

Forestry South Africa launches new infographic for Arbor Month

By [Dr Ronald Heath](#)

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Sunday, 1 September 2019 saw the launch of National Arbor Month by Deputy Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Ms Maggie Sotyu in Port Elizabeth. This year's theme is *Forests and Sustainable Cities*.



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Against this year's theme of Forests and Sustainable Cities, Forestry South Africa (FSA) has compiled an [infographic](#) showcasing key areas in which the South African forestry sector and its 1.2 million hectares of commercially farmed trees not only play an important role in South Africa's economy, but in society and our natural environment.

Plantations and prosperity

The forestry and forest products sector recently pledged its support to the Public-Private Growth Initiative's (PPGI) five-year business plan which will see close to R19bn be unlocked for investment in forests and forestry products and services across the value chain.

The R19bn commitment includes a R1.8bn investment in plantation forestry and R17bn in infrastructure development that will enable the sector to increase wood fibre production. This will be done through the sustainable planting and farming of trees for processing into renewable and sustainable wood, pulp and paper-based products. This, in turn, will create jobs and foster economic growth in rural and urban areas.

Guided by industry associations FSA, Sawmilling South Africa and the Paper Manufacturers Association of South Africa, the PPGI programmes will create significant new employment opportunities for women and youth in rural areas through new afforestation, replanting programmes and artisanal and apprenticeship opportunities in sawmilling, pulp, paper, bio-refinery and renewable energy production.

The South African forestry sector – comprising large-scale corporate growers, around 1,300 commercial timber farmers and more than 20,000 small-scale timber growers – contributes R69bn per year to the GDP. From trees to timber, pulp, paper and recycling, the forestry-to-paper value chain employs more than 156,000 people – with a further 690,000 people dependent on forestry for their livelihoods.

Further to this, forestry companies are active corporate citizens, investing in education, health, community and enterprise development and food security, at a local level, mostly in rural areas where the need is greatest.

Plantations and the planet

Trees – in both indigenous forests and commercial plantations – are nature's greatest recyclers. They take in carbon dioxide, keep the carbon for their growth and release oxygen. The carbon remains in the wood, even when it is converted into other products, helping to mitigate climate change.

Plantations that are sustainably managed in line with international best practice reduce soil erosion and the subsequent silting of valuable water resources. They also provide habitats for a diversity of animals, birds and plants. South Africa prides itself on a responsible and sustainably-managed forestry sector that balances productive plantations with sound conservation management and social responsibility.

Plantations and people

Plantations represent 7% of the earth's forested areas[i], but provide for more than half of the wood used for industrial purposes. From the moment we rise in the morning, we make use of products derived from trees: the label on the coffee jar, toilet paper and the kitchen table. Wooden trusses support the roofs above our heads while paper makes it possible to be productive at work. Even the vitamins we take or the low-fat yoghurt we eat contains wood – as a purified powder called microcrystalline cellulose.

Forestry can also be fun. It is a treasure trove for eco-tourism and provides the perfect playground for mountain bikers, hikers, trail runners and nature lovers.

[National Arbor Month is an annual campaign](#) coordinated by the national Departments of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs in partnership with Total South Africa, [Food and Trees for Africa](#) and Good Green Deeds.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Ronald Heath is research and protection director at Forestry South Africa.

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