

NFA to evict forest grazers

GOMBA

By Jeff Lule

As part of the efforts to restore the ecosystem of Kalombi and Nsowe forest reserves, the National Forestry Authority (NFA), together with Gomba district administration, have resolved to evict over 300 cattle keepers from the reserves.

The lakeshore range manager, Leo Twinomuhangi, said the reserves have lost their ecological functions because of overgrazing.

The two woodland forests are within the cattle corridor, which is why NFA had initially given out casual grazing permits to the cattle keepers during the dry spells.

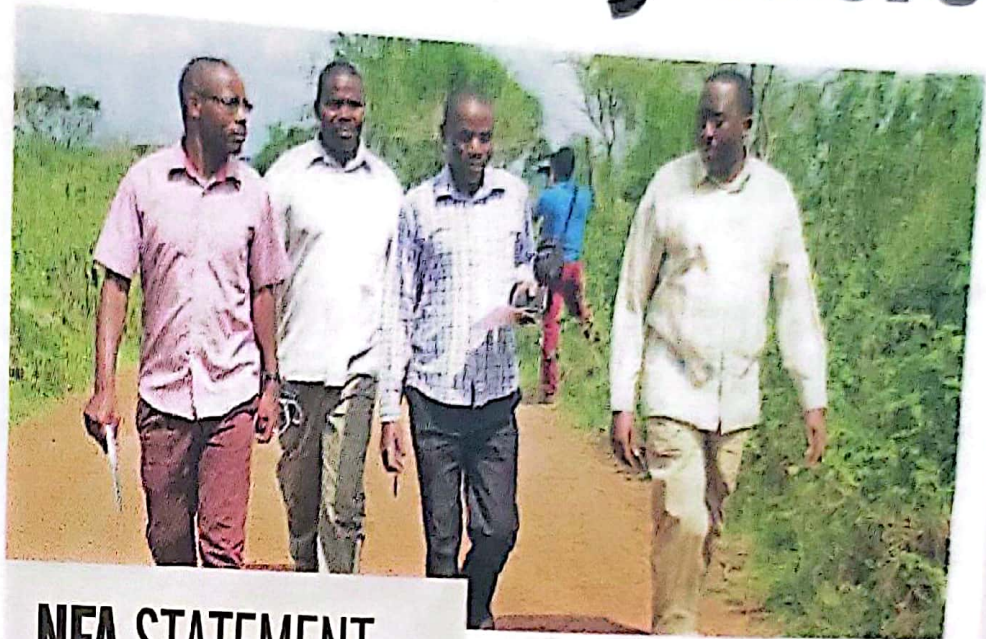
NFA noted that the cattle keepers abused the conditions according to which they acquired the permits, with some engaging in cultivation and building homes for their families.

Twinomuhangi said, over time, the population of cattle and people have increased, thus exerting a lot of pressure on the forests.

Suspension of permits

The NFA executive director, Michael Mugisa, said because of the effects on the ground, they resolved to suspend the grazing permits.

"We stopped giving out permits in March. These were just casual permits, but some applicants refused to leave after the dry spells. Others have built homes. These two forests are so important to River Katonga and the adjacent wetlands. So, we cannot just look on when they are being destroyed," Mugisa noted.



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He explained that a majority of the grazers are on the reserves illegally because their permits expired. He said they would engage the grazers before their eviction, to allow them vacate in the next one month, before applying force should they refuse.

"Apart from settlements and increased

Mugisa (right) with other NFA officials inspecting part of Kalombi Central Forest Reserve. Photo by Jeff Andrew Lule

cattle population, there is also minimum cultivation and settlements in different parts. All these came from somewhere, and must go back," Mugisa said.

The Gomba resident district commissioner, Fred Nayebare, also attributed the problem to the influx of people into the area, forcing many to encroach on the forest reserves.

According to Nayebare, a majority of the encroachers are from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

The district chairperson, Lt. Geoffrey Kiviri, said they are ready to work with NFA, to stop the destruction of the forests.

The Uganda People's Defence Forces commander in charge of vital assets, Lt. Col. Allan Kungungu, said they would force the grazers out if they did not comply with the order.