbara Creecy said over the next five years the department aims to create 38,839 work opportunities every year primarily in rural communities.

"Biological invasions by alien plants is a major threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services, water resources and sustainable livelihoods. Invasive species exacerbate floods, droughts and wildfires, and have negative impacts for the forestry and agriculture sectors.

"In short, biological invasions will exacerbate the effects of context of climate change and the extreme weather events associated with global warming. It is for this reason our department is happy today to announce this five-year programme to combat alien species and the damage they do to our land, wetlands and rivers," Creecy said on Friday.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute's (Sanbi) 2019 Report on Biological Invasions details the impact of invasive species on South Africa's biodiversity and economy.

Invasive trees use 3-5% of South Africa's runoff water every year, which is a significant loss for a water-scarce country.

"Many species of invasive plants are also less drought-resistant than indigenous ones and pose a greater fire risk. By displacing indigenous species and creating single species plantations, alien invasive also undermine our country's rich biodiversity, which in turn negatively impacts our tourism potential.

"Invasive species also interfere in natural processes that can help mitigate the effects of natural disasters through the provision of ecosystem services, examples being the role estuaries, wetlands and indigenous forests play during natural disasters such as cyclones and floods.

"Thus, by clearing waterways and managing the spread of invasive species we are restoring natural habitats and simultaneously restoring ecosystem services that will assist us in the fight against the effects of climate change," the Minister said.

To ensure sustainable clearing of alien species on a regular basis as well as sustained public employment, the department has made its contracting over a longer five-year period, as opposed to short-term contracts in the previous cycle.

For local small enterprises in rural communities, this also offers a reliable revenue that can assist the enterprises to invest their businesses to ensure future opportunities.

"This means that the Working for Water Programme is growing and is advancing the inclusion of previously disadvantaged enterprises to participate more meaningfully in the value chain of clearing invasive alien species. In this way the Working for Water Programme advances transformation and prioritises the inclusive economy policies of government," the Minister said.

The department has committed R2.67bn to clear hectares while creating 194,195 work opportunities over a five-year period.

"Today marks the launch of the Gauteng Working for Water Programme to the value of R152m to implement projects across the five Gauteng municipalities namely, the City of Tshwane, City of Joburg, West Rand, Sedibeng, and the City of Ekurhuleni.

"In Gauteng, the Working for Water Programme will clear 74 781 hectares over a period of five years, starting from 2023/2024. During this five year period, we are aiming to create 13,615 work opportunities through the EPWP model," the Minister said.

The department also collaborates with the South African National Parks (SanParks) to implement the Working for Water Programme.

SanParks has been allocated R947.710m to create 90,710 work opportunities through clearing 431,237 hectares over a five year period.

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