



Amid toxic gas and smouldering smoke, the Working on Fire team deploys their innovative spike technology to flood the underground with water to put out the peat fires.
PHOTO: Working on Fire

Working on Fire

- Over 5 000 people, 94% of whom are youths, across 200 bases in South Africa
- Recruits are trained in fire awareness and education, prevention and fire suppression skills
- 31% of team members are women, the highest level in any comparable fire service in the world
- 3% are disabled
- A subsidiary of Kishugu Holdings (Pty) Ltd, Working on Fire is actually an example of providing a private sector solution to a state-owned entity. Since 2003, Kishugu has been re-awarded the Project WP9191 tender and the project has grown by 30% per annum. In 2013, WoF was awarded a seven-year contract by the Department of Environmental Affairs
- WoF is widely regarded as the best performing Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in South Africa
- WoF South Africa has partnerships with Indonesia, Canada, and Mexico

along the section of the Onrus River at Camphill has been burning since 11 January 2019 and they were unable to extinguish it. This is why WoF has been asked to help. Even the recent rains in March and April have not had an effect in filling up the water table.

"This is not an ordinary fire," says Overstrand Fire Chief, Lester Smith. "There were a lot of different options but this is the way we have decided to move forward."

One of the crucial reasons for calling in WoF is the environmental sensitivity of the area.

A statement by the Overstrand Municipality says, "This wetland is characterised as the only remaining piece of palmiet vegetation wetland, which plays a critical role in the function-

ing of the Onrus River and the Onrus Estuary and is of considerable ecological importance and must, therefore, be protected."

Simply put, this wetland, which WoF is fighting to save, is the only natural filtering system that keeps the Onrus Estuary in balance, which is important not only for the recreational and agricultural activities of the surrounding community, but also for the survival of its faunal and floral systems.

According to the Onrus River Estuary Forum (OREF), the peatland covers an extensive area of 33 hectares, and is estimated to be 12 000 years old. The fire is burning in a nine-hectare area that is eroded and covered with aliens. WoF's focus is on 800 m² in this area. The peat is 7.25 m deep, although, in the central chan-

nel, it is even deeper.

Along with Working of Fire, this Public-Private Partnership project involves Camphill, Overstrand Municipality, the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Enviro Wildfires, landowners, the Breede Gouritz Catchment Area (BGSMA) and more.

The job that Working on Fire is doing is DANGEROUS. Please AVOID the area and let the experts get on with their work. Apart from smoke, there are potentially toxic gases. This dynamic and dangerous fire has resulted in the ground becoming soft and unstable. There are places where it just sinks away and you could be trapped.

"I was in a comfortable position as Chief Fire Officer in the Eastern Cape. I saw WoF growing over the years and, basically, I became jealous. So I thought, let me join the team and make a bigger impact. I subsequently joined WoF in 2010. I moved to the Western Cape in 2011 and have worked on various jobs. It is a very exciting job because you work with various partners in various situations. It is the private sector so you are kept on your toes all the time." - **Shane Christian, Working on Fire: National General Manager**