

MEDIA RELEASE



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Department of Water Affairs and Forestry - Chief Directorate: Communication
Services

SCORCHED EARTH PILLAGING OF FORESTS

Date: 5 December 2001

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry arrested seven men in the Umzimkulu Area on the weekend. The men were charged with various crimes in terms of the National Forests Act, 1998, relating to the illegal cutting, possession, sale and transportation of forest products. The men, including two brothers from Mooiriver and a local iNkosi and some of his tribal councillors, were allegedly involved in crimes relating to the felling of more than a hundred giant yellowwood trees of two species of yellowwoods in Gonqogonqo State Forest, which comprise hundreds of cubic metres of timber. Much of the equipment used in the illegal operation has been seized and includes a tractor, two timber loaders, a timber skidder, trucks and railcars all of which are in police custody.

The names of the seven men are as follows: Morne Terblanche, Pierre Terblanche, Nkosi Wilson Ntlabathi, Mandla Masango, Steve Hlawuthi, Eric Sithole and S P Satywa.

Five of the seven men appeared in court today and warrants for the arrest of the two Terblanche brothers were issued. The case has been remanded to 27 February 2002 and due to the value of the forest products involved, it will be heard in the Umzimkhulu Regional Court.

The matter was reported to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry by members of the Eastern Cape Nature Conservation Board last week and the officials have been working together closely, with the help of the SAPS and the Protected Species Unit also of the SAPS.

The two brothers allegedly paid the iNkosi fifteen thousand Rand for permission to fell the trees, which permission the iNkosi had no authority to give. Accordingly to the brothers the timber was worth around two million Rand.

The Department of Water Affairs has been working closely with communities around the country to raise awareness of the importance of sustainable utilization and to ensure that there is a sustainable flow of benefits from forests.

The Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry has expressed his shock at the crimes committed saying that “this will be a large stain on the environment for a long time. Most of the trees were hundreds of years old and were all healthy and continuing to fulfill an important ecological role. The forest cannot be restored in a lifetime. There is also going to be a great impact from invasive weeds into the area and the damage to the sensitive forest floor through the reckless harvesting operation will also impact greatly on the recovery of the forest.”

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has taken steps to crack down on illegal felling of timber from indigenous forests and this is the first major blow to bring all involved in similar crimes to book. A process is already underway to prosecute loggers and sawmillers who have any dealings in any timber that is harvested from a natural forest without the requisite license from the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.

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