

Case Study for EFRA committee inquiry into Wildfire risk and response

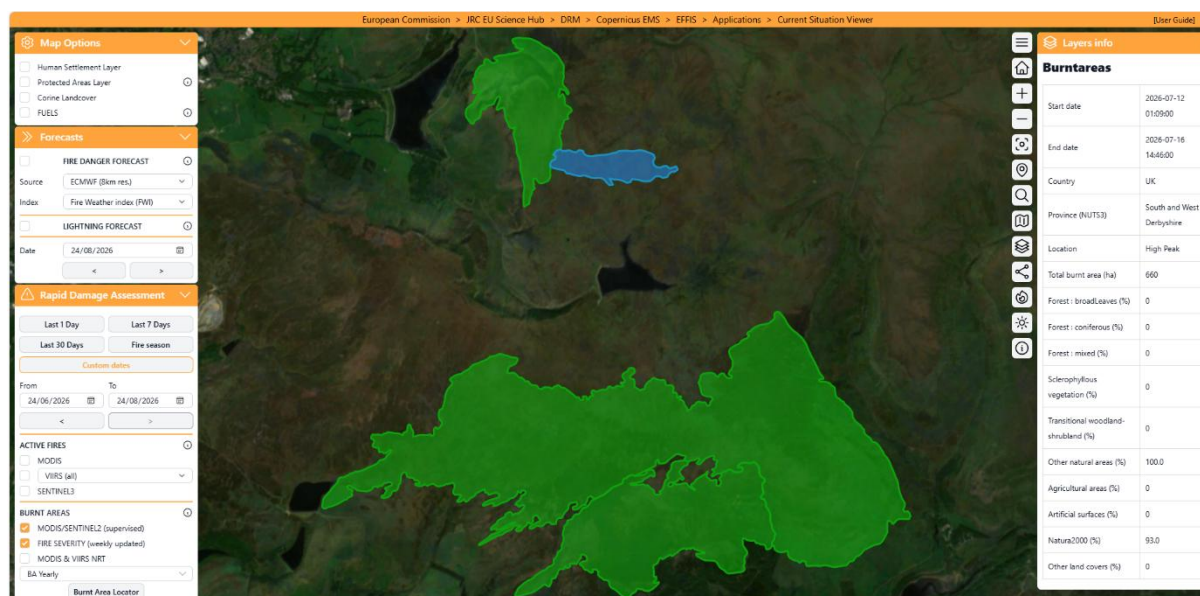
Tintwistle Wildfire June-August 2026

This account with supplementary comment has been compiled by the GWCT and Peak District Moorland Group.

Introduction

Tintwistle and Dove Stone Moors, owned by United Utilities and managed by RSPB, are in the Dark Peak of the Peak District, Derbyshire. Wildfires have burnt for a duration of two months, 24th June – 22nd August with deep seated peat fires still burning after this date. The fire has seen the declaration of a major incident and involved the collaboration of multiple FRS, land managers, and neighbouring moorland personnel along with specialist equipment. United Utilities and the Moors for the Future Partnership have invested in peatland restoration across the area (3000ha) over the last 5 years. The A628 Woodhead Pass road, which was closed from the 20th July – 31st July, is one of the busiest trans-Pennine non-motorway crossings with an estimated 12,000 vehicles a day equating to a loss of circa 130,000 vehicle journeys. The economic impacts of fighting the fire, the road closure, community impacts, biodiversity and carbon losses, health and restoration costs have not yet been fully calculated. We provide estimates of the cost to private estates in the additional commentary section below.

Fig 1. Location and extent of fire – EFFIS



Figures 1 and 2 show the extent of the Tintwistle and connected wildfires as taken from the EFFIS Current Situation Viewer [Current Situation Viewer](#) (areas marked in green only) and FIRMS fixed time database. This source does not allow custom timescales, so map shows extent of fire on 24th July 2026; one month from ignition. [NASA | LANCE | FIRMS](#).

