



## **Avoiding wildfires in our UNESCO Biosphere**

Please help us to protect our UNESCO Biosphere from damaging wildfires.

Our upland areas not only provide space for recreation and scenic views, but contain heathland and peatland habitats of global significance. Locally, the upland organic peat soils are our greatest carbon store estimated to store around 20 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide equivalent).

It is essential that we protect these habitats from the ever increasing risk posed by uncontrolled wildfire. Not only could a wildfire consume thousands of acres of above ground vegetation it could also burn the underlying peat releasing carbon that has built up over thousands of years in a few short days.

Wildfires can and do occur away from the uplands in a variety of habitats such as coastal beauty spots, coastal headlands and agricultural land. In many cases these fires are contained to a limited area which is where they differ from an upland wildfire.

### **How do wildfires start?**

Unfortunately the majority of wildfires are caused through carelessness. Common ignition sources include:

- Disposable barbecues
- Campfires
- Bonfires on land adjacent to flammable vegetation
- Fireworks
- Discarded cigarettes
- Litter such as glass bottles
- Chinese lanterns.

### **What should I do to lower the risk of wildfire?**

- Always take your litter home with you or place it in the nearest bin
- If you smoke, make sure you extinguish your cigarette and place it in a metallic , sealed, container so you can dispose of it away from flammable vegetation
- Picnic instead of using barbecues or campfires to cook food
- Do not drive over or park a vehicle on flammable vegetation.

Lighting any type of fire (including all barbecues) anywhere on the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) estate is prohibited unless permission is granted by the Department.

Fires and barbecues may be permitted at some privately owned rural locations, such as dedicated campsites, but the land owner will advise on their rules or any seasonal restrictions.

The risk of fire in the open countryside can cause catastrophic damage to wildlife, habitats, carbon stores, pollute public water supplies and put the public and emergency services at risk. A large scale wildfire would require hundreds of thousands if not millions of litres of water to be drawn from our seasonally depleted water resource.

### **Has the risk of wildfire increased in recent years?**

- Climatic conditions have increased the frequency of high risk wildfire periods
- In some areas the fuel load (flammable vegetation) has increased due to changes in land use or management practices
- As our population has grown, so has recreational access to rural locations, further increasing the risk.

### **What is controlled or prescribed burning?**

- Controlled burning is a legal land management technique regulated by the [Heath Burning Act 2003](#)
- Controlled burning of Registered Heathland can only take place between September 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup> and must be licenced by DEFA
- When carried out in accordance with the [Heath Burning Code](#) prescribed burning aims to reduce fuel loads by providing firebreaks and can enhance habitats for wildlife and grazing livestock.

### **Do I need to report a wildfire or an activity that could ignite a wildfire?**

If you witness an unattended fire, phone 999 and make your best attempt to inform the operator of the exact location of the fire.

Consider downloading and using the what3words app as this will greatly assist dispatching first responders to the exact location.

If you see someone acting in such a way that may result in a wildfire please also report this to the landowner:

DEFA Forestry – 01624 695701 (plantations and uplands)

Manx National Heritage – 01624 648000 (heritage sites - Cregneash, Eary Cushlin)

Manx Utilities Authority – 01624 687687 (reservoirs and North Barrule).