

Wildfires in Scotland

This Information Sheet is aimed at increasing awareness of the work currently being undertaken across Scotland in relation to minimising the impact of wildfire, in particular the prevention, preparation, and response strategies appropriate for rural areas. This guide looks at estate, area and national levels.

Many Scottish landowners and their staff carry out muirburn and other land management tasks, that gives them useful skills and experience for tackling wildfires. Many estates have also invested in all terrain vehicles (ATVs), fire fogging pumps, VHF radios with common frequencies, fire insurance and other appropriate resources. In some areas estates have also developed mutual assistance fire groups that help neighbours develop a co-ordinated response to the wildfire threat.

Much of the current work is aimed at developing a network of fire groups or contingency planning functions within existing groups e.g. Deer Management Groups or Moorland Groups in all high hazard areas in Scotland. If estates create a co-ordinated response this will reduce damage and losses and help personnel responding from the Fire and Rescue Services (F&RS) to deal with the increasing danger from wildfires. Work carried out ahead of a wildfire outbreak can also save valuable time and money.

Causes of wildfire incidents include:-

- Prolonged periods of dry weather, especially in the spring and late summer.
- Escapes from burning operations.
- Equipment generating sparks or embers e.g. welders, angle grinders and tractors.
- Campfires and BBQs.
- Malicious and wilful fire raising (arson).
- Discarded cigarettes.
- Arcing electricity cables, etc.

Wildfire prevention:-

- Check the current level of fire danger, if “high” or “extreme”
- Put out fire risk signs, carry out patrols of known hotspots and vantage points, talk to people and also intervene appropriately at an early stage with any high risk activities e.g. BBQs.
- Conduct appropriate risk assessments and introduce appropriate control measures prior to any burning operations.
- In the medium term reduce fuel load hazards and create firebreaks by burning or cutting.

Preparation:-

- Before the fire season starts ensure insurance cover is in place, including helicopter & fire fighting costs, as appropriate.
- Carry out relevant training, for example Lantra Awards “Basic Fire Fighting.”
- Check crash-out packs and PPE.
- Check equipment (ATVs, pumps etc are all working and fuelled up).
- Work out weekend / holiday staff rota's.
- Make sure your fire action plan, fire map and local contact details are up to date.
- Make sure the plan and map are lodged with the F&RS and the fire group secretary.

Response:-

- Know what to do if a fire occurs on your property or a neighbour's property.
- Contact F&RS and your neighbours with information on the fire.
- If appropriate start preparing an initial action plan and briefings for F&RS and fire group
- Work with the F&RS and/or your local fire group to extinguish the fire.

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Wildfire Groups

Scottish Land & Estates support a number of local Wildfire Groups and are keen to see the continuing growth of neighbouring landowners and organisations coming together to react quickly to the threat of wildfire.

What is a Wildfire Group?

A Wildfire Group is a partnership between F&RS and the land management sector, including both public agencies and private estates, to tackle the increasing threat of damaging wildfires. To be effective, membership of a Wildfire Group should include landowners, rural public agencies, foresters, gamekeepers and farmers as well as anyone with an interest in tackling wildfire. Wildfire Groups aim to improve landscape resilience by delivering activities that consider and address wildfire prevention and response. At a practical level, a Wildfire Group establishes firm lines of communication, increases the public's wildfire awareness, provides relevant wildfire training and provides a structure for wildfire response. These elements combined promote wildfire prevention and provide, in partnership, a co-ordinated and effective wildfire response.

The formation of Groups in areas of high fire risk such as forestry, heather or grass moorland has proven most beneficial, but equally, advantages can be gained if effective fire preparedness is established for other vegetation/crop types, especially if the potential for fire is high.