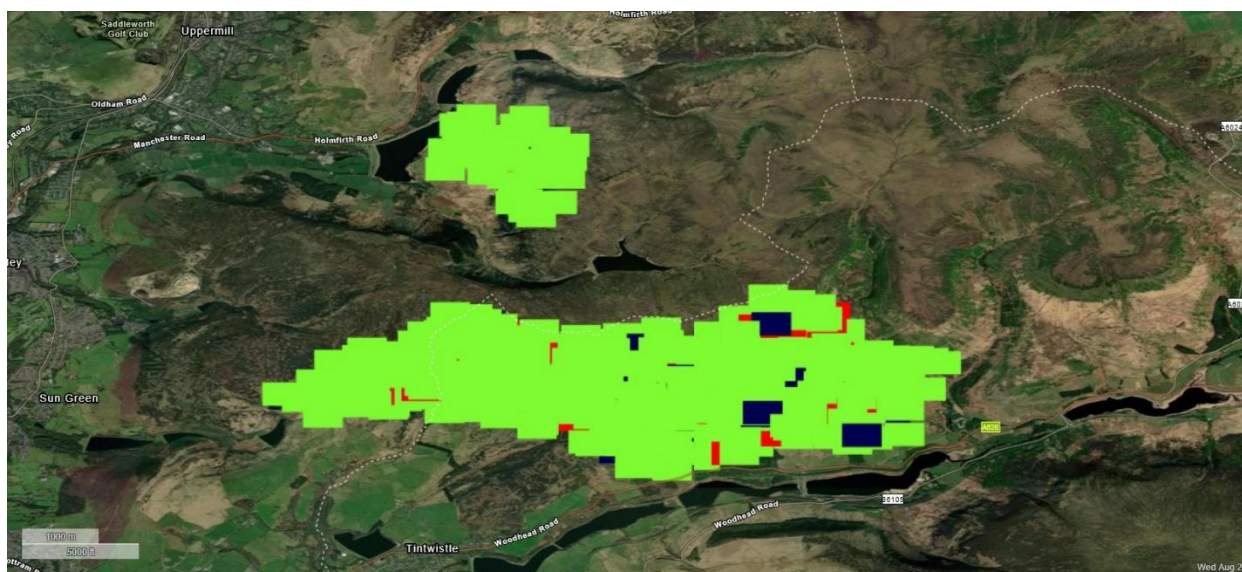


Fig 2. Location and extent of fire – FIRMS date 24th July 2026

Derbyshire FRS (DFRS) and Greater Manchester FRS (GMFRS) were joint leads, but many other fire services provided support (see additional commentary at the end).

In broad terms the extent of the wildfire stretched from the A628 Woodhead Road in the south to Tintwistle, Arnfield brook, Dove Stone and Swineshaw in the west, Crowden in the east and to Greenfield Brook in the north. There are diverging estimates of the size of the wildfire; EFFIS estimates 660ha (Tintwistle) and 90ha (Dove Stone) but others involved in the operation suggest around 1200ha for Tintwistle alone (pers.comm).

There were also separate wildfire incidents during this time:

- 16th July - on Woodhead Road where a RTA (road traffic accident) resulted in a wildfire which was prevented from becoming a larger incident on the neighbouring moorland by PDMG gamekeepers and South Yorkshire FRS; and
- 23rd July - to the north of the Holmfirth Road near Wessenden Reservoir (incident closed on 25th July). Five fire engines from West Yorkshire FRS were in attendance alongside specialist wildfire support teams.

Below we outline the incident timeline (taken from DFRS updates with additional comments from GMFRS) supplemented by PDMG observations (in red) and provide some additional commentary at the end regarding collaboration, costs etc.

Timeline and supporting FRS commentary supplemented by PDMG observations

24th June – DFRS first deployed to blaze on Tintwistle Moor following 999 call at 22.11 hours. Crews from Glossop and New Mills are in attendance. Fire crews left the scene shortly after 02.00 hours on 25th for safety reasons (failing light).

