

The Lowveld and Escarpment Fire Protection Association

LEFPA has about 500 voluntary members covering roughly 880 500ha within an operational area of 1 980 000ha



The Lowveld and Escarpment Fire Protection Association (LEFPA) was founded in 2000, DAFF registered in 2004 and registered as an NPC in 2014. LEFPA is a non-profit organisation registered in terms of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998. In this ACT in Chapter 2 (3.1) states that landowners may form an association for the purpose of predicting, preventing, managing and extinguishing wildfires and apply for registration as a Fire Protection Association (FPA).

LEFPA had its first meeting in November 2000 when it was decided to incorporate the district of Ehlanzeni (landowners, large forestry, agriculture and the community), which form part of the association.

Fire and Rescue International spoke to LEFPA manager André Scheepers about the FPA's history, risk profile resources and alliances.

With approximately 500 voluntary members covering roughly 880 500ha within an operational area of 1 980 000ha, LEFPA is one of the largest FPAs in the country and deals with all aspects of fire detection, prevention, suppression, rehabilitation and awareness. LEFPA is a member of the Mpumalanga Umbrella Fire Protection Association (MUFPA) and its operational area includes state land, forestry, agriculture, plots, small holdings and conservation properties from Bushbuck Ridge to Badplaas and Komatipoort to Machadodorp. LEFPA has reciprocity agreements in place with adjoining FPAs to assist and support with additional resources in the event of need.

Services offered to its members include fire fighting aircraft, fire fighting ground crews, dispatch centre, dispatch and coordination of resources during fires, fire detection, fire awareness, weather forecasting, weather updates, issuing of burning permit, GIS mapping, training related to integrated fire management and fire related legal advice.

LEFPA has four membership categories:

1. Agriculture
2. Conservation
3. Forestry/processing
4. Municipal/residential.

Their base office has been at Canary Walk Centre in Nelspruit for the past 11 years but they will be relocating back to Nelspruit Airfield (FANS) as of January 2022.

Permanent staff includes André Scheepers as manager since 2008, Ivina Alberts as administrator, Angela Norton as finance officer, Queen Khoza as base manager and Nomcebo Mlotywa as permit officer. Ad hoc personnel in season includes a GIS officer, seasonal Working on Fire (WoF) dispatchers and seasonal LEFPA dispatchers.

The board of LEFPA consists of representatives from each category including the general manager and fire protection officer. Members elect a representative/s within their membership category every three years. This representative will sit on the LEFPA. The board elects a chairman, vice-chair, secretary, alternate board members and co-opt additional members (if required) for a three- ▶



LEFPA dispatcher Nomcebo Mlotywa, WoF dispatcher Pleasure Nkosi and LEFPA administrator Ivina Alberts doing morning reports on FireWeb in the LEFPA ops centre

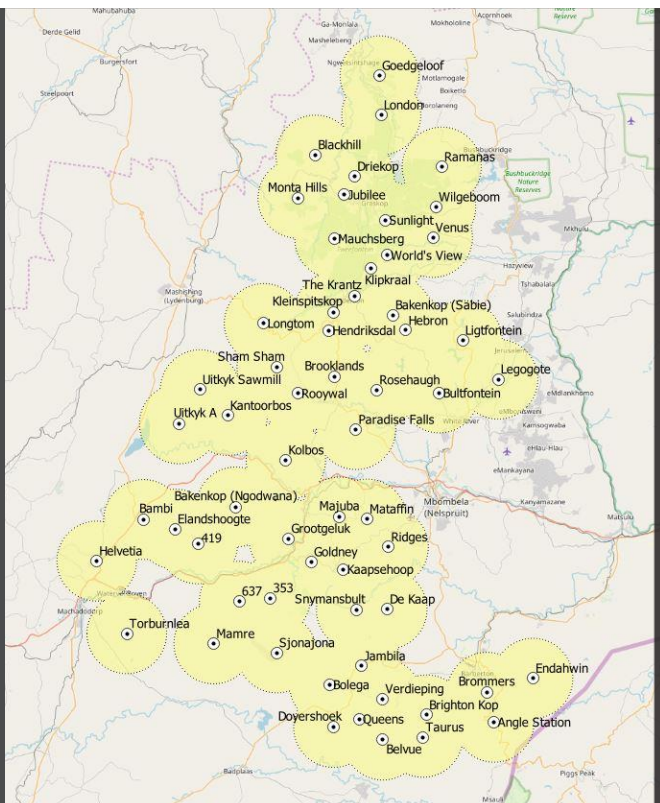


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Wildfires



LEFPA operational area

- ▶ year term of office. The current office bearing period commenced April 2019 and will end on March 2022. The office bearers are for 2019 - 2022
 - Chairman: V Lascelles – Board member for Forestry (small growers)
 - Vice chairman: J Schoeman – Board member for Agriculture
 - Secretary: M Wagner – Board member for Conservation
 - Forestry: I Botman – Board member for Forestry
 - Forestry: A Van Wyk – Board member for Forestry
 - Forestry: F de Wet – Board member for Forestry
 - Forestry: J Tait – Board member for Forestry
 - Forestry: N Engelbrecht – Board member for Forestry Small Growers
 - Forestry: T Dlungwana – Board member for Forestry
 - Conservation: D Ballantyne – Board member Conservation
 - Municipal/residential: W van Wyk – Board member for Municipal/Residential
 - FPA general manager: A Scheepers – LEFPA
 - Fire protection officer: P Mthiyane – Mbombela Fire Department

Directors elected by the office bearers are:

- Vaughan Lascelles (chairman)
- Jacques Schoeman (vice chairman)
- Mark Wagner (secretary)
- André Scheepers (LEFPA manager)
- Duncan Ballantyne
- Willem van Wyk

Resources

LEFPA manages an airbase at Nelspruit Airfield (FANS) in fire season from 15 May to 15 November with a

fully equipped crew room 'HotSpot', a top-class type 1 dispatch centre based at Canary Walk Centre in Nelspruit dispatches air and ground resources with a type 1 dispatcher and three type 2 dispatchers operating on a shift or FDI basis.

