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# South Africa Grapples with Tree Cover Loss Amidst Rising Wildfires and Urban Expansion

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## BODY

In South Africa, a recent wildfire incident in Gauteng has brought to light the ongoing challenges the country faces with tree cover loss. Over the past two decades, South Africa has experienced a net loss in tree cover of approximately 141,776 hectares, which represents a 1.86% decrease in tree cover extent. Notably, forestry activities have been the predominant driver of this loss, followed by shifting agriculture, which together account for a significant portion of the total tree cover loss.

The data reveals a concerning trend where the loss due to forestry activities has been consistently high, with a peak in 2017 where over 68,883 hectares were lost. Shifting agriculture also shows a substantial impact, contributing to over 22,618 hectares of loss in 2020 alone. Wildfires, although less significant in terms of hectares lost, remain a persistent threat, as evidenced by the latest fire alerts.

Urbanization has also played a role, albeit smaller in comparison to other drivers, yet it underscores the pressure on natural landscapes due to expanding urban areas. The net change in tree cover indicates that despite some gains, the losses have outpaced them, leading to an overall decline in tree cover.

This trend of tree cover loss has implications for biodiversity, climate change, and the well-being of local communities. It highlights the need for sustainable land management practices and the importance of balancing development with environmental conservation. As South Africa continues to address these challenges, the focus on preserving and expanding tree cover remains crucial for the country's environmental health and resilience.



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