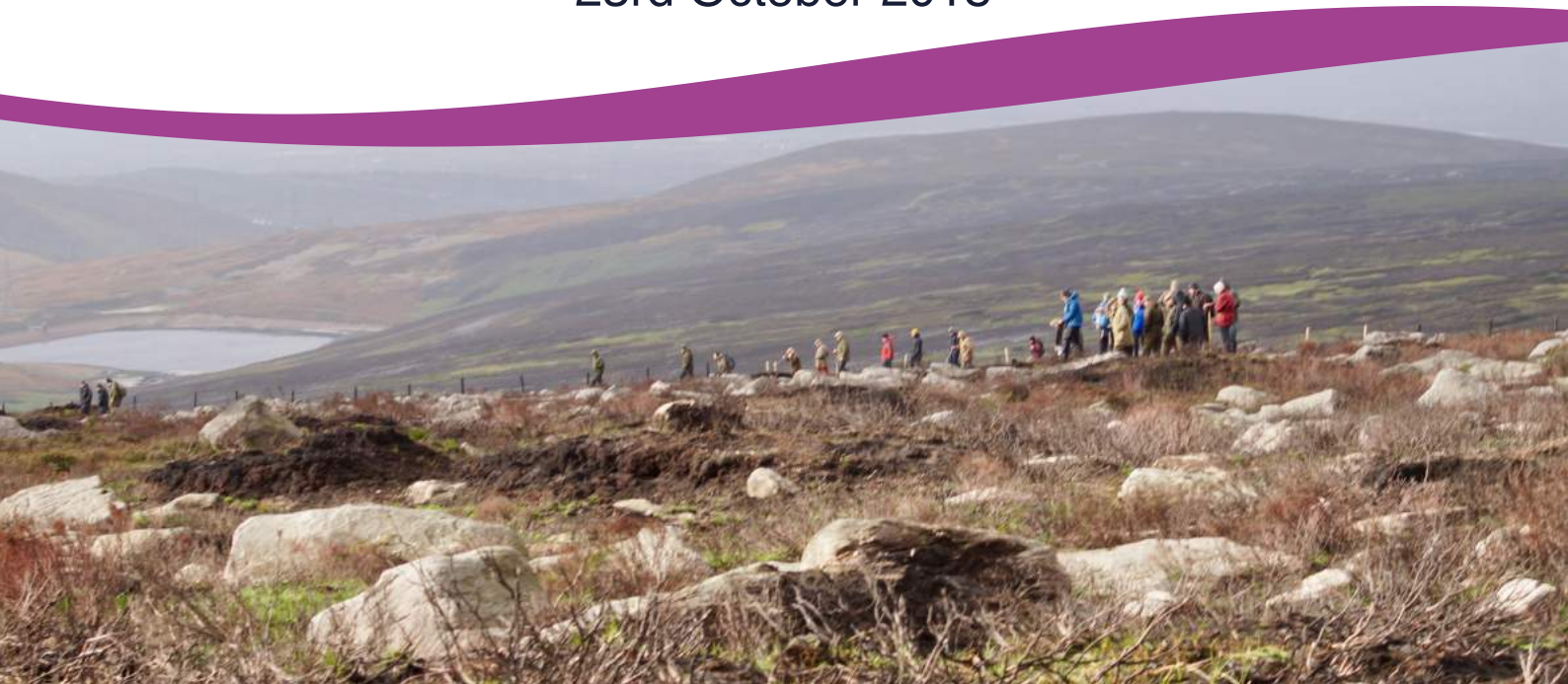




Site Visit & Conference Summary 23rd October 2018



Morning Site Visit: Tameside Wildfire sites

Circular walk from Chew Reservoir

The delegates were divided into four mixed groups (in terms of interest and expertise), each group made up of between fourteen and fifteen people.

The groups saw how the fire behaved in a variety of situations, and the site included wet ground, drier areas, areas which had been vegetated prior to the fire and others which were already bare when the fire struck.

In some places the fire had affected surface vegetation but had not penetrated the peat to any great extent, while in some places it had gone deeper.

On the initial walk in, we were on ground which had not been burnt which provided a useful comparison.

A surprising amount of vegetation recovery was evident on parts of the site – generally in the wetter areas.

We also looked at and discussed gully blocking techniques, revegetating bare peat and other peatland restoration techniques, and the issues that restoration was aiming to address.