25th June – Firefighters from Chapel-en-le-Frith, Buxton and Hathersage were re-mobilised at 04:00 hours. Six fire engines supported by a high volume pump, command support unit, water carrier, moorland vehicles and a helicopter from United Utilities

which is being used to drop water onto the fire. FRS working alongside partners from the Peak District Fire Operations Group (FOG) including Peak Park rangers, the Eastern Moors Partnership, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and United Utilities. FRS reported significant fire affecting approximately 500 sq metres of moorland and woodland.

The A628 Woodhead Pass closed between the Gun Inn, Mottram Moor A57 to the roundabout at Flouch, junction with the A616. It was closed for 11 days re-opening on 31st July.

Again fire crews left the scene shortly after midnight due to failing light returning at 05.00 hours on 26th June.

26th June – Area affected estimated at c.200 hectares. Fire crews from Derbyshire and Greater Manchester FRS in attendance. At 14.29 reported that fire contained. Six appliances plus specialist vehicles, including a high volume pump and helicopter from United Utilities, remained to monitor the situation and weather conditions. Firefighters damping down and checking for hot spots. Fire crews withdrew for safety reasons (failing light) but fire service presence remained to monitor with reinspection at 05.00 hours on 27th. [Note: this was a recurring theme throughout the incident so not repeated further].

27th June – fire crews remained on site alongside specialist vehicles to prevent further spread. FRS reported that crews had faced extremely challenging conditions due to changes in wind speed and direction contributing to flare-ups across the affected area.

28th June – fire crews returned to Tintwistle to fight the fire that had been burning since Wednesday night. They returned to the scene at 06.00 hours and were supported by specialist vehicles including two helicopters. The FRS reported visible flames on Tintwistle Moor and the fire burning deep into the peat, making firefighting more challenging.

28th-29th June – fire crews continue to work to extinguish the fire. FRS reported that progress had been made with very few hotspots on the western flank, while the eastern flank, which was the main concern on 28 June due to a 600-metre smoke plume, had been substantially reduced with no further spread.

30th June – fire crews focus was on south side of the fire with monitoring in other areas. By 17.00 fire crews had withdrawn from western and eastern flanks and helicopter stood down.

1st -2nd July – fire crews remain on scene managing hot spots. At 19.51 on 2nd July FRS reported that fire crews had now finally left the scene and handed over to United Utilities and Peak District FOG.

3rd July – PDMG reported that the wildfire had gone underground and expressed concern about the scale of peat ignitions on Arnfield Moor. Reports of containment and fire out therefore do not match what is being seen on the ground.

9th July – firefighters returned to Tintwistle moor as wildfire moves into moorland to the north of the original fire. Ground fires were report as having been burning on the tree lined edge alongside a significant peat fire on the moor. Wildfire reported as affecting around 2.6 million square metres (260ha) of moorland.

10th July – moorland fire near Arnfield Farm is reported by Derbyshire FRS as a separate incident to the ongoing wildfire on Tintwistle. Fire crews from Buxton, Matlock, Glossop, Bolsover, New Mills, Wirksworth and Shirebrook are in attendance supported by two unimogs. They are assisted by personnel from GMFRS and partner agencies.

11th July – Derbyshire FRS reported that fire crews had returned to the wildfires near to Arnfield Farm and Tintwistle Moor and were actively firefighting with the support of partner agencies. It was reported that eight fire engines were at the scene, and a helicopter would carry out water drops on hotspots.

12th July – DFRS declare a major incident at Tintwistle Moor.

11th/12th July - PDMG reported multiple fire fronts in high winds and high temperatures (Tintwistle, Crowden, Arnfield, Dove Stone). This significant wildfire activity reflected the ongoing heatwave conditions and the 100% probability of ignition in many areas (as forecast by FireInSite model). There is a 30-30-30 rule that is widely used by fire managers which equates to temperatures of 30 degrees, winds of 30mph and humidity of 30% that was experienced in the second week of July.

The Dove Stone incident was due to daytime fireworks being let off as part of a memorial tribute to a local lad who had drowned the day before.

