

LandCare:

Gauteng VeldCare Projects

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agriculture

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1. INTRODUCTION

LandCare is a community-based and led programme supported by Government and partners to ensure sustainable use and management of natural resources. Since its inception back in 1997, the programme continues to provide tangible solutions and interventions on natural resource management to optimise productivity and sustainability of natural resources. This is achieved by restoring degraded landscapes, adopting Conservation Agriculture principles, and providing awareness and capacity building to land users and communities. The LandCare programme has five focus areas, namely, SoilCare, VeldCare, WaterCare, JuniorCare and Conservation Agriculture. Additional information on each focus area can be found on the website of the Department of Agriculture.

This article focuses on three VeldCare focus area projects within Gauteng. Under this focus area, several projects have been implemented that focus on bush clearing and the control of Alien Invasive Plants (AIPs). This article seeks to highlight and compare key achievements, financial implications, job creation and knowledge sharing from recent VeldCare projects across Gauteng.

1.1 VeldCare projects

The VeldCare focus area aims to provide interventions that seeks to restore rangelands' functionality through bush encroachment control, AIP control, combating land degradation and deforestation, practical veld condition management and optimum stocking rate recommendations.

1.2 Gauteng VeldCare projects

Gauteng undertook and reported on three VeldCare projects during the 2024/2025 financial year. These projects provided interventions on the control of bankrupt bush (*Seriphium plumosum*) and the control of invasive alien trees (*Eucalyptus sp.*, and *Acacia mearnsii*).

1.2.1 Farm Holfontein 556 IQ, SoilCare and VeldCare project

This project is based on the farm Holfontein 672 IQ within the Emfuleni Local Municipality in the Vanderbijlpark area under the Sedibeng District Municipality. The farm is 560 ha in extent, and it is owned by Mr Mamabolo Raphesu. The property is used for mixed production where the farmer farms with both livestock and crops (maize). The farm receives an annual rainfall of between

500 mm and 700 mm. The maximum temperatures range from 27 °C to 29 °C, while the minimum temperatures ranges from 0 °C to 2 °C. The geology is underlain by rock of the Kalahari Group. The soils are characterised by a plintic catena with a clay content ranging from 20% to 35%. During the preliminary baseline assessment, the farm was found to be encroached by problem plants such as black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), which is a Category 2 declared weed in terms of the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (CARA), 1983 (Act No. 43 of 1983) and bankrupt bush (*Seriphium plumosum*), which is an indicator of bush encroachment in terms of CARA. The project's objectives were to clear invasive alien trees on a total of 93.68 ha, recruit 25 Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) beneficiaries and capacity building and with the aim to increase the grazing capacity of the grazing camps. The farmer approached the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) for intervention where the farmer was assisted in applying for LandCare funding. The funding was approved for the 2024/2025 financial year to address the natural resource problem posed by invasive alien trees.

