

**Water Affairs and Forestry proclaims first Champion Trees**  
**Media release by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
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The Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, proclaimed the first 21 Champion Trees as protected under the National Forests Act No 84 of 1998 in the Government Gazette of 6 December 2006. These are individual trees and groups of trees short listed by a panel of experts from a list of proposed trees, considered to be of national conservation importance. This declaration comes a year after an initial list of trees was published for comment.

Among the listed trees are:

- the famous Tsitsikamma Big Tree along the Garden Route
- The Post Office Milkwood Tree of Mossel Bay
- Sagole baobab in Limpopo province (largest tree in South Africa)
- Camphor trees planted at Vergelegen Estate 3 centuries ago.

During 2006 each of the trees had to be visited, measured and evaluated by officials of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF). Of the trees on the initial shortlist, two were destroyed by storm winds and another by fire. During August last year a strong wind toppled the tallest tree in Africa, a Saligna gum tree of more than 81m tall. A storm also destroyed most of the largest Cluster fig in the country, on the south coast of KwaZulu Natal. In Cradock, a historic Holly oak planted more than a century and a half ago, was seriously damaged by a fire, and finally destroyed by a property owner who feared that the tree may fall over. The rest of the trees on the list now proclaimed, appear to be sturdy and in good health, except for a large River Red gum tree (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) on the Bergzicht Square in Stellenbosch which appears to be infested with a sap-sucking insect called *Thaumastocoris australicus*. Another exception is the Sophiatown Oak in Johannesburg which died more than a year ago, and of which the site is maintained due to its historic significance. The mutilation of this tree by a property owner led to the initiation of the Champion Tree project –aimed at pro-actively protecting trees of national importance and sparing them from a similar fate.

The search is now on for the next tallest tree among the grove of Saligna gum trees in Woodbush Forest Estate in Limpopo province, where the tallest tree was toppled by wind. These trees were planted in 1906, and many of them are close to 80m tall, which means that the next contender will still rate as the tallest tree in Africa. Although slender, the Woodbush trees are almost twice as tall as the Tsitsikamma big tree, an Outeniqua yellowwood along the Garden Route that receives more than 80 000 visitors per year.

The Champion Tree Project has entered an exciting phase, with new discoveries of exceptionally large trees. In Aderne Gardens (Cape Town) an enormous Indian rubber fig was measured by officials. It has a trunk circumference of more than 11m, and a crown diameter of more than 44m. Applying the international formula for tree size that combines height, trunk size and crown diameter, it was discovered that this tree has a size index similar to the Sagole baobab in Limpopo province. This means that the title for largest tree in the country is now shared by two trees at the opposite ends of South Africa, one an indigenous tree in the far north, and the other an exotic tree in the far south.

A new cycle of nominations for Champion Trees begins at the start of August each year, while the nominations of the previous cycle is then evaluated by DWAF and its panel of experts. At the second evaluation session of this panel in October last year, it was also recommended that a logo be developed for the Champion Tree Project, to appear on plaques to be erected at all the declared trees around the country. A nomination form is available on the DWAF website [www.dwaf.gov.za/forestry](http://www.dwaf.gov.za/forestry).

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