

MEDIA RELEASE

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York Timbers Baboon Management Statement

York Timbers' forestry land is privately owned and access to the land is controlled through a permit system. This is necessary in order to control fire risk, timber theft, theft of fauna and flora, environmental damage to sensitive areas as well as poaching. In addition, the safety of people accessing York's plantation is of great importance to York since forestry activities entail the moving of heavy machinery and harvesting equipment as well as timber trucks weighing up to 40 tonnes. This poses a risk of causing harm to people entering our plantations without authorised access. The recent rains of over 200mm in the Sabie District furthermore made traveling on the roads inside the plantations very dangerous. York promotes access and utilisation of our forestry land through various events and recreational activities on an organised and controlled basis.

Recently, various groups gained unauthorised access to our land where they disturbed burial sites of damage-causing animals and captured footage in an effort to portray forestry companies in an unfavourable light. The growing baboon population has become a national problem in the agricultural sector and York is as concerned as other stakeholders about this.

Finding practical solutions to the growing baboon population and the resultant risk to the agricultural sector is a very high priority to the forestry industry. Forestry companies in Mpumalanga continuously strive for scientific solutions based on ethical grounds to contain and manage this problem.

Therefore:

- York fully subscribes to the Forestry South Africa (FSA) protocols and governance in baboon management and participates in industry and community forums that jointly address this matter with an ethically- and scientifically-based approach.
- York, under the umbrella of FSA, is collaborating with stakeholders, through the Baboon Damage Interest Group (BDIG) and Forestry Baboon Working Group (FBWG). Research is governed and managed through these forums in order to constantly improve on baboon management protocols.
- Research studies have revealed that baboons do not eat bark as it is of minimal nutritional value and that the stripping of bark is a behavioural consequence directly related to high population densities. The baboon population densities in the Mpumalanga region range from 7 to 10 times greater than the accepted norm of baboon population in their natural habitat. These densities vary between pine plantations (the highest), urban environment and the natural *fynbos* habitat.
- The reason for the explosion of the baboon population numbers is still under investigation. The decline of natural predators with the habitat transformation due to urbanisation, the growth of the mining sector and intensive agricultural activities are all factors impacting animal behaviour.
- The density of baboons in various biodiversities have a significant impact on ecological systems and is currently impacting the survival of other endangered species like the African Peregrine, Bateleur and Cape Vulture.

- The Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) is a global organisation dedicated to the promotion of responsible forest management practices. In January 2011, the FSC reviewed the method of “bait, trap and shoot” currently used and found that the practice is not an infraction of any of the FSC Principles and Criteria. The finding further states that the current method:
 - Complies fully with legal requirements;
 - Does not prejudice any listed threatened or protected species;
 - Does not threaten any species with local extinction;
 - Does not threaten the viability of existing native ecosystems;
 - Respects the criteria dealing with pests management.

The FSC panel also made certain recommendations, including adopting a more transparent approach to the problem as well as encouraging further research to better understand the bark stripping behaviour. The damage that baboons have caused to trees in the Mpumalanga region is substantial. This causes a huge volume of timber, in both solid wood and fibre processing, to become unusable. York submitted a bid under the REIPPPP Program for a 25MW biomass electricity plant to better utilise this huge volume of baboon damaged trees.

- Various research institutes such as the Forestry and Agriculture Biotechnology Institute (FABI) of the University of Pretoria, University of Cape Town and the Institute of Commercial Forestry Research are engaged to assist the industry in finding alternative solutions. This includes adopting species that will be less prone to damage caused by animals. These initiatives are funded by the industry and FSA, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.
- The practice of allowing various sporting and recreational activities on our land throughout the year also acts as a deterrent for baboon troops.

Along with the rest of the industry, York is keen to find constructive solutions to manage the baboon situation in a balanced and sustainable way.

Any enquiries can be directed to Michael Peter, Executive Director of Forestry South Africa and industry spokesperson regarding baboon management controls and protocols.

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