
South Africa: "social benefits" of industrial tree plantations

The Forest Owners' Association recently released a report from results of a survey during the first nine months of last year on "crime and violence" in the so-called South African forests (in reality large industrial eucalyptus and pine tree plantations) in the Kwazulu Natal area. The survey covered 54% of total afforestation in the country -over 800.000 hectares.

According to a company's forest manager, plantations "were increasingly becoming safe heavens for people who lived in violence-torn rural townships, which mostly neighboured the plantations."

Crime, arson and theft were the main problems highlighted by the survey. Crime against individuals resulted in 380 deaths and 115 seriously injured people. According to the report, "people were being shot on the way to work, timber-carrying trucks were being fired at, and intimidation was becoming a serious problem." Arson was responsible for 1093 or 74% of all forest (plantations) fires and 2825 hectares were damaged by arson during the period. Some 30.000 tons of timber was stolen in the same period.

Industry is "deeply concerned" about the issue and the largest corporations (including Mondi and Sappi) have met the South African Police Service and the South African National Defence Force to find solutions. It has also had to invest heavily in security, fire fighting and communications equipment.

Source:"Crime joins arson as a threat to forest profitability", Business Report (South Africa), December 10 1997