

WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLANNING

1 Background

- 1.1 For the purposes of this guidance, wildfire is defined as “Any uncontrolled vegetation fire which requires a decision, or action, regarding suppression.” (para 9.2)
- 1.2 Wildfire is deemed to be an increasing threat.
- 1.3 Wildfires can consume large amounts of vegetation and the peat and the carbon emissions associated with wildfire incidents can have a significant impact on climate change.
- 1.4 Wildfires can occur on any land in any part of the country. Some of the larger fires occur in remote, rural locations, but wildfires close to areas of high population can pose the greatest risk to people and property.
- 1.5 To mitigate their impact, it is important to plan for wildfire incidents before ignition occurs.

2 Wildfire Risk Assessment and Management Planning

- 2.1 In 2018, the Uplands Management Group was commissioned by Defra to produce guidance that covers an approach to wildfire risk assessment and management planning to mitigate the risk. The guidance was published in July 2019.
- 2.2 It is not compulsory for landowners and land managers to follow this guidance but they are encouraged to use the process outlined in the guidance or to adapt it to meet their specific needs.
- 2.3 Following the introduction of The Heather & Grass Burning Regulations 2021, additional information is provided to support the development of a Wildfire Management Plan, which will provide the information necessary to support the application for a licence to carry out prescribed burning on protected deep peat. See section 4.

3 Uplands Management Group Guidance

3.1 This latest version of the UMG’s guidance includes the following stages:

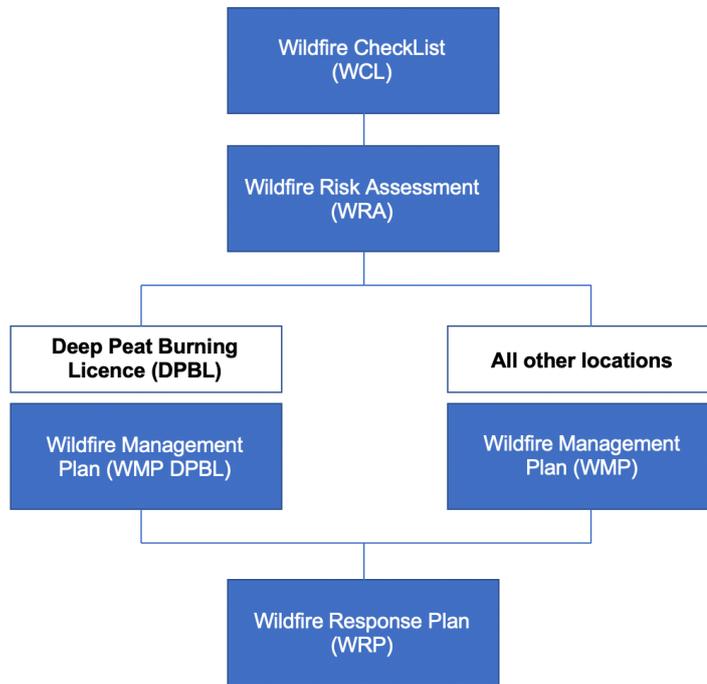


Figure 1: The Risk Assessment Process

3.2 Wildfire Planning Documents

More details about these documents are provided in Appendix 1.

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| <p>Wildfire Checklist (WCL)</p> | <p>The checklist provides a range of options that will meet most situations, for landowners and land managers to consider. There is space to include any special issues that relate to a particular site that are not covered by the standard descriptions.</p> <p>The issues identified in the checklist should be carried forward to form the list of issues to be addressed in the Wildfire Risk Assessment (in the first column).</p> |
| <p>Wildfire Risk Assessment (WRA)</p> | <p>Guidance notes provide details about how to complete the WRA, which takes the form of a matrix.</p> <p>The WRA takes the issues identified in the WCL and sets out more information.</p> <p>The Likelihood and Severity are used to establish an Initial Risk Rating score and description.</p> <p>There is space to produce a Revised Risk Rating after recording additional action that will be taken.</p> |

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| Wildfire Management Plan (WMP) | The WMP sets out the good management practices that protect people, businesses, land and property, sensitive habitats and the provision of ecosystem (natural) services. A different version of the WMP has been developed to support the application for a Deep Peat Burning Licence (WMP DPBL). |
| Wildfire Response Plan (WRP) | The Wildfire Response Plan aims to enhance preparedness in advance of a wildfire incident and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of any subsequent operational response. ² This plan should be developed with the local Fire and Rescue Service and a template is provided to provide examples of the issues that can be considered. |