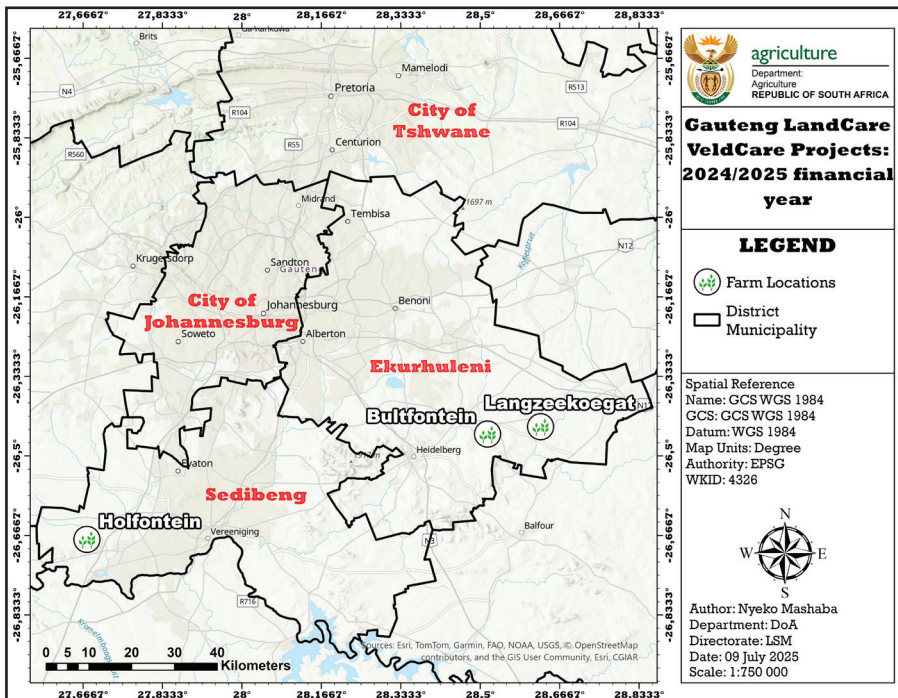


Figure 1. Location of VeldCare projects across the Gauteng Province

1.2.2 Bultfontein 192 IQ, SoilCare and VeldCare project

This property is located on Portion 15 of Uitkyk 327 IR, Rietfontein 193 and Uitkyk 329 Portion within Lesedi Local Municipality under the Sedibeng District Municipality in Nigel. The farm is 521 ha in extent and the farmer is only utilising 140 ha of arable land and the rest is used for grazing purposes. The farm has solely been focusing on livestock farming for beef production with the breeds of choice being Nguni and Bonsmara. The farmer also intends to incorporate crop production by growing soya bean and maize to increase the farm's agricultural output. The maximum temperatures range from 25 °C to 27 °C, while the minimum temperatures ranges from 0 °C to 2 °C. The geology is underlain by rock of the Eccca Group. The soils are characterised by a plintic catena with a clay content in A-horizon ranging from 10% to 35%. The farm was found to have a natural resource problem in the form of the indigenous encroacher, bankrupt bush (*Seriphium plumosum*), dominating grazing camps. Patchy stands of Blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) were also observed on the farm, which is considered invasive although not declared or listed under CARA or the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), 2004 (Act No. 10 of 2004). The project's objectives were to clear a total of 233.5 ha of bankrupt bush-infested grazing land, recruit a total of 25 (EPWP) beneficiaries and capacity building and with the aim to increase the grazing capacity of the grazing camps. The farmer sought assistance from GDARD, which supported the application for LandCare funding. Funding was successfully approved for the 2024/2025 financial year to address the natural resource challenge caused by bankrupt bush.



Figure 2. EPWP beneficiaries clearing bankrupt bush at the Bultfontein farm 192 IQ

1.2.3 Langezeekoegat Invasive Alien Plants Eradication Project

The project is a mixed farming enterprise located on Portion 11 of Langezeekoegat 135 IR within the Lesedi Local Municipality under the Sedibeng District Municipality. Duduza is the local community node in which the farm is based. The farm's total spatial extent is 101,6 ha. The farm is led by Ms Mphahlele and she produces yellow maize on 51,6 ha using conventional agricultural methods and keeps sixty (60) goats for meat production in a 48,2 ha shrubland grazing camp. The maximum temperatures range from 25 °C to 27 °C, while the minimum temperatures are higher than 0 °C. The geology is underlain by rocks of the Ecca Group. The soils are characterised by a plinthic catena with a clay content in A-horizon ranging from 20% to 35%. The grazing camp is currently infested with bankrupt bush attributed to historical bad farming practices and recently a poor fire regime as well as overstocking. The farmer has been trained and exposed to Conservation Agriculture in 2022 to promote sustainable farming practices into her farming operation. However, the farm currently does not have any farm management programme with regards to problem plants such as indigenous encroachers and AIPs. The first approach to sustainable farm management is to identify natural resource problems and develop and implement intervention measures. Therefore, this project aimed to clear 27,7 ha of bankrupt bush established in grazing camps, create 25 work opportunities, plant soya bean (*legumes*) on 42,9 ha to improve soil fertility and to offer accredited and non-accredited capacity building courses on natural resources management. The farmer approached the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) for intervention where the farmer was assisted in applying for LandCare funding. The funding was approved for the 2024/2025 financial year to address the natural resource problem posed by bankrupt bush and low soil nutrient status.



Figure 3. Soya bean planted at Langezeekoegat Farm 135 IR

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Gauteng VeldCare projects for the 2024/2025 financial year received total funding of R2,482 147.00. The funding was allocated to three projects with the cost per project ranging between R770 650 to R859 850 (Table 1). Only the Langezeekoegat projects utilised and exceeded the allocated funds while the other two projects underutilised the funds. The bulk of the funds were utilised to improve the land under Conservation Agriculture by planting leguminous crops (soya bean) (Table 1). In the case of farm Holfontein 556 IQ, R315 510.00 was utilised to clear declared weeds and invader plants on 50 ha while at the Bultfontein project, R380 807.00 was utilised for bush encroachment control on 174.75 ha and capacity building. Therefore, out of R2,482 147.00 allocated, only R1,889 503.00 was utilised. This represents 76% expenditure of the total budget.

