

# We need our trees

Deforestation – the permanent destruction of indigenous forests and woodlands for farming or development or for the production of fuel, timber and paper – is a problem worldwide.

Currently, 12 million hectares of forests are cleared annually – an area 130 times the size of KwaZulu-Natal – and some countries such as Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Costa Rica and Sri Lanka are likely to lose all their tropical forests by the year 2010 if nothing is done.

Large expanses of forest are vital to life on the planet. Trees absorb carbon dioxide – one of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Fewer trees mean less CO<sub>2</sub> is absorbed and, when felled trees are burnt, more CO<sub>2</sub> is released into the atmosphere. Trees also absorb and store water from the soil and without them areas become more arid. Plus, without surface vegetation, soil is more easily eroded, rivers and dams become silted and desertification increases. Species that depend on trees for their natural habitat die out and biodiversity is threatened.

Internationally, countries are cooperating to bring about responsible forestry monitored by organisations like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In South Africa, the Committee for Sustainable Forest Management (CSFM – part of the Department of Water and Forestry (DWAF)) has drawn up a set of forestry criteria. Large industrial users of wood, like paper producers Sappi, are required to undertake replanting programmes. There are also many tree planting projects by organisations such as Food and Trees for Africa who, with DWAF, set up the Urban Greening Fund that links local government with civic organisations needing help with tree planting. The annual Arbor Week helps raise national awareness of the importance of our trees and forests.