

Mystical Knysna forest not affected by the fire

According to the initial findings, the iconic Knysna forest was not affected by the devastating fires in Knysna. The forest - from Goudveld to Diepwalle - is accessible. Spanning across some 60,500 hectares of land, from George to Tsitsikamma in the East, the Knysna forests are South Africa's largest portion of Southern Afrotemperate Forests.



Knysna Forest - Theunis Schutte

SANParks scientists have recorded and documented, in the State of Knowledge report (2015), the presence of more than 30 terrestrial habitat types, representing more than 50 forest and fynbos communities within the boundaries of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). The forest is a haven for 465 species occurring in the forest areas, over 22 species of amphibians, 24 reptile species, 305 species of birds and some 42% of South Africa's 290 mammal species. At least 7.1% of the park's mammals are listed as endangered (EN) and 14% as vulnerable (VU).

The fynbos areas in the Park (Harkerville) were affected. The Kranshoek Viewpoint and picnic areas were gutted down by the recent inferno. The team in Harkerville are assessing the damage to see if that area will be ready for the town's biggest festival in July.

The Knysna estuary which was used to ferry people across from suburbs affected by the fire is also operational and ready for the Knysna Oyster Festival in July.

"We had an overwhelming response to a call for volunteers for GIS mapping of lost infrastructure. The team is also getting

ready to finalise findings and should hand over maps and a report to the Joint Organising Committee (JOC). This exercise will provide adequate information pertaining to the loss of infrastructure as a result of the devastating Knysna fires from Rheenendal right through to the town of Knysna."

The mystical Knysna forest is attractive to visitors for its indigenous trees some over 600 years old. The King Edward Big tree in Diepwalle, the Dalene Matthee Memorial, the Hoekwil Big tree and the 1,000-year-old Tsitsikamma Big tree. Other activities in the forest include camping spots, cycling trails, hiking trails, forest excursions (segways, scootours and ziplining). There are two museums in the Knysna forest - the Legends Museum in Diepwalle with the history of the Knysna forest is by far the most popular.

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