Resources contracted to LEFPA during the fire season include three spotters, three fixed-wing bombers including two Air Tractors 802s, one UH-1 Hueys and the first in the country to operate the UH-60 Black Hawk from Leading Edge Aviation, all based in Nelspruit. LEFPA also operates a Helistop at Tweefontein in Sabie, where two UH-1 Hueys are based.

"As of the 2021 fire season, we have established three temporary landing zones (forward bases) at Nelshoogte, Elandshoogte and Graskop, where choppers could be relocated to during high FDI days. Two additional ad hoc



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LEFPA's recently developed app



bombers are also placed on standby at Nelspruit Airfield on high FDI days”, said Scheepers.

In addition, LEFPA hosts three WoF hand crews that can assist LEFPA members with prevention and suppression operations as well as fuelload management out of fire season. These crews are based in Barberton, Nelspruit and Waterval Boven, respectively. “As of 2020, LEFPA also hosts two Forestry Support Programme (FSP) teams with a project manager to assist the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) in the Bushbuck Ridge area and these teams are based at Injaka”, added Scheepers.

LEFPA manages a state-of-the-art fire detection centre with almost 60 high sites and cameras reporting in to the detection centre also based at Canary Walk. The Fire Danger Rating is distributed within the LEFPA operational area via the LEFPA app and all data is collected from more than 30 Vital Weather stations in the area.

LEFPA has also installed the FireWeb information, incident and communications system in order to coordinate, manage and synchronise incident information, resources and reports. FireWeb is a mature web-based information, incident and communications tool, tailor made for fire and rescue services with users on the ground throughout South Africa and more recently within the United States of America and has utilised successfully in national, provincial, district and local government as well as in the private sector.

“For administration, historic data of incidents in excess of 18 000 plus fire data from FIMS has been incorporated into FireWeb allowing for some really comprehensive reports and trends to be generated. For dispatch, aerial support and reporting, the immediate capturing of aircraft movement for all to see on the

incident is now possible. Added to this, for resource management, the incident commander is able to see either on his laptop or on the phone app what resources are at the incident. Vehicle movement of other available resources can be monitored in a single place”, said Noël Harrison of Uniti FireWeb.

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Command Corner: Frontal assault on a wildfire

By Chief Tim Murphy, US Forest Service Africa Disaster Management Technical Advisor

Attempting a frontal assault on a wildfire is recognised as Watchout Situation #10 and is a potentially dangerous tactic. If your tactics include a frontal assault, the following checklist must be adequately addressed before engaging the wildfire:

- Has the fire been scouted and sized up? Who will scout and size up a fire and what are they looking for?
- Is your position defensible? List what makes a fire fighter's position defensible ie anchor points, safety zones, escape routes, etc.
- Are escape routes and safety zones adequate? Review what constitutes an adequate safety zone and escape route.
- Do you have an anchor point? How would you establish an anchor point for a frontal assault on a fire?
- Do you have adequate resources to complete the

assault? Discuss things you need to consider, for example, if the frontal assault fails, do you have backup?

- Are you informed on strategy, tactics and hazards? Consider what could happen if someone has a different approach than you ie, the incident commander has a burnout operation planned while you are attempting frontal assault.
- Is the terrain favourable to holding the fire? Discuss ways the terrain will influence where you will make a stand.
- Are you relying on aircraft for support operation? Any operation, especially frontal assault, should not need air resources to be safe.

In order to reduce the risks, reassess your tactics, post lookouts, identify situations in which fire fighters may be enticed to attempt frontal assault on a fire. Review why this may or may not be a good idea. 🔥

- ▶ FireWeb has an integrated mapping solution, bringing the power of own GIS systems into the dispatch and reporting function. This allows for the grouping of all incident information on a single record, multi-day fires included. Occurrence book entries, media such as photos, videos and voice notes as well as polygons and attachments all archived with the incident for audit purpose. FireWeb serves as a powerful statistics database allowing for a wide variety of reports ranging from incident hotspot reports through to trend analysis reports.

LEFPA manages all different resources, either owned or contracted, from an aerial and ground resource

perspective and generate performance reports on resources and associated drivers and/or pilots. Log book entries can be exported for a period or resource and analysed per incident, per region, per dispatcher, per dispatch centre, per season etc. Tariffs can be allocated and real-time cost estimates performed for incidents from a manpower, aviation and vehicle perspective and FPA responses linked to a member fire, saving time in populating that data a second time (for the member).

The FireWeb Live Chat assists service providers, other dispatch centres and other services using the same product as well as members. FireWeb has a mobile reporting application that enables foresters and other members to capture their incidents/fire (emergency and controlled) with information such as: description, location, time, photos, videos, voice notes, polygons with estimated hectares/metres and additional reporting meta required.

The FireWeb system offers major time saving in collecting captain's logs, route forms and other FPA supporting documentation as the incident is simply linked and allows for the uploading of all supporting evidence for inclusion in reporting or for audit queries ie insurance etc.

Scheepers concluded, "LEFPA has a very successful awareness programme in the farming community and the old 'Bokkie' has now become a super hero". 🔥

