

Deforestation; a cause for concern

Deforestation is a major driver of degradation. It leaves the land bare, making it susceptible to various forms of erosion. Statistics at hand show that the country is losing 330 000 hectares annually as a result of deforestation (Forestry Commission, 2008).

Causes of deforestation

- Tobacco curing;
- Energy provisions;
- Land clearing for various land uses including agriculture.

EMA has been flooded with deforestation complaints countrywide and has linked up with the Forestry Commission and responded accordingly. The thrust of reporting environmental crimes by citizens is a welcome move aimed at ensuring that natural resources are sustainably utilised.

Which institution deals with deforestation?

EMA and Forestry Commission play a critical role on the issue. Both parastatals fall under the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate, and play complimentary roles in promoting the protection of the environment. EMA's mandate is to promote sustainable utilisation of natural resources and protection of the environment, prevention of pollution and environmental degradation; whilst the Forestry Commission specialises in the conservation of gazetted and non-gazetted forests and Zimbabwe's vegetation. On a broader spectrum EMA's role is to work with stakeholders so as to maintain healthy ecosystems and promote biodiversity whilst that of the Forestry Commission is to administer, control and manage state forests for the protection of trees, control the cutting of trees, drive afforestation projects as well as regulate and

control trade in forest produce. Traditional leaders also use the Traditional Leaders' Act (Cap 29:17) and their traditional norms and values to control deforestation issues. The ZRP administers all the laws in the country including the environmental laws and thus can prosecute those who cut down trees and those found in wrongful possession of forest produce.

Why is EMA concerned about deforestation?

EMA is concerned about deforestation because it leads to land degradation. Deforestation negatively affects ecosystems, leading to biodiversity loss, high rates of soil erosion, resulting in the siltation of streams and rivers and the disruption of hydrological systems.

What does the law say?

The legal instruments used to control deforestation are the Forest Act (Chapter 19:05) and the Communal Land Forest Produce Act (Chapter 19:04). These Acts are administered by Forestry Commission. They make it an *“offence to cut, injure, remove, and collect any forest produce without authority and to move firewood from one place to another without a timber movement permit issued by the Forestry Commission.”* Section 4 of the Communal Land Forest Produce Act allows inhabitants of communal land (and by implication, those in A1 and similar model resettlement areas) to exploit forest produce for own use, not for commercial purposes. Section 55 of the Forest Act requires that any removal of indigenous trees must be preceded by a notification to the Forestry Commission before removal, subjecting such forest resource to State control.

In addition to the two main Acts cited above the Forestry Commission also makes use of Statutory Instrument 116 of 2012 which is the Forest (Control of Firewood, Timber and

Forest Produce) Regulations 2012. This Statutory Instrument controls both wood and timber movement and trade in Zimbabwe and has special emphasis on encouraging the production of flue-cured tobacco on a sustainable basis. Flue-cured tobacco production consumes substantial amounts of wood. The destruction of forests commences from land clearing for tobacco farming purposes where virgin land is involved, harvesting of poles and sticks for barn construction right up to the curing process itself. To avert a potential disaster of lack of trees in Zimbabwe owing to flue-cured tobacco production activities, the government has come up with a set of regulations to control the utilization, trade and movement of firewood and timber and other forest produce in Zimbabwe, as well as encouraging the establishment of woodlots of fast-growing tree species for sustainable tobacco curing purposes.

What are the solutions?

Extensive tree planting programs whatever form they take- by individuals, groups (schools, churches, etc.), by corporates or non-governmental organisations will help us maintain a balance between what we are losing and what we are gaining.

Tobacco curing energy is just one of the many inputs that a tobacco farmer should prioritise and budget for. Farmers must buy coal for curing; they can also establish their own sustainable sources of energy in the form of fast growing exotic tree woodlots which are a renewable source of energy. Of late, tobacco contracting companies have gone into an intensive campaign to facilitate establishment of fast growing tree species woodlots to sustain their business as they are aware that their business cannot rely on the indigenous forests for long. This is a welcome drive.

To get a copy of the Forest Act, Communal land forest Produce Act and Statutory Instrument 116 of 2012 which is the Forest (Control of Firewood, Timber and Forest Produce) Regulations 2012 visit the Forestry Commission website www.forestry.co.zw or contact us on 04-498436-9. **Report all deforestation activities to the Forestry Commission.**

Please talk to us we are always ready to listen. Email: eep@ema.co.zw or 04 305543 / Toll free 08080028, sms/whatsapp 0779 777 094, Like our Facebook Page- Environmental Management Agency or follow us on Twitter @EMAeep.