Table 1: Wildfire Planning Documents

4 Prescribed burning on protected deep peat

- 4.1 In March 2021, The Heather & Grass Burning Regulations 2021¹ were introduced. The regulations require anyone seeking to carry out prescribed burning on protected deep peat to obtain a licence from Defra (a deep peat burning licence - DPBL).
- 4.2 The Regulations state that a DPBL is required to burn heather, rough grass, bracken, gorse or Vaccinium (such as bilberries) which is both:
- 4.2.1 on peat deeper than 40cm (also known as blanket bog)
 - 4.2.2 within a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), and either a special area of conservation (SAC) or a special protection area (SPA)
- 4.3 To apply for a DPBL, applicants must first have SSSI consent to carry out prescribed burning on the land holding. If there is no existing consent to burn on the SSSI / SPA / SAC, before applying for a deep peat burning licence, a consent must first be obtained from Natural England.
- 4.4 An application for a DPBL to reduce wildfire risk must be supported by a version of the standard Wildfire Management Plan (WMP DPBL) that has been produced to provide the information required to support the licence application. This must cover the whole land holding.
- 4.4.1 The WMP DPBL should mitigate the wildfire risks and it is recommended these are identified by completing a Wildfire Risk Assessment (WRA).
- 4.5 Guidance about applying for a DPBL is available on the GOV.UK website².

¹ <https://www.uplandsmanagement.co.uk/about-me-picture>

² <https://bit.ly/36q2INf>

- 4.6 If wildfire risk on the land holding has not been considered before, completion of a Wildfire Check List may be useful, in advance of the WRA.
- 4.7 A Wildfire Response Plan should also be considered, as this will assist in tackling a wildfire on the land.
- 4.8 More information about the application process is Section 6 of the guidance notes for the completion of WMP(DPBL).

5 External Engagement

- 5.1 Table 2 contains a list of organisations and individuals that it may be appropriate to discuss a Wildfire Management Plan with and it will help to ensure that any statutory requirements have been met.
- 5.2 In some cases, there may be a ‘duty’ or courtesy reason to consult neighbours or those with interest in the land.
- 5.3 You may not need or wish to discuss your plan with all the organisations and individuals listed, and there may be others relevant to your circumstances.
- 5.4 Keeping a record of any liaison or discussion may help in discussions with statutory bodies and will serve as an audit trail for the future.
- 5.5 Section 11 of the WMP templates provides space to record the engagement with the organisations listed below.

| Organisation | Details of Engagement |
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| Planning Authority | Where proposals require or may require planning permission |
| Environment Agency / County Council | May be required where watercourse or land drainage consent is needed |
| Highways Authority | Where proposals affect access or Rights of Way |
| Natural England | Where the land is a SSSI. NE may also comment on implications for landscape |
| Rural Payments Agency | Where there are agri-environment agreements and the Plan affects prescriptions |
| Historic England | Required where proposals affect a Scheduled Monument |
| National Park / Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty | Where proposals require or may require planning permission, affect access etc |
| Fire and Rescue Service | Wildfire Response Plans should be lodged with the FRS |
| Commons Committee | Local knowledge and site history. Resource for actions |
| Tenant(s) | Local knowledge and site history. Resource for actions |
| Neighbour(s) | Local knowledge and site history. Resource for actions |
| Grazier(s) | Local knowledge and site history. Resource for actions |

Table 2: External Engagement

6 Use of Maps

- 6.1 A map is a useful way to present the information in a WMP. Examples of maps to support the WMP DPBL have been prepared and can be viewed on the UMG website – see the link in Section 8.
- 6.2 This approach can be adapted to support a WMP on other areas.
- 6.3 In the example, the mapping information is presented on three maps. Three maps have been used for clarity of the example, but for other applications a lesser, or greater, number of maps could be used.
- 6.4 Maps can be updated regularly to show progress on wildfire risk management and used to facilitate co-ordination between holdings and other organisations.
- 6.5 Maps do not have to be prepared professionally. A good sketch map may be adequate to provide spatial information to support other description.

7 Wildfire and Prescribed Burning Training

- 7.1 In parallel with the development of the wildfire risk management process to meet the requirements of the burning licence application, training is being developed to provide practitioners with an improved understanding of wildfire management and prescribed burning techniques.
- 7.2 Completion of prescribed burning training will not be a prerequisite for the application process, but applicants will need to demonstrate that they have the skill and experience necessary to carry out any prescribed burning safely within the agreed constraints. The training will provide applicants with the minimum level of knowledge to achieve this.
- 7.3 More details about the training packages will be published separately.

