



Opuntia Fact Sheet

INTRODUCTION

Opuntia fulgida (*umayeqela/magneta*) was introduced in Gwanda as an ornamental and has since spread to Bulilima, Mangwe and Tsholotsho districts. It is a short shrub usually 1 to 2 metres in height with many segmented, irregular, drooping branches. The branches are covered with a dense layer of sharp spines. It infests pastures, road sides and stream banks. The control of *Opuntia fulgida* is delegated to the Environmental Management Agency through the Environmental Management Act Chapter 20:27 with support from other environmental statutes.

REPRODUCTION AND SPREAD

It reproduces by stem fragments and underground tubers. The stem fragments spread by attaching themselves to animals, foot wear and vehicles. Once segments detach, they easily establish wherever they lodge and quickly form impenetrable ground cover thickets.

HABITAT

It is a perennial plant which establishes itself in a wide range of soils.

IMPACT

1. Its spatial occupation competes with native species resulting in loss of bio-diversity.
2. The spines injure animals and people.
3. It invades pastures reducing productivity.
4. It reduces quality of meat and hide of infested animals.

Integrated Management of Opuntia



- Put a small bunch of dry grass at the base of an Opuntia bush.
- Ignite the grass. When it is fully lit the Opuntia thorns will quickly catch fire and the whole bush will burn.



Work with fire with care. Take care not to cause veld fires.



- When the bushes have stopped burning. Wait for the smoke to clear and then hack the branches of the bush down. Take care when doing this, some thorns might still be present.
- Dig out the roots.
- Gather the branches and roots into piles using sticks or a rake.
- Use shovels to deposit the branches and roots into containers such as buckets and dishes.
- Carry the containers and place the branches in heaps.



- Gather dry leaves and grass.
- Cover the opuntia heap with the dry grass and leaves.
- With care, set the heap on fire.
- Using sticks help the fire burn fully.



- Dig a pit that is 1 metre deep and bury the Opuntia.
- Make sure you separate the top and bottom soil.
- Cover the pit with the bottom soil first then the top soil.



- **Plant indigenous species of trees and shrubs on the pits.**
- This safeguards against erosion.
- It also prevents the opuntia from reappearing.