

Submission to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Committee Call for Evidence: Wildfire Risk and Response

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Executive Summary

Wildfire risk in England is increasing in frequency, scale and complexity, driven by climate change, fuel conditions and high levels of human activity. The Peak District Fire Operations Group (PD FOG), a long-standing multi-agency partnership, provides an operational perspective on how wildfire risk is currently managed at a regional level.

PD FOG demonstrates that effective wildfire resilience depends on close collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), land managers, public bodies and communities. This enables shared training, coordinated response, and locally informed prevention. However, it also exposes significant systemic challenges.

Regarding land management and nature-based solutions, the Fire Operations Group recognises that partners will have different approaches and discussion of this is outside the remit of this group

Defra funding schemes are supporting wildfire resilience in practice but are not designed for it, leading to delivery complexity, short-termism and a lack of support for core partnership coordination. There is also no clear national framework for equipping or training non-FRS personnel.

Monitoring is fragmented and inconsistent, with strong local examples but no integrated national system linking incidents, environmental impacts and risk data.

Operational experience highlights capacity constraints, including staff resource, training delivery, specialist equipment and sustained incident response.

Human behaviour remains the main cause of wildfire ignition. However, prevention is undermined by inconsistent enforcement and limited investment. A significant gap exists in the lack of dedicated resource and specialist capability to investigate wildfire causes, meaning opportunities for learning and enforcement are lost.

Policy is fragmented, and responsibility for wildfire is spread across departments. In practice, coordination is delivered locally through partnerships such as PD FOG, which are effective but under-resourced.

Wildfire resilience in England currently depends on locally driven partnerships operating without a coherent national framework. A step-change is required in policy, coordination and investment.

1. Land management at a regional level

The Fire Operations Group recognises that partners will have different approaches to land management practices and discussion of this is outside the remit of this group

2. Role of nature-based solutions

The Fire Operations Group recognises that partners will have different approaches and discussion of this is outside the remit of this group

3. Defra funding schemes

Defra schemes (e.g. Farming in Protected Landscapes) are supporting wildfire resilience through:

- Provision of PPE
- Delivery of multi-agency training
- Enabling partnership working

However, they are not designed for wildfire, creating challenges:

Delivery challenges

- Complex governance across mixed partners
- Different auditing and procurement systems
- Significant administrative burden

Operational gaps

- No clear framework for:
 - Training standards
 - PPE provision and maintenance
 - Roles of non-FRS personnel
- Ongoing risks around PPE decontamination and use

Strategic limitations

- Short-term, project-based funding
- Little or no support for core coordination capacity

Recommendation

- Introduce a dedicated wildfire resilience funding stream
- Fund partnership infrastructure and coordination
- Provide national guidance on training, roles and equipment standards

4. Monitoring of wildfires

Wildfire monitoring in England is currently:

- Fragmented
- Inconsistent
- Locally driven

There are strong examples of:

- Ecological monitoring (carbon, vegetation, hydrology)
- Behaviour tracking tools
- Local risk indices and mapping

However:

- These approaches are not standardised
- There is no integration at national level
- Wildfire data is rarely linked to ecological outcomes

National tools can lack local accuracy, while local tools are not consistently recognised or integrated.

Recommendation

- Develop a national wildfire monitoring framework integrating:
 - Incident data
 - Ecological impacts
 - Carbon and hydrological effects
 - Behavioural data

5. Resources and training

Wildfire incidents are:

- Increasing in scale and duration
- Resource-intensive
- Dependent on multi-agency coordination

Effective response requires:

- Shared training
- Local knowledge

- Specialist skills and equipment

PD FOG delivers annual multi-agency training, combining field and classroom learning, and demonstrating strong interoperability.

However, key challenges include:

- Limited capacity to organise and deliver training
- Shortage of specialist equipment and trained operators
- Workforce fatigue during prolonged incidents
- Lack of infrastructure (e.g. PPE cleaning, logistical support in remote areas)

The primary constraint is capacity, not capability.

Recommendation

- Invest in:
 - Multi-agency training programmes
 - Specialist equipment and skills
 - Dedicated coordination roles
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6. Tackling human causes of wildfire ignition

Most wildfires are caused by human activity, including:

- BBQs, campfires and cigarettes
- Arson
- a range of accidental ignition sources, including land management operations in rare cases

PD FOG partners undertake prevention activity including:

- Patrols by rangers, gamekeepers, fire wardens etc
- Public awareness campaigns
- Behaviour monitoring tools

These interventions are effective but constrained by:

- Limited resources
- Inconsistent enforcement

Investigation and enforcement gap

A significant weakness is the lack of dedicated wildfire investigation capacity:

- Incidents are rarely systematically investigated
- Causes are often assumed rather than confirmed

- Responsibility is fragmented between agencies

As a result:

- Few incidents lead to prosecution
- Opportunities to understand ignition patterns are lost
- Prevention strategies are weakened

Recommendation

- Establish a national wildfire investigation framework
 - Improve coordination between FRS, police and land managers
 - Develop specialist investigative capability
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7. Policies to reduce wildfire impacts

Current policy is:

- Fragmented
- Spread across environmental, land management and emergency systems

There is limited clarity on:

- Role of land managers in wildfire response
- Standards for PPE and training
- Integration between environmental policy and fire risk

Wildfire impacts (ecological, economic and social) are not addressed through a whole-system approach.

Recommendation

- Develop a national wildfire strategy covering:
 - Prevention
 - Preparedness
 - Response
 - Recovery

8. Cross-government coordination

Responsibility for wildfire is distributed across multiple departments.

In practice:

- Coordination occurs locally through partnerships such as FOG
- These partnerships are effective but:
 - Informal
 - Under-resourced
 - Dependent on goodwill

There is:

- No national coordination mechanism
- No clear leadership structure

At the same time, demand is increasing through:

- Policy engagement
- Research activity
- Public and political interest

Recommendation

- Establish a cross-government wildfire framework
 - Provide national coordination, strategy and funding
 - Recognise and support regional partnerships as key delivery mechanisms
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Conclusion

The Fire Operations Group demonstrates both:

- The effectiveness of local multi-agency collaboration
- The limitations of relying on it without national support

Wildfire resilience in England currently depends on:

- Informal partnerships
- Limited resources
- Fragmented policy frameworks

At the same time:

- Risk is increasing
- Demand is growing
- Capacity is declining

Despite widespread recognition that wildfires are largely human-caused, there is no systematic national capability to investigate their origins, limiting both prevention and enforcement.

A step-change is required to:

- Recognise wildfire as a national resilience issue
- Provide clear policy direction
- Invest in coordination, capability and evidence

Without this, the gap between wildfire risk and response capacity will continue to widen.

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