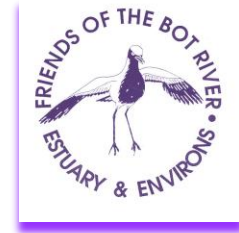


botfriends newsletter

jan/feb 2019



INVASIVES ARE A FIRE HAZARD TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

What do you do about invasive species on your property or your neighbour's property? Recently inhabitants of the Botfriends area have been asking this question.

It is illegal in terms of the local fire regulations and national environmental laws to have invasive species such as Port Jackson, Rooikrans, Australian Myrtle and other listed species growing on your property. The other most common invasive species in the area are pine trees and eucalyptus species such as spider gums.

All these species use as much as ten times more water than indigenous species do; if allowed to spread, they outcompete indigenous species and can take over your land. When this happens they become a severe fire hazard to you and your neighbours. Even green Port Jacksons burn with as much 10 times the fire intensity of indigenous vegetation. They grow quickly and also can increase the fire load very quickly. In terms of local fire regulations, plants of more than 500mm have to be controlled or chopped down. These rules and regulations apply to all public and private land. The rules have not been enforced in the last decade but may be in the near future, especially with the exorbitant costs of the recent fires. In the area, there has been a surge in encroachments recently, especially on empty erven. This has increased the possibility of fire risk to most inhabitants. **Many of these vacant erven have been cleared recently, but the incorrect type of clearing leads to increased encroachment and increased fire risk.** Chopping down trees without removing or poisoning the stumps leads to four to six times as many Port Jacksons stems capable of flowering and producing thousands of seeds within two years. Correct clearing is a much slower process: maybe four years before seed production starts, resulting in much less dense stands. Correct clearing allows the indigenous plants to get a head start: it is more difficult, therefore, for Port Jacksons to grow.

A few examples of properly-cleared plots exist in Fisherhaven, for example, the ground on the lagoon side of Riverside Drive (excluding the Yacht Club), the whole of Miramar, The Crescent, Protea Park and the corner plots on China Marais and Sharpie. A great example of correct clearing is the plot on the corner of Stormalong and Schooner, which was cleared a year ago. Compare this to the adjoining triangle across Trimaran which was **not** cleared then and is reaching crisis proportions with Port Jacksons now (see pic alongside).

It is easy to do the job properly on your own property, either on your own or using a contractor. What is essential is that no stumps should be left behind OR, if they are, that they be poisoned. A follow-up should be done about a year later (when the plants have regrown to about 300mm, depending on how much water they have received in the interim). If you are using garden services, make sure that they are clear about what you require, and check what they have done. In the long term you will save yourself much money and reduced follow-up costs. On your neighbour's property, it's not so easy. The first step is contact your neighbours and request them to comply with the regulations. Then, if all else fails, report the problem to the local fire department as a fire hazard (Mr Lester Smith 028 3138980 or 028 312 2400). The local environmental department of the OSM claims they are not responsible for environmental laws application. It is possible that you will find it difficult to get any action.

The more areas we can get cleared properly in our area, the more peer pressure will be applied to reduce the fire hazard for **all** inhabitants considerably. Botfriends and private individuals have cleared 13.5ha of **public land** well. Botfriends can clear further public land at a very reasonable cost but they need funding to do this. If you have pinpointed some public land which needs to be cleared, let us know at botvlei@gmail.com and we'll see what we can do. Do we have to have a Betty's Bay type disaster before anything happens? In the meantime, it is up to us to do whatever we can.
M Austin



A fiery start to 2019



We trust you had a joyous festive season. It's time to reflect, however, on the devastation caused by multiple fires in our beautiful surrounds. We think of the destruction to the plant and animal life,

of those who have lost their precious homes, farm land or possessions, of lives which were lost and of the terrain which now lies barren and bleak. But we also think of the bravery of all those who fought fires, of those who donated food, clothing and cash and of the rebirth that comes from the ashes. And hopefully of a commitment to make our environment more "fire-proof" in future: ridding our gardens of aliens, not unwittingly or wittingly causing fires and planning better strategies in our communities to deal with fires when they do come. May we all have a safe and fire-free 2019.

Letters from Friends



Someone is systematically chopping at and vandalising one of the few magnificent indigenous trees that grows near OPS in Fisherhaven. Two weeks ago I removed dead branches from nearby, not noticing where they had come from – and now more. On either side of the tree are declared invasive weeds:

*New Zealand xmas tree and bottlebrush. This tree is Sisygium guinense (Bushveld waterberry) – a magnificent evergreen. Someone wants a view? Is anyone concerned, let alone distressed?
B Bayers (shortened)*

[Letters to the editor: botvlei@gmail.com]

STILL ... not a paid up member of Botfriends? Contact the Secretary at botvlei@gmail.com and we'll send you a membership form.

Editor Renee Austin

BOTFRIENDS AGM

The Botfriends AGM will be held on Saturday 4 May 2019 at 10:00 at the Lake Marina Yacht Club. There are a few amendments to the constitution on which members will be asked to vote. These will be published in the formal AGM notification in the next newsletter. Please diarise this date.

"We have to recognise that every breath of air we take, every mouthful of food that we take, comes from the natural world. And that if we damage the natural world, we damage ourselves.

"We are one coherent ecosystem. It's not just a question of beauty, or interest, or wonder. It's the essential ingredient; the essential part of human life is a healthy planet. We are in the danger of wrecking that." Sir David Attenborough at Davos Jan 2016.

Thank you to those who made donations when availing themselves of one of our Xmas trees – we made R320.60. Also thanks to Michael and Richard for cutting the trees, to Rooisand Horse Ranch for allowing us to do so, to Frans and Jonathan for assisting with transport and to The Blue Roof for allowing us to use their yard.



GREENHEART PROJECTS

For proper and effective private plot clearing and follow-up, phone Mike 0832610543 for a quote.