

PROVINCIAL FACT SHEET

LAND DEGRADATION

Northern Province

Reviewing land degradation

As part of a national review of land degradation, information about soil and veld degradation was gathered at five workshops held in the Northern Province during 1997. Based on the insights of agricultural extension officers and conservationists, three consensus maps were produced (see over). These represent the status of soil and veld degradation and an overall measure of land degradation in the province. In terms of this analysis the Northern Province is one of the most degraded provinces in South Africa.

Provincial Profile

The 1995 census recorded nearly 5.4 million people living in the Northern Province (123 280 km²). Population densities vary greatly from district to district, with most commercial farming areas being sparsely populated (0–5 people/km²) but more than 100 people/km² living in some of the communal districts. During the period 1988–98 many housing projects were initiated and there was a marked increase in settlement areas in the province. The Northern Province has the second highest percentage (71,4%) of the population in poverty.

The commercial farming areas of the Northern Province comprise what used to be the northern Transvaal, while the former homeland of Venda and self-governing states of Gazankulu and Lebowa make up most of the communal areas.

The natural vegetation of the Northern Province is savanna. The northern half of the province has an arid climate, while the southern part is semi-arid.

Agricultural land use

58% of land in the Northern Province is used for grazing, including beef and dairy cattle and game. Crops account for a further 22% of land use, including sorghum, sunflowers and groundnuts. Deciduous fruits are grown on the highveld, and citrus, subtropical fruit and a small amount of tea in the lowveld. Only 1% of the province is used for commercial forestry and 2% for conservation.

Between 1988 and 1998 there was an increase in the area of land used for crops, and a decrease in the area of grazing land.

Land degradation issues

The Northern Province and KwaZulu-Natal have the highest provincial soil degradation index values (see over). Soils in

the Northern Province are highly susceptible to erosion and both croplands and grazing lands are affected by sheet erosion and by gully erosion. The rate of soil degradation is increasing in both croplands and grazing lands. Naphuno 2, Mankweng, Schoonoord and Sekgosesse 1 have the highest soil degradation indices.

The Northern Province also has the highest provincial veld degradation index (see over). Loss of plant cover is a serious problem in the east of the province, while most of the western districts are affected by bush encroachment. Deforestation and change in plant species composition affect mainly the communal areas. The most seriously degraded districts are Mutale, Schoonoord, Praktiseer and Messina.

Nearly 14% of land in the Northern Province is infested with alien plants, making it the third most extensively invaded province. However, in comparison to other types of veld degradation, alien plants are not generally considered a priority.

Five of the twenty magisterial districts requiring priority attention in terms of land degradation in South Africa are found in the Northern Province.

Priority magisterial districts

Mutale	Naphuno 2	Praktiseer
Schoonoord	Sekgosesse	

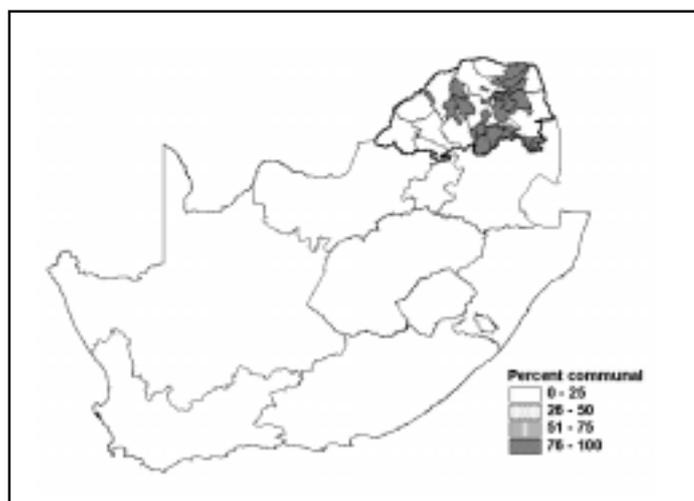
Combating land degradation

Land degradation in the Northern Province is very serious, particularly in the extensive communal areas that were once Venda, Lebowa and Gazankulu. In order to address problems of soil and veld degradation, the province will have to deal with the legacy of apartheid, which forced too many people to live on too little land, with poor infrastructure and services.

