

GWCT welcomes acknowledgement of the growing threat of wildfire in the UK Climate Change Committee's (CCC) new progress report

Thursday 30 March, 2023

The GWCT welcomes the [UK Climate Change Committee's 2023 report](#) and its acknowledgement that the risk of wildfire will increase significantly in future decades. The report states: *"The events of the last year [2022 saw the highest annual number of wildfires (greater than 30 hectares) ever recorded in the UK] reinforce the urgency of making better preparations for climate change now. Action cannot be delayed further."*

The report expresses concern that there is no national coordinated strategy to identify and mitigate risks of wildfire in England to people, habitats, food production, property and infrastructure. Furthermore, it recommends a number of actions to build resilience including the *"management of vegetation and fuels (but minimising adverse biodiversity impacts)"* and the *"mapping of future UK wildfire risks"*.

GWCT CEO Teresa Dent said,

"GWCT is very pleased to see the references to the need to protect vulnerable habitats from wildfire and to map future wildfire risk as these were key outcomes from a GWCT-hosted wildfire workshop in January 2023, chaired by Lord Deben, chairman of the UK CCC.

"At the workshop expert contributions were made from the UK and around the world combining inputs from scientists, practical land managers, firefighters, government officials, policymakers, meteorologists, and CCC staff. Many types of knowledge were shared: scientific; observational; experiential; practical and behavioural.

"Our thanks to all attendees in particular Lord Deben and the keynote speakers, Professor Morgan Varner of Tall Timbers in the US, Marc Castellnou of the Catalan Fire & Rescue Service, Professor Claire Belcher of the wildFIRE lab at Exeter University and Paul Hedley the National Fire Chiefs Council wildfire lead."

The workshop reached a consensus on the need to increase understanding among policymakers and the wider public of the environmental, economic and social impacts of wildfire, together with the need for active management to mitigate these impacts and reduce the increasing risk of wildfire. Additionally, the workshop concluded the current policy is ineffective in its reliance on the fire and rescue services to put out/suppress wildfires and that further preventative intervention was required to manage fuel loads.

Teresa Dent continued:

"GWCT is pleased to see that the strong conclusions from the workshop including a national coordinated wildfire strategy, local wildfire response plans and the management of vegetation and fuels are now recommended actions in the CCC report."

The GWCT's team of upland ecologists has been working on sustainable upland management issues since 1979. In 2020 it published a [Peatland Report](#) which reviewed the environmental impacts including carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions and wildfire on peatland in England associated with grouse moor management. This report initiated conversations with the CCC. In 2022, GWCT published a second report [Sustaining Ecosystems](#) looking at the ecosystem delivery of English grouse moors compared to other upland land uses. It showed that grouse moor management performed well compared to those other land uses in terms of wildfire risk mitigation and carbon storage and emissions.

Available for Interview: Teresa Dent, Chief Executive GWCT

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