13th July – fire crews returned at 01.15 hours following reports that the fire had escalated due to high winds. Five fire engines, two Unimogs, an argocat, command unit and water carrier were in attendance supported by partner agencies. At 20.35 it was reported that fire crews and partner agencies had been working to contain the incident and prevent its spread into the surrounding area. A range of specialist resources was involved, including drone reconnaissance and helicopter water drops on hotspots, and a specialist wildfire team was employed to support the response by removing vegetation and carrying out controlled burns to reduce the amount of fuel available to the fire and help prevent it from spreading further.

Firefighting activity is scaled back in the evening with full operation resuming at 05.00. Personnel remained on site throughout the night to monitor the fire, respond to any changes in conditions and ensure nearby properties remain safe.

13th-15th July – PDMG reported that:

Multiple estates, staff and specialist equipment had returned to the Crowden/Arnfield wildfire on 13th July given that the ongoing peat ignitions since the original fire about 3 weeks previously was now threatening privately owned moorland.

Gamekeepers collaborated to tackle the right flank of the Crowden/Arnfield wildfire given concerns about joining up with the Dove Stone wildfire and expansion onto neighbouring moorland.

At the wildfires height 15-20 keepers worked day and night in rota.

14th July – two helicopters carrying out water drops on hotspots. Crews on the ground were using a combination of water backpacks, beaters and all-terrain Argocat vehicles fitted with water tanks to tackle the fire and prevent further spread.

15th July – separate incident reported at Dove Stone Reservoir and Swineshaw Moor (attended by GMFRS).

PDMG reported that moorland estate gamekeeping teams have split into day and night teams given the deep seated nature of the fire.

16th July – reported that 80 fire fighters working at Tintwistle with main focus at Arnfield Moor whilst others were tackling hotspots at Digsbury Intake, Featherbed Moss and Crowden.

PDMG reported that an estate in the neighbouring moorland group in Calderdale had sent down a gamekeeper and specialist equipment for 3 days. Also that all partners linking well under GMFRS at Arnfield site and DFRS at Dove Stone.

17th July – FRS reported that team from South Wales helping to create firebreaks and remove vegetation to prevent further spread.

18th July – FRS efforts expected to continue into the following week. Two helicopters dropping water on Tintwistle and on Dove Stone/Swineshaw. DFRS carried out a controlled burn as part of its response along the Pennine Way in the Crowden area. They reported that *“By carefully burning vegetation in a controlled way, firefighters can remove fuel that would otherwise allow the fires to spread further. We are aware that the controlled burn will result in increased smoke over the next 24 hours. Current easterly winds are continuing to carry the smoke plume towards Manchester.”*

19th July – four helicopters dropping water on the hotspots and flare ups. Controlled burning at Crowden continued. Peak District gamekeepers stopped fire spreading onto Stalybridge estates through digging a trench and National Resilience Tactical Burns Teams back burning to it. [Note: The FRS has legislative authority (Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, sections 7 and 44) to undertake *“anything he reasonably believes to be necessary”* to prevent further fire spread. This will have been documented at Incident Command and in Incident meetings].

20th July – FRS reporting that 65 firefighters deployed alongside 15 personnel from mountain rescue teams and 10 from United Utilities. Crowden and Arnfield are main areas of focus following overnight flare ups. Four helicopters carrying out water drops.

21st July – 75 personnel on site, including National Resilience assets, and 3 helicopters. A628 to remain closed in both directions between the A57 Hollingworth and the A616 Flouch until at least Monday 27 July.

22nd July – fire crews remain on scene.

23rd July – the fire ground is divided into 4 sectors – Didsbury (no active firefighting – monitoring only); Crowden (wet line damping down activity continues to prevent re-ignition); Arnfield (active firefighting); and Featherbed Moss (wet line damping down and percolating hose to prevent fire spreading north). 65 firefighters on site.