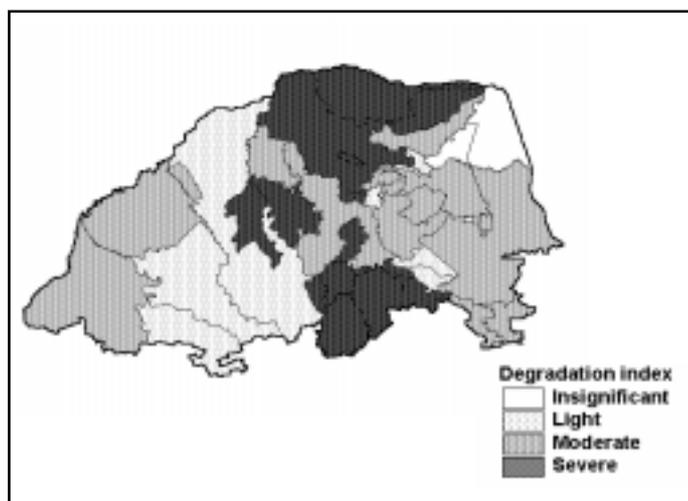
The experience of less degraded provinces suggests that good agricultural extension services, farmer study groups, government-subsidised soil conservation works, and strict application of agricultural legislation may all help to combat land degradation in the Northern Province.



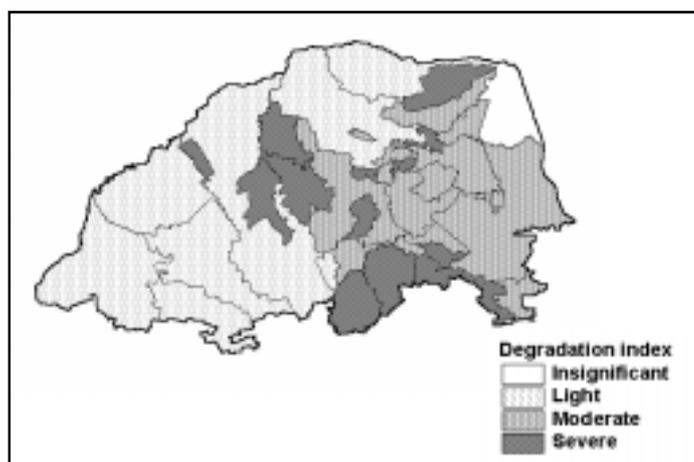
Indices of Land Degradation in the Northern Province



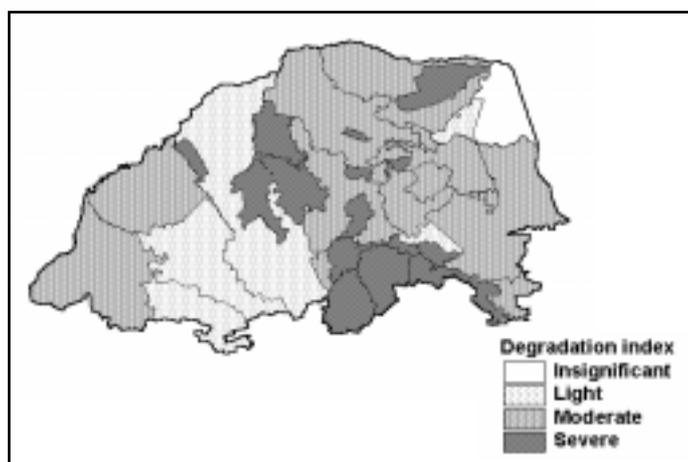
The location of the Northern Province, showing the percentage of each magisterial district managed under a communal land tenure system.



The total Veld Degradation Index (VDI) for the 39 magisterial districts of the Northern Province:
The VDI incorporates the severity and rate of veld degradation, as well as the % area of veld in the magisterial district.



The total Soil Degradation Index (SDI) for the 39 magisterial districts of the Northern Province:
The SDI incorporates the severity and rate of soil degradation for all land use types, adjusted for the % area of each land use type in the magisterial district.



The Combined Degradation Index (CDI) for the 39 magisterial districts of the Northern Province:
The CDI is the sum of the total SDI and VDI for each magisterial district.

Where can I get more information?

Department of Agriculture, Northern Province, Private Bag X9487, Pietersburg 0700

Tel: (015) 295 3980, Fax: (015) 295 7028

Department of Water Affairs & Forestry, Northern Province, Private Bag X9506, Pietersburg 0700

Tel: (015) 295 9410, Fax: (015) 295 3215

For more information about the national review of land degradation and its products, visit the following web-site:

www.nbi.ac.za/landdeg



National Department
of Agriculture



National Botanical
Institute



Environmental
Monitoring Group



Department of Environmental
Affairs & Tourism



Programme for Land
& Agrarian Studies



Department of Water
Affairs & Forestry