

ACCESS NEWSLETTER

WILDFIRE SPECIAL : Are you ready for summer?

Issue 32

May 2008

So far spring this year has been relatively wet and cool compared to recent years, damping down the risk of wildfire. However, the remaining spring and summer may yet produce periods of elevated risk for wildfires.

Following on from last year's Wildfire Special, this edition of the Newsletter aims to provide a reminder of steps that can be taken to reduce the risks of wildfire, and examples of best practice.

Be Prepared

Here are a few suggestions for action that access authorities can take to prepare for hot weather:

- Fire plans - Check you have the most up to date version of any fire plan. Make sure your own role and that of other organisations are clearly identified.
- Contacts - Ensure contacts are identified within your own organisation and others such as the fire service, the local fire group (if you have one) and local land owners. If you have a contact list from last year, check none of the details have changed.
- Publicity and awareness raising – Consider what key messages you will want to communicate publicly if there is a significantly elevated risk of wildfire – such as not lighting barbeques or fires, safe disposal of smoking materials and litter, and how to report wildfires to the authorities.
- Signage – Check that relevant signage is in good order and of sufficient quantity, and plan when and where to put signs up and take them down. An example of a fire sign used in Northumberland can be seen on the following page of the defra website under the section headed **Fire**:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/accessopen/accessopen02.htm>
- Ground conditions - Check weather forecasts and the Fire Severity Index (see below) on a regular basis to help plan for managing increased fire risk.
- Equipment - If you have an active role to play in assisting with wildfires, make sure your equipment and protective clothing has been checked and is easy to get to at short notice.
- Lessons learned – Take time to reflect on what went well and what could be improved upon from the last fire season, and make any necessary adjustments.
- Expertise – Share experiences with other organisations who have done fire planning.

Recent developments

- The Fire Severity Index (FSI), provided by the Met Office, is the trigger for fire restrictions on open access land when conditions become exceptional. It can be viewed at www.openaccess.gov.uk
- Natural England and CCW have set up soil moisture monitoring sites in some of their national nature reserves, to help verify the accuracy of the FSI. The map of sites can be viewed on the defra website under the section headed **Fire**: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/accessopen/accessopen02.htm>
- The Met Office is continuing to work with Edinburgh University on a peat fire model which will identify weather conditions likely to lead to severe peat damage during a fire. This could help protect valuable peat areas and assist those fighting such fires.
- The Met Office is also improving the FSI to use the latest in weather forecasting methods, which includes using higher resolution forecast models. This should make the accuracy of the FSI even greater.

Examples of good practice

Quantocks AONB have recently purchased some new fire fighting equipment including a mobile reservoir, back water spraying unit and extra long light-weight aluminium fire beaters, photographs of which can be seen on the defra website under the section headed **Fire**: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/accessopen/accessopen02.htm>

They have also produced a generic sign to be used when there is an elevated risk of wildfire, alerting the public to the risks of wildfire and appropriate action to take if they see a fire.

Land owners and access authorities in the **South Pennines** have continued to work with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, drawing up fire plans. The group has produced leaflets, displays and posters to be circulated throughout the South Pennines area which explain the economic, recreational and environmental importance of the moors and why it's important to protect them from fire. The leaflet, South Pennines Wildfire watch, can be seen on the defra website under the section headed **Fire**: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/accessopen/accessopen02.htm>

The group has also commissioned some recyclable portable ashtrays, which will be given out to try to reduce the risk of wildfires started by discarded cigarettes.

Over the past year Cumbria County Council has teamed up with Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service and local land managers to form a **Cumbria Wildfire Group**. The purpose of the Group is to coordinate and share good practice, provide training and equipment, and develop fire plans for some of the most vulnerable sites in the area. To aid the fire service's response to wildfire, the plans provide the fire service with key information about landowner contact details, access points and water sources. The template fire plan and guidance can be viewed on the defra website under the section headed **Fire**: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/accessopen/accessopen02.htm>

Dorset Urban Heaths Partnership continue to work with Dorset Fire and Rescue Services and local people to raise awareness of the dangers and impact of wild fires. Arson Awareness sessions have taken place including courtroom drama scenarios with information on courts and prison sentences. Sessions with schoolchildren also include raising awareness of how heath land fires spread and how they are dealt with by the fire service. The Partnership has also developed fire prevention plans for rural heath land sites based on the systems used for the urban heaths. Visit www.dorsetheaths.org.uk for more info.

Contacts and further information

If you would like further information on any of the items covered in this newsletter, please contact: Sarah Haigh at Natural England on 01242 533 420, or email sarah.haigh@naturalengland.org.uk.

Other information Fire Restrictions [Guidance](#) • [Countryside Code](#) • [Moorland Code](#)