

CONCLUDING REMARKS

“Savanna Woodlands: Scientific Contributions Session of the Natural Forests and Savanna Woodlands Symposium III, 6-9th May 2002, Kruger National Park”.

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1999-2002 National Forests Advisory Council's
Standing Committee for Sustainable Forestry Management

- ❑ In terms of the 1998 Forests Act, DWAF is ultimately responsible for the sustainable management of all kinds of forests in South Africa.
- ❑ Criteria and Indicators for the sustainable management of plantations and indigenous forests have been developed and are currently being validated.
- ❑ This same process for woodlands was not embarked upon because we did not have reliable information on the spatial extent of woodlands or on the types of woodlands represented in the country conforming to the 5% canopy cover definition of them in the Act.
- ❑ Carla Willis described the structural classification system that is currently being developed to address this need. As it (a) has a conceptual framework that was workshopped by most of the country's leading woodland taxonomy and ecology experts, (b) is not designed to represent the precise situation “on the ground”, (c) is meaningful in terms of Low & Rebelo's (1996) vegetation types, (d) can be modified to include additional expert input formulated within the same conceptual framework, and (e) will be reviewed once the NBI's VEGMAP classification is complete, it should become a widely accepted instrument to monitor spatial variations in the status of the country's woodland biome.
- ❑ But DWAF is in a very unenviable predicament when it comes to meeting its obligations in terms of the “woodland” forest types.
- ❑ In addition to monitoring and reporting on each, it is required to set aside a portion of each for conservation.
- ❑ While NOT required to manage woodlands “on the ground”, it has the regulatory function for them. That is, it is required to “manage” those who manage them on the ground.
- ❑ Clearly there is a need to develop criteria to enable DWAF to identify (a) which woodlands, where and how much of them needs to be conserved, and (b) exactly who at local and provincial level will be responsible for safeguarding them.
- ❑ There is also a very definite need for indicators to be developed so that DWAF can assess whether or not the woodlands are being sustainably managed or utilized. Assuming that regulation (control) means intervening and implementing the legislation if they are NOT being used or managed sustainably.
- ❑ But the problem is these criteria and indicators are dependent on the land use category in which the woodlands occur, whether in conservation areas (including private game ranches), commercial rangelands, or areas under traditional communal tenure.
- ❑ We can not assume just because they are in conservation areas that they are being well looked after. Many of these areas are heavily infested with invasive alien plants. Bronn, Archibald, Bond and Balfour's presentations all gave food for thought regarding whether fire is being effectively used to manage woodlands in these areas.
- ❑ Soil erosion and bush encroachment have long been used as indicators of woodland degradation by the Department of Land Affairs and Agriculture. Ward and Bond's presentations however, have taken us right out of our comfort zone with regard to employing bush encroachment as an indicator.
- ❑ I am pleased that this session has included inputs from non-DWAF and non-academic sectors because the sustainable management of woodlands in these different land use categories is dependent on the combined efforts of various government departments, non government organizations, traditional leaders and other role players particularly those charged with enhancing enabling conditions for rural development.
- ❑ However, DWAF remains the lead agent responsible for identifying threats to sustainable woodland management and this (extremely well managed) symposium is proving very valuable in flushing out some of these threats.