Discussion with Fire and Rescue Service

At the end of the walk, we were met by one of the crews from Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. The crew had been fighting the fire on the morning it really took hold, and they were able to give insight into the issues associated with fighting moorland wildfires. These

included access with fire-fighting equipment, access to water, and the need to use alternative vehicles and techniques when fire appliances can't be taken on site and in the absence of large volumes of water. The use of firebreaks, surfactants and fogging units were discussed.

It was felt a more joined-up and strategic approach to wildfire planning was needed.



Afternoon Conference

At the Huntsman Inn, Holmfirth

Speakers included:-

Research and Science

Rob Marrs, Emeritus Bulley Professor and Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Liverpool

Andreas Heinemeyer, Associate Professor at the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) at the University of York.

Policy and Practice

Simon Thorp, England and Wales Wildfire Forum and the Uplands' Management Group

Mark Owen, Uplands Management Group and Natural England

Case Studies

Anthony Barber-Lomax, Resident Agent at Wentworth Fitzwilliam Estate speaking about Bradfield Moor

Dave O'Hara, RSPB/United Utilities Dove Stone speaking about Dove Stone.

Panel Discussion

Chaired by **Dave Chapman**, Chair of Moors for the Future Partnership

Members included – **Anthony Barber-Lomax** and **Dave O'Hara**, **Amanda Craig**, Natural England, **Amanda Anderson**, Moorland Association, **Matt Scott-Campbell** and **Dave Chandler** of Moors for the Future Partnership, and **John Scott** from Peak District National Park.

(A PDF of speakers' presentations is available separately).



Discussion at the panel session and throughout the afternoon included points on:-

1. How should practitioners and policy-makers interpret the science which is valuable and necessary but incomplete, challengeable and changing. Do we need something equivalent to the IPCC for peatland and moorland science?

- Moorland vegetation is fire-adapted because wildfire is part of this environment naturally. How do we manage with this in mind in light of climate change and likely greater occurrence of wildfires? Are strategic, controlled burns less damaging than uncontrolled fire? What is the role of cutting vegetation and also of unburnt areas?
- Peatland-ES-UK research – finding that charcoal addition to carbon accumulation in peat can result in a net positive carbon balance. It may also have some positive impact on water retention – but further research is needed. Don't throw controlled burning out of the tool box. Wetter still better, but not too much wetter as more methane (CH₄) can be created and released to the atmosphere where it has a greenhouse effect (*around x 28 more powerful than CO₂, although this is less long lived in the atmosphere*). Proceed but monitor
- The methodology of EMBER report was questioned. Comparisons seem invalid as environmental factors on sites compared varied significantly.

2. History of policy position extremes is unhelpful – “flip flopping” from policy support to complete reversal and banning practice. Examples - tree planting in flow country and agricultural drainage of the uplands.



We must guard against doing the same again – e.g. over wetting moors and possibly encountering problems with methane release. A more pragmatic, inclusive way forward was preferred.

3. Restoration burning and repeat burning definitions were discussed. Concerns were raised about terminology and intent. More work and discussion is required to deal with these tensions.

4. The future earning capacity for those currently living and working in the uplands was raised as a major concern. Future rural payments tied to managing nature and environment were discussed. Clarity on what the future looks like is needed.

5. Problems with sitka seeding into moorland areas were raised.

6. The management of wildfire ignition risks were also raised. The problem is no longer one of reckless use of portable BBQs and so on, but of deliberate ignition attempts. Education and awareness-raising with the wider public is part of the solution, but the issue is more complex than that.



Summing Up

The public and private benefits that moorlands can bring were considered through the lens of wildfire management, although it would have been possible to look at them from other perspectives. In the light of last summer's wildfire events, it was right however that this was our focus.

We heard about the many other things that we want to see our moorlands and our uplands deliver too, and we need to find ways of working that enable us to deliver the maximum number of benefits we can from an area. We need to deliver an integrated approach to moorland management.

Work has perhaps started down this route. We heard about Natural England working with moorland managers to develop long-term management plans and that these should over time become more encompassing. We know there will be challenges and difficulties to be ironed out and issues to be rethought along the way. Flexibility as we proceed is key.

The conference brought a range of people together to air all angles and opinions and to see if common ground could be found. We can perhaps all agree that there is common ground and a common goal, if we say that what we want is resilient moorlands. Moorland habitats that can withstand more extreme weather patterns for example. Places which do not easily succumb to wildfire and drought in dry summers, or to problems that come from excessive rainfall in wet spells.

Resilient moorlands will give wildlife and livestock the best chance to survive and thrive, while also helping us to manage water and carbon better - that has to be good for the rural economy and the environment.