24th July – Tintwistle continues to be managed as a Major Incident. The FRS update reported that *“firefighters from across the UK have continued to support local crews through National Resilience (NR) arrangements. Alongside Derbyshire crews, firefighters from Greater Manchester have also undertaken significant specialist wildfire operations, including the creation of a trench approximately one mile long and five metres wide. Percolating hose, designed to continuously dampen surrounding vegetation and act as a fire break, has been laid in the trench.”* And *“Additional fire breaks have also been established through the use of specialist farm machinery, creating flail lines that remove vegetation and help prevent the fire spreading further. A substantial amount of work has been undertaken to create a horseshoe-shaped fire break around the upper cordons, helping to protect the Pennine Way and strengthen defences ahead of predicted easterly winds over the weekend.”* This update also highlighted the challenges the fire crews face including walking for more than an hour to reach active areas and the nature of the terrain. Smouldering fire burning in deep seated peat requires crews to undertake digging out and painstaking hotspot monitoring.

25th July – operations continue across the four sectors.

26th July – heavy rain provided welcome assistance by dampening vegetation and reducing fire activity in some areas. The scale of the fire is reported as being equivalent to 1250 football pitches.

27th July – operations remain ongoing and the fire remains a major incident.

28th July – 60 personnel deployed with activity focussed on containing the fire perimeter, hotspots, smouldering peat fires and reducing re-ignition risk. As the update notes, peat fires can remain active underground despite the rainfall and may reignite if not completely extinguished.

29th July – significant progress reported particularly within Featherbed Moss sector. While all four sectors remain active, the update reported no visible naked flames.

However forecast change in weather with a shift in wind direction and warm temperatures may impact the incident.

30th July – ongoing monitoring and positive overall progress but slight increase in hotspots in Featherbed Moss sector following change in wind direction.

31st July – A628 reopened with temporary traffic signals. Firefighting resources withdrawn from Didsbury sector due to no flames or hotspots and redeployed to the other 3 sectors. United Utilities to continue to monitor Didsbury.

1st August – monitoring of the remaining 3 sectors continues although currently no visible flames in any of the sectors.

2nd August – emergency response now scaled back but firefighters and partners continue to monitor for hotspots and risk of re-ignition.

3rd August – at 14.00 hours FRS formally stood down the major incident although it remains an active incident. Nearing end of response phase and will soon move into the monitoring and recovery phase. Greater Manchester FRS noted that – *“This milestone has only been possible because of the outstanding efforts of firefighters, landowners, and partner agencies and organisations, who have shown incredible professionalism, commitment and resilience throughout a challenging and prolonged incident. Whilst standing down the major incident is an important step forward, the incident is not over. Fire is still present beneath the surface so firefighters will remain at the scene to monitor and contain any fire spread, while working alongside our partners to support ongoing recovery efforts.”*

PDMG expressed their concerns to DFRS given risk of flare ups and signs of smoke in areas adjacent to unburnt vegetation. DFRS confirmed there would be 24 hour surveillance. This highlights the value of relationships between Peak District Fires Operation Group, FRS and other partners.

4th August – operations currently focussed on 3 sectors to identify and extinguish flare ups. Given that the vegetation has already been burnt there is little risk of fire spread. No further updates from FRS unless situation changes.

7th August - GMFRS reported that crews remain on scene monitoring the moors and carrying out recovery work - <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1378859727669592>

8th August – PDMG reported that pockets of deep seated burning peat still being identified approximately a week after the last flaming front extinguished. Flare ups (flames) can occur from the peat even on areas already burnt.

13th August – DFRS report that firefighters and partner agencies remain in attendance. Featherbed Moss and Crowden handed back to United Utilities as landowner. Arnfield Moor continues to require operational response.

PDMG reported significant deep seated peat fire around Arnfield cabin which is an ongoing hotspot.

22nd August – PDMG report that despite the rain, deep seated peat fires were still burning on Arnfield Moor. Such fires can burn for months although the onset of Autumn and Winter should hopefully prevent longstanding ground fires.

This is a useful record from GMFRS of their updates during the wildfire including advice to residents with images - [Major incident updates - Firefighters continue to tackle moorland wildfires - Greater Manchester Fire Rescue Service](#)

Additional comments

1. **Collaboration** - Derbyshire FRS in their updates made regular reference to collaboration with partners from the Peak District Fire Operations Group (FOG) including Peak Park rangers, the Eastern Moors Partnership, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and United Utilities as well as specialist FRS assets from National Resilience and other fire services. We note however that they did not mention private estates involvement. Note: the private estates concentrated their effort with GMFRS, but were involved with higher tactical level meetings – so disappointing not mentioned, especially as Derbyshire FRS had overall control of the entire incident.

