

HAT pilot project hailed as a success

Team clears pine trees affecting flow to water catchment area

OVER the past two weeks, Working on Fire's High Altitude Team (HAT) in conjunction with CapeNature has launched a pilot project in the Drakenstein Mountains to clear a number of pine trees that has dampened the flow of water into the Berg River Dam catchment area. This is one of many projects being implemented to improve water supply in the Western Cape.

HAT ground operations manager Jason de Smidt said: "Seventeen of the best HAT chainsaw operators from as far as George came together to clear a very important catchment area above the Berg River Dam. After being airlifted to their base camp, they worked effectively to clear the targeted area. There is still much more work to do but this 'first' for HAT in the Western Cape has been a big success."

Over the past few years, HAT teams have cleared invasive plants in:

- Voelvlei catchment area and Tulbagh surrounds.
- Berg River Dam catchment.
- Hottentots Holland Mountains.
- Cape Peninsula: Chapman's Peak



HATS OFF: Working on Fire's HAT and CapeNature have cleared away pine trees to improve the water flow into the Berg River Dam catchment area.

Drive and north of Constantia Nek.

- Genadendal and Greyton catchments.
- Outeniqua Pass and Garden Route

dam; and Knysna River.

In the Western Cape, there are 14 HAT teams of 136 participants stationed at part-



ners such as CapeNature, SA National Parks and the Cape Winelands municipality. Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) programmes such as Working for Water, Working on Fire and High Altitude Teams contribute significantly to protecting the environment while creating work opportunities under the Expanded Public Works Programme.

In 2011, the HAT project was handed to Working on Fire to implement on behalf of the DEA. Currently, HAT projects provide work opportunities to at least 450 participants from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, and 99% are youth. There's also a strong women's presence. Over the 2017/18 financial year, more than 8 080 hectares of alien invasive vegetation were cleared.
– Staff Reporter