Table 1. Gauteng VeldCare projects funding breakdown

Project Name	FY 2024/2025 Budget	Funds Utilised	Variance
VeldCare – Farm Holfontein 556 IQ	R859 850.00	R454 385.00	R405 465.00
VeldCare – Farm Bultfontein 192 IQ	R851 647.00	R651 647.00	R200 000.00
VeldCare – Langezeekoegat Invasive Alien Plants Eradication Project	R770 650.00	R883 471.00	-R112 821.00
Total	R2,482 147.00	R1 889 503,00	R592 644.00

3. PROJECT IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENTS

a) Job creation

These projects resulted in the creation of green jobs aimed at both rehabilitation and improving natural agricultural resources. A total of 75 green jobs opportunities were created resulting in 1 650 total person days created (Table 2).

Table 2. Job creation summary

Project Name	Male			Female			Total Jobs Created	Per-son-Days Created
	Adult (%)	Youth (%)	Disabled (%)	Adult (%)	Youth (%)	Disabled (%)		
VeldCare – Farm Hoffontein 556 IQ	7 (28%)	7 (28%)	0 (%)	4 (16%)	7 (28%)	0 (%)	25	550
VeldCare – Bultfontein 192 IQ	2 (8%)	13 (52%)	0 (%)	1 (4%)	9 (36%)	0 (%)	25	550
VeldCare – Langezeekoegat Invasive Alien Plants Eradication Project	1 (4%)	12 (48%)	0 (%)	2 (8%)	10 (40%)	0 (%)	25	550
Total	10 (40%)	32 (128%)	0 (%)	7 (28%)	26 (104%)	0 (%)	75	1 650

b) Work implemented

A total of 384,1 ha were initially targeted for rehabilitation and improvement by the application of CA principles. However, only 254,6 ha were cleared of problem plants and improved through CA during the 2024/2025 financial year (Table 3). The Langezeekoegat project was the worst performing project where out of 48,2 ha of land to be cleared and 50 ha of land under CA (99,7 ha) to be improved, only 30 ha under CA land was improved. The Holfontein project achieved 98,2% target achievement and therefore was the best performing VeldCare project followed by 74,8% attained by the Bultfontein project (Table 3).

Table 3. The summary of VeldCare and CA work implemented across the projects

Project Name	Target Area (ha)	Actual Cleared or Improved (ha)	% Achieved	Problem Species Controlled or Species planted for improvement
VeldCare – Farm Holfontein 556 IQ	50,9 ha	50 ha	98,20%	<i>Eucalyptus</i> sp.
VeldCare – Bultfontein 192 IQ	233,5 ha	174,6 ha	74,80%	<i>Seriphium plumosum</i>
VeldCare – Langezeekoegat Invasive Alien Plants Eradication Project	99,7 ha	30 ha	30,10%	Soya beans (legumes)
Total	384,1 ha	254,6 ha	66,30%	

c) Capacity building and awareness

A total of three capacity building training workshops, each per project, were held for the projects focusing on:

- Soil management
- Problem plant control

Participants capacitated include a total 75 EPWP beneficiaries including three land users.

4. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- These projects experienced implementation challenges as GDARD lacked human resource capacity required to implement and achieve the objectives of the project.
- This explains the underspending by 26% of the total allocated funds and only achieving 66,3% (254,6 ha) of the target area to be cleared of problem plants and improved through CA.
- These shortcomings were further observed in the absence of awareness events required to educate local school learners on these VeldCare projects and the processes involved in addressing the natural resource problems observed.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Agriculture through its Directorate: Land and Soil Management, Subdirectorate: LandCare, funded three VeldCare project proposed by GDARD to the tune of R2,482 147.00. Only one project, the farm Holfontein 556 IQ, almost achieved its target in terms of hectares of land cleared, although no awareness events were conducted. Other projects achieved between 30% and 75% of their initial targets. This underscores the need for human resource capacity at the Provincial Department of Agriculture. Even though the initial targets were not achieved, the 254,6 ha of land cleared of problem plants and improved through CA will improve the grazing availability and capacity of the affected farms as well as improve nutrient and production potential of the soils. The targeted training facilitated by the project on natural resource management will provide the land users and local EPWP beneficiaries with necessary tools and knowledge to practice sustainable management of agricultural natural resources. These projects will further emphasise the importance of sustainable management of natural resources for land users as a mechanism for improved food security and profitability among smallholder farmers.

The interventions implemented in these projects require ongoing monitoring of veld conditions, including both the herbaceous and woody layers. This monitoring is essential for determining whether the ultimate objectives of improving degraded natural resources, such as degraded veld, and potentially increasing carrying capacity are likely to be achieved. It is further recommended that the soils planted with legumes be analysed to determine improvements in soil nutrient status.

6. CONTACT DETAILS

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