On Facebook Greater Manchester FRS on 16th July said “*We would like to thank the gamekeeping community and United Utilities as well as Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (Official), Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and all other partners for their continued support as we remain focused on containing the fires, reducing hotspots and preventing further spread across the moorland.*” And again, on 19th July thanked all those involved in the ongoing response “*This includes specialist national resilience teams; colleagues from Derbyshire, South Wales, Lancashire and Hereford & Worcester fire and rescue services; local authorities; RSPB, National Trust, Peak District Moorland Group, the Eastern Moors Partnership and United Utilities; landowners; and the gamekeeping community.*”

Note: All keepers involved hold Lantra wildfire training certificates and some train GMFRS on moorland burning each winter. Of more relevance is that the majority of the moorland gamekeepers have practical experience and knowledge of moorland fire behaviour through using it as a management tool for implementing prescribed burns in the cooler months.

2. **Costs involved** – no official statistics are yet available regarding suppression and recovery costs but estimates of the cost to privately owned estates have been produced for the committee to illustrate the ‘hidden’ cost of a wildfire incident. The figures below reflect the input the shooting estates provided over a 10 day period, the busiest time before the fire was safely contained on the perimeter and the worst of the peat fires that could have spread out from the containment zone were dealt with:

- **Asset costs** = £2,550,700 (for all the kit and getting the kit to the site). Kit and personnel involved:
 - 48 staff directly associated with shooting estates,
 - 9 argocat,
 - 9 sit in 4x4 or 6x6 all-terrain buggies,
 - 1 tracked dumper,
 - 8 quad bikes,
 - 13 water foggers,
 - 15 leaf blowers,
 - 33 Hilux or equivalent,
 - 15 transporter trailers,
 - 28 Scotty Packs.

A separate local fundraising initiative used public donations to supply 30 Sundstrom face masks and meals.

- **Man hours and labour costs** - 2,392 man hours over a 10 day period. At an assumed contractor rate of £35/hour* (assumed flat rate (some days the gamekeepers were clocking up 18 hour days)) = £83,720
[*Note: Gamekeepers are skilled operators and relied upon by FRS in such instances. As a comparator private estates are charged by moorland contractors for cutting etc at £80/hour].

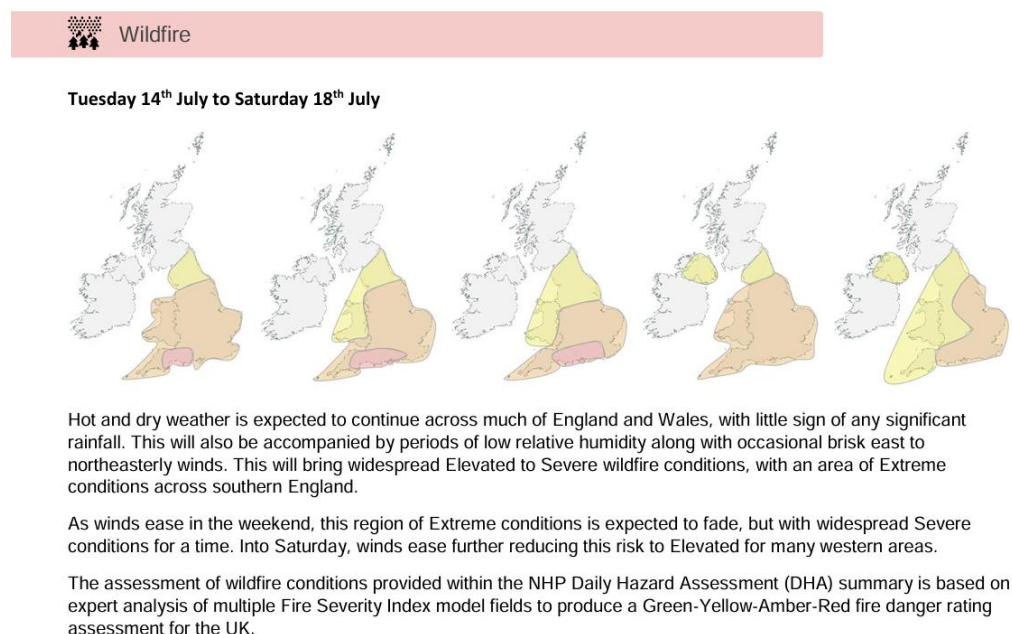
- **Total costs** = £2,634,420 (this doesn't include the excavators and bulldozer, which will be an additional cost).

