



Prescribed Burning of Moorlands in the Diepholzer Moorniederung, Lower Saxony State, Germany

Location , type of vegetation

The long-term and full-time nature conservation project of the BUND (Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz in Deutschland) regional organization in Lower Saxony is located in the high moor Lowlands of Diepholz, mainly in the district of Diepholz.

Main objectives and first results

Conservation of open high moor areas (with a grazing tradition) where a satisfactory stabilizing effect cannot be reached by means of waterlogging.

The objectives of prescribed burning goals aim to maintain successional stages of *Molinia caerulea*, *Erica tetralix* and *Calluna vulgaris*. Prescribed burns are conducted on pre-drained high moor peat. Each year different areas are burnt in January-February.

The tradition of sheep husbandry by old shepherds at the edges of the moor was taken up by nature conservationists; where the last herds of sheep were kept the ecologically most valuable moor and heath areas were to be found because they had still remained open.

Pastures for nature conservation were established by single adherents of conservation of natural resources as well as by various foundations with the help of nature conservation administrators. The sheep races involved are German moorland sheep. The goal of sheep grazing is to preserve open moor and heath areas, and to restore open moorlands that were subjected to woodland succession.

Prescribed burning is a traditional way to preserve these open landscapes, especially if it is heath-covered grazing land. The advantages of prescribed burning include:

- immediate release of nutrients;
- reduction of vegetation height as a prerequisite for habitats and existence of certain endangered species of breeding birds, insects, and reptiles;
- better access to the nutrients within the system due to the fact that sheep can feed on lower parts of vegetation;
- higher quality of the feed for both herbivores and sheep.



Figure 1. Winter prescribed burning in the Diepholz high moor.

Additional means for keeping the moor and heath areas wide open are e.g. waterlogging, cutting down surplus birches, gradening of peat-diggings, mowing and mulching. Thus, the conservation and the restoration of large open as well as semi-open moor and heath areas of a size of several thousand hectares have been achieved as a first result in this project. Progress checks are being kept both in the faunistic and vegetation range in commission and under the authorization of the Nature Conservation Administration.



Figure 2. Post-fire vegetation recovery in the Diepholz high moor. Unburned moor surface in the upper right part of photograph. Photos: F. Niemeyer

Reports, publications, website

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Website: www.bund-niedersachsen.de/diepholzer-moorniederung

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