

Camphill fire smoulders

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Camphill fire 'difficult to douse'

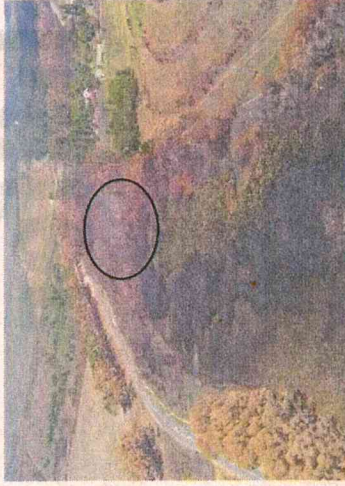
Bianca Du Plessis

Vegetation in the riverbed at Camphill is still smouldering three weeks after the devastating blaze that swept through the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley.

Officials from the Department of Environmental Affairs are due to visit the site on Friday 15 February to assess the resultant effects of the fire on its wetlands as well as the biodiversity of the area, and what needs to be done.

Liezl de Villiers, Overstrand's Senior Environmental Manager, says the Overstrand Fire Department has also brought in an expert to capture thermal images of the fire smouldering beneath the surface.

"Because it is a sub-surface fire," De Villiers explained, "we could not determine what grade it is. With the thermal images we could see for the first time where the fire is burning and what



Enviro Wildfire is assisting Overstrand Municipality with monitoring underground fires that have been smouldering for over a month in the riverbed of the Onrus River.

this ecologically sensitive wetland area that could be detrimental to the environment, it needs to be determined if these fires are expanding, or in the process of self-extinguishing.

Rob Erasmus of Enviro Wildfire says a

information as to the location, size, and temperature of the various fires currently located within a restricted area of the riverbed. "With the surrounding areas having been burned by the recent fire that swept through the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, there is no risk of this underground fire spreading. Periodic surveys are planned to determine the spread or decline of these fires," Erasmus stated.

De Villiers explained that the fire is smouldering in an area of peat wetlands. "Usually a fire will burn over the wetlands and then it's over," she said.

"But in this case there are alien vegetation species such as bluegum trees in the wetlands, which have caused the fire to spread below the surface. This causes the fire to smoulder much longer."

She added: "The experts say from their experiences, because of the intensity and depth of the fire, it is practically impossible to douse this kind of fire with

Jeanne-Marie Botha, Camphill School principal, says part of the special school's ethos is to care for nature. This is why it is important to them that the fire be extinguished in a manner not harmful to the environment.

Camphill students, meanwhile, have their classes in the Sandbaai Hall.

Botha said the school's boarders had not returned due to the smoke.

"Some of the children do not have strong immune systems, so we cannot afford any further challenges to their health," she explained.

The school is currently seeking alternative premises where they can house their boarders as well as their carers, house parents and other staff. "We need one or two houses that can accommodate up to 20 people," Botha pointed out. "A dormitory won't be suitable as the children need their own rooms."

To assist, contact Botha at *jeanne-*