



Republic of Namibia

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY AND TOURISM

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Press Release (For Immediate Release)

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Editors and Journalists

Etosha National Park fire suppressed to manageable level

The fire that has been burning east of the Etosha National Park (ENP) has been suppressed to a manageable level by the 20th October 2020.

The fire started outside the national park on 6 October 2020. Initially, the Ministry took a decision to allow the fire to burn after it entered the park on 10 October. The fire burned in the park for ten days covering a total burnt area of 2 545 km².

On the 15th October, the Ministry took a decision to suppress the fire so that it does not burn any further. The fire was ultimately brought under control without any wildlife losses, damages to equipment or park infrastructure. However, some powerline service poles were burned in the process and are currently being replaced by CENORED Company.

The Ministry has noted concerns from members of the public regarding the fire. We wish to assure the public that the fire was not in any way destructive even though it may have appeared as such from the pictures and videos that were. To the contrary the fire will stimulate the regrowth of grass with the rain season approaching.

In recent years, fire management approaches have been introduced into Namibia's Protected Areas particularly Etosha National Park, and the parks in the Zambezi, Kavango East and Kavango West Regions, under the premise that fire can be used as an appropriate management tool to actively maintain and rehabilitate all terrestrial habitats within the parks. Implementation of this practice has been successful in controlling veld fires, as well as reducing the area burnt annually and shifting the seasonality of burning to the early dry season in the Protected Areas.

In managing the fire, the Ministry deployed officials, a grader, a water tank truck as well as a fixed-wing aircraft to monitor and control the fire. Furthermore, the Ministry implemented back burning from strategic areas to stop the fire from encroaching the Namutoni and Halali resorts, Mukuti lodge, Namutoni MEFT staff quarters, commercial farms and Okaukuejo areas. The actual fire produced a mosaic/patchwork of burnt and unburnt vegetation patches which meet the criteria for fire management in Etosha National Park, for which the Ministry can provide maps for such patches.

To date, numerous game species, including zebras, springbok and gemsbok have been observed to feed on the recently burnt patches which illustrates that there are ample food resources for the game in Etosha.

The fire in Etosha National Park was managed in accordance with the Ministry's fire management strategy for protected areas. The fire strategy within our protected areas network is done on sound scientific basis and continuous monitoring to ensure that the biodiversity consisting of plant and animal communities is maintained within set targets.

Since the 2011 review of the fire management approach of the Etosha National Park, the park has been subdivided into seven fire zones which replace the previously used twenty-six fire blocks. The zones are demarcated mainly on soil and vegetation characteristics. Additionally, each zone is accessible through a network of roads and firebreaks. This facilitates the implementation of the mosaic burning programme and the logistical effectiveness with which rapid adjustments could be made to either allow or suppress the burning.

We call upon the general public to remain calm, and we assure everyone that the situation is under control and no damages to equipment and infrastructure (except a few powerline poles that need replacement), and loss of wildlife has been caused.

End

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