The constant nature of the firefighting exercise also meant that machinery broke down and had to be replaced. It should be noted that many estates are now restricted from burning on deep peat by the new regulations yet maintain argocats and fogging units purely for wildfire emergencies.

Not accounted for here is the mental toll on the gamekeepers (and FRS personnel) and on their families. PDMG is investigating post incident counselling for all staff involved along with GMFRS and Gamekeepers Welfare Trust.

3. **Lessons learnt – these are based on observations made by the gamekeeping community:**

- a. **Restricting public access to Open Access land** – relevant authorities may apply restrictions on the grounds of public safety where considered necessary and for fire prevention ([Open access land and the coastal margin: how to restrict public access - GOV.UK](#)) These were not acted on by the National Park or other relevant authority despite the fire risk being so high. This presents a concern about using the Met Office Fire Severity Index which is relied upon by Natural England. For example, the Daily Hazard Assessment for 14th -18th July (the height of the Tintwistle wildfire) is shown below. The Peak District is in the Yellow (low-level impacts)/Amber (higher likelihood of significant impacts) area.



This Facebook posting demonstrated the frustration of the gamekeepers that these restrictions were not implemented –

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2965225147149979>

- b. **Understanding fire behaviour** – early response focussed on controlling the wildfire in the woodland alongside the A628. Given that the road and reservoir acted as a natural firebreak and the fire was moving downhill (which means it moves more slowly), this fire front would have naturally died out. That would have allowed greater effort on the northern side which was open moorland and potentially prevented the ‘escape’ of the wildfire across this landscape.
- c. **Terrain** – the nature of the terrain was mentioned several times by the FRS as being an obstacle to the suppression activity (walking an hour to the fire front etc). Such access issues need to be incorporated into wildfire

risk management plans and a focus on firebreak creation and maintenance in these areas. Given issues of inaccessibility methods of creating firebreaks will be limited. Prescribed burning during the burning season would be the most effective (subject to licence approval).

- d. **The value of hard firebreaks** – both Tintwistle and Fylingdales required the creation of bulldozer trenches to act as fire breaks. This PDMG video proves their worth on Tintwistle as the trench prevented the wildfire spreading onto neighbouring Stalybridge and into Carrbrook <https://www.facebook.com/reel/4593305974239210> There is however the issue of permissions if on a SSSI etc.
- e. **Regulatory hurdles** – concerns that regulations are limiting the ability to fight the fire effectively. As mentioned above the FRS does have the legal authority to act if the fire risk requires it. Consequently, does there need to be legislation that allows land managers/those with a legal interest in the land to act with due care similarly for the purposes of preventing a fire spreading if lives, environment and property (including farmed land) are at risk? Would this ensure that land managers act in the most effective way without fear of retrospective prosecution?
- f. **Nighttime working** – the timeline demonstrates that gamekeepers continue to work through the night on the moorland (often a good time to address a wildfire given the change in moisture levels) whilst working condition regulations means that FRS personnel usually leave the fire site but often carry out a watching brief – this is dependent on FRS Incident Command managers.
- g. **Fire behaviour skill/knowledge** - there is also a concern that the fire management skill base within the gamekeeping community that the FRS relies on will be lost due to the burning restrictions (a point made in oral evidence). Few young keepers are being trained in heather burning.

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25th August 2026