

UK Parliament Call for evidence
Wildfire risk and response

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Chatsworth owns approximately 3,600 acres of moorland in Derbyshire. The moor is not managed for grouse, instead it is used for farming, to enhance biodiversity and supply water to Chatsworth House. In answer to the questions:

- How can land management techniques be best used at a regional level to prevent and control wildfires whilst balancing the needs of different land users? What evidence-gaps are there and how can they be filled?

Wildfires will only be reduced by reducing the fuel load. This can be done by either controlled burning or cutting. This year we have been doing cutting on our moor and I believe a wildfire will go straight through the cut area. Cutting reduces the fuel load but does not remove it. If there is peat, a controlled fire will not damage the peat.

I do not think land management techniques should be at a regional level but site specific. Variations occur within specific sites, let alone regions. Re-wetting a moor is beneficial to the peat but this does not prevent wildfires.

There seems to be a lack of trust in the evidence provided when comparing controlled burning and wildfires.

- What role do nature-based solutions, such as improving biodiversity and more resilient landscapes, have in the prevention and control of wildfires?

Re-wetting is restricted by the topography and the presence of peat and this cannot be used as a blanket approach to reduce the risk of wildfires.

We are using no-fence collars on our cattle as an environmental solution to try and reduce certain vegetation which in turn will reduce fuel loads and improve diversity of vegetation (keeping a living plant as opposed to dead material). Nature based solutions can play a part in trying to reduce the risk of wildfires.

- How best can Defra funding schemes be used to support land managers to adapt to the increased risk of wildfires?

The solution is to support and train land managers and supply the necessary equipment for cutting, controlled burning and managing wildfires.

There should be better funding for natural flood management and an easier solution to obtaining this funding (the application forms are too much).

DEFRA should flex their eligibility for funding, for example our moor is a SSSI which prevents us from accessing their funding.

- What impact does the monitoring of wildfires have on our understanding of the causes and risks of these events in the UK, and how can this be improved? Are there international examples or best practices that can be used in a UK context?

All wildfires should be reported into a central database so we can gain a better understanding of the risks and when to be on high alert. For example, our 2026 wildfire was started by campers but to the best of our knowledge it was not reported further?

We have a team of foresters, farmers, neighbours and employees who are on a What's App group monitoring wildfires. This group knows the ground and sees when a fire is in the wrong location (e.g. a wildfire). This same team is responsible for putting out the wildfires whilst waiting for support from the emergency services. This team has worked on two wildfires in the last 18 months, the first on the moor and the second in neighbouring woodland.

- What resources and training do emergency services and local authorities need to respond to the increasing number of wildfires, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas?

I think the emergency services are reliant on those living and working in the area to explain the lie of the land and how best to access the fire. This same group are there to work with the emergency services to put out the fire and provide water bowsers as they only have a limited water supply. When the emergency services stand down, it is this group who monitors the burnt area and makes sure the fire does not re-ignite.

Realistically, when a wildfire is out of control the requirement is a helicopter.

- What are the most effective activities for tackling the human causes of wildfire ignition, for example public engagement and campaigns? How can the UK Government best support the delivery of these activities at both a local and national scale?

We have large signs on the edge of main roads saying “No BBQs or Campfires” and we still had a wildfire this year. I think public engagement will help but sadly there will always be a minority who will ignore this advice. It only needs one person to cause a wildfire. The fires will keep coming therefore the safest option is to reduce the fuel load. One would much rather manage a controlled burn than a wildfire.

I would propose the UK Government implements a UK ban on disposable BBQs.

- What policies are in place, or are needed, to reduce the severity of wildfires and their socio-economic impacts on both agricultural land and at rural-urban boundaries?

A request for a clearer understanding of the current policies.

- Given that responsibility is spread across government departments and bodies (e.g. Defra, Forestry Commission, MHCLG), how should the government coordinate a cross-departmental approach to tackle the increasing risk of wildfires?

Ideally one department takes responsibility for all wildfire decisions.