Establishing a Wildfire Group in your area:-

- Membership must be determined according to local needs and preferences and should not be confined to geographical boundaries created for other purposes e.g. National Park boundaries.
- Hold an initial group meeting to establish the benefits of coming together and agree on an approach for dealing with any outbreak
- Establish procedures for: call-outs and roles and responsibilities at fires
- Address logistics including, food, water, fuel, and costs for labour and equipment.
- Determine a communication flow
- Consider Health and Safety issues and risk management
- Hold an annual meeting to refresh lists of people, firefighting resources and procedures for the forthcoming year and address any issues or lessons learnt from the previous year.

A successful Wildfire Group depends on good quality information from estates at the moor, farm or forest level:-

- Estate or groups of estates fire maps, using standard symbols.
- Estate emergency fire action plans.
- Wildfire group procedures (see South Grampian Good Practise Guide)
- Lists of personnel and equipment available and rendezvous (meeting) points.
- Local knowledge of: estates boundaries, land management network, access routes, fuel types and fuel loads, especially high fuel load hazard areas.
- An individual with good communication skills and knowledge of the people and resources in the area who can be the point of contact between F&RS and estates, when there is a wildfire.

Scottish Wildfire Forum

The Scottish Wildfire Forum (SWF) was formed in 2004 and consists of a network of representatives from key organisations. The SWF is currently administered by Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service and chaired by Chief Fire Officer Trevor Johnson. The aim of the SWF is to create a focus to enhance joint working between F&RS, agencies and those with land management interest within Scotland that will be able to develop and communicate strategic wildfire protection and prevention initiatives to Scottish Ministers, stakeholders and the wider community.

Objectives

The SFW Strategic Action Plan sets out the objectives of the Forum including:-

- To encourage relevant interest groups to join the Forum
- To promote the formation of Wildfire Groups
- Develop and promote a common understanding of wildfire related issues and procedures
- To minimise environmental damage from wildfire
- To advise on wildfire safety matters
- Develop a wildfire prevention programme which will include education, hazard and risk reduction and enforcement issues
- To advise wildfire related national policy, strategy and action plans

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Memorandum of Understanding

The SWF Memorandum of Understanding was issued on 20 January 2010. As of 26 October 2011 ten organisations representing the rural sector – including Scottish Land & Estates – and 7 F&RS have signed the Memorandum of Understanding. The Minister responsible for F&RS, the Justice Minister, Roseanna Cunningham supports the partnership approach. There is also a continuing effort being made to secure buy-in from a number of other organisations working across the rural sector in Scotland.

Benefit of Wildfire Group membership

"In the Badenoch and Strathspey area, and this will be the case in other areas, farm, forestry and estate staff normally have better local knowledge than the Fire and Rescue Services of internal access roads. They are better equipped with off road vehicles and ATVs, fire fogging machines and fire brooms etc., with which they tackle heath and woodland fires. Most game keepers in our area also have many years of experience in managing heath fires.

Wildfire Groups bring together local expertise and equipment and provide co-ordination and co-operation of resources targeted at land based fires in a way that can never be achieved by the Fire and Rescue Services whose resources and training are targeted more at house and traffic incidents. It is important therefore that we work closely together to ensure the maximum use is made of local resources to tackle the scourge of rural wildfire in Scotland"

Jamie Williamson, Alvie and Dalraddy Estates

Groups currently operating in Scotland

- North Grampian Forest Fire Protection Group
- South Grampian Wildfire Group
- Badenoch and Speyside Wildfire Group

More Information

Scottish Wildfire Forum website

http://www.scottishwildfireforum.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=56

Scotland's Moorland Forum website

<http://www.moorlandforum.org.uk/>

Health and Safety Executive website (AFAG803 Firefighting leaflet)

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/forindex.htm>

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Appendix A: Standard Fire Map Symbols (largely from Muirburn Code):

Forest Area	
Fire Support Office	
Equipment Store	
Fire Beater Stand	
Helicopter Landing Site	
Permanent Water Course	
Fire Dam	
Public Road	
Track Passable to All Vehicles (inc. HGV's)	
Track Passable to 4WD	
Track Passable to light ATV's	
Fire Rendesvous Point (RVP)	
Hilltop Radio Repeater Site	

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