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# How KZN is deadling with invasive alien plant species

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THE Invasive Alien Species Programme (IASP) in KwaZulu-Natal has been allocated R59 million, as reported in the KZN Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs' 2024/2025 third-quarter progress report.

This initiative, scheduled for implementation over three financial years from 2023/24 to 2025/26, aims to clear invasive alien plants from ecologically and agriculturally significant lands.

For the 2024/25 financial year, R73.9m has been earmarked for the IASP implementation, with a target of clearing 100 000 hectares. So far, 84275ha have been cleared.

The programme employs labour-intensive methods and is designed to promote socio-economic development through employment and skills training.

The IASP operates under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) national framework.

The Biodiversity Management Directorate oversees projects outside protected areas, while the Ezemvelo Wildlife Partnership man-



THE KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs has budgeted almost R80 million for the Invasive Alien Species Programme (IASP). | HENK KRUGER Independent Newspapers

ages clearing projects within protected areas.

The report highlights that non-native plant species can disrupt ecosystems by out-competing native vegetation, necessitating effective management through mechanical,

chemical-, and biological-control methods.

The IASP is crucial for restoring ecosystems by removing invasive plants and rehabilitating degraded land. Its objectives include preventing, containing, and reducing the density and

distribution of invasive alien species, thus mitigating their negative environmental impacts and restoring habitats for biodiversity.

In 2020, the IASP Directorate conducted a desktop study to identify strategic priority areas within KwaZu-

lu-Natal that would benefit from the programme.

This involved using a Geographic Information System (GIS) modelling tool for multi-criteria decision analysis to recommend priority areas for invasive alien species clearing projects. Currently, projects are being implemented across 10 district municipalities.

The programme is intentionally labour-intensive, focusing on capacity building for beneficiaries. Both EPWP contractors and project workers are selected according to EPWP guidelines, ensuring local community involvement.

Monitoring and evaluation are integral to the programme, ensuring quality and effective delivery of project objectives.

Training is a key component of the EPWP initiative, providing accredited and non-accredited training to participants. To meet annual targets, additional recruits have been brought into the programme as part of a contingency plan.

However, challenges persist, as invasive alien species continue to proliferate, leading to ongoing biodiversity and ecological system deterioration.