8 Links to Other Documents

- 8.1 Links to the following documents are available from the UMG website <https://www.uplandsmanagement.co.uk/wildfire>

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| Example Maps Wildfire Checklist Wildfire Risk Assessment Notes, Form Template, Matrix templates Wildfire Management Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none">• WMP DPBL - Template and Notes• WMP (for other situations) - Template and Notes• Proposed Burn Area Information form Wildfire Response Plan Feedback Form |
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9 Links to other information

- 9.1 Forestry Commission: Practice Guide Building wildfire resilience into forest management planning (2014) – a guide for managers of woodland habitats but covers planning, risk assessment, fire behaviour, fuel characteristics etc.
<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/6952/FCPG022.pdf>
- 9.2 Scottish Government: Fire and Rescue Service Wildfire Operational Guidance (2013) – an invaluable reference covering for example fire behaviour and operational methods of firefighting.
<https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/10/6118>
- 9.3 Guidance page for the DPBL on GOV.UK
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-licence-to-burn-on-deep-peat-in-a-protected-site>

Acknowledgements

The Wildfire Risk Assessment process outlined in this guidance is based on the Forestry Commission: Practice Guide Building Wildfire Resilience into Forest Management Planning (2014) – see Links to Other Information para 9.1

Wildfire Risk Assessment and Management Planning Description of Planning Stages

All documents are available from the UMG website
www.uplandsmanagement.co.uk/wildfire

Wildfire Check List (WCL)

The checklist has been developed as an aid to understanding the size of the wildfire threat on a land holding. It is not a replacement for a Wildfire Risk Assessment.

It is aimed at landowners and land managers, who might not have considered the wildfire risk before, and it provides a quick way for them to identify the issues that may require further action.

The checklist is provided as a protected Word document. If opened in Word, the fields can be completed on a computer and the revised document saved. Alternatively, the document can be printed and completed by hand.

Wildfire Risk Assessment (WRA)

A Wildfire Risk Assessment is a tool for identifying fire hazards and evaluating fire risk; it is a means of combining understanding of the likelihood of an event occurring with the severity of the impact, if it does occur.

It can be used as a framework for planning decisions on wildfire prevention measures, and form the evidence base for a Wildfire Management Plan.

By providing details of specific site hazards, the assessment identifies how wildfire risks can be mitigated and managed; this is an iterative process that prioritises action to address the most significant risks.

Wildfire risk assessment is complex because it is a product of a number of factors including weather, peoples' behaviour, vegetation type and character, each of which vary from place to place and time to time. Nevertheless, the process outlined here attempts to make the assessment as objective as possible.

A thorough WRA should be an integral part of the WMP process, and it should be reviewed on a regular basis; for example, after a wildfire incident, or as a minimum every 5–10 years.

Local Wildfire Fire Groups or Fire Operations Groups and land managers may be able to co-ordinate activities between different land holdings and provide advice about preparing a WRA.

The output from the WRA can take the form of a map or a matrix. A matrix is likely to be appropriate for larger, more complicated landholdings; the guidance includes an outline of a matrix in three forms.

- For those who would like to complete an electronic version, an Excel spreadsheet version is available. Macros need to be enabled, when opening the file, and further guidance about how to complete this is included within it.
- For those who would prefer to complete the matrix by typing into the boxes on a PC or Mac (but not a tablet), a Word version is available.
- A PDF version is available to print for completion by hand.

All versions of the WRA matrix include a list of options to guide the completion of the matrix boxes. In the electronic version, the options are provided as a dropdown box. The lists should be seen as a guide only and additional information can be added that is specific to the land holding.

Wildfire Management Plan (WMP)

The main aims of a WMP are to reduce the risk of a wildfire starting and to reduce the severity of damage caused by any wildfire that does occur.

A WMP may be a requirement for environmental schemes, (for example, Countryside Stewardship agreement, option UP3), and a Plan will be required to support applications to Defra for a deep peat burning licence (DPBL) where the aim is to mitigate the wildfire risk.

The website provides links to two versions of a WMP: the first is used in support of an application for a DPBL, and the second version for all other situations.

A WMP may be developed to cover individual land holdings, but it would be beneficial to produce plans that cover multiple land holdings, as larger scale plans will help to co-ordinate the response to wildfire risk in the area.

A WMP is site specific, and it is recommended that it is developed to address the risks identified in a Wildfire Risk Assessment (see above) and set out measures that will reduce or mitigate the risk and / or consequences of a wildfire. It is not essential to produce a WRA before the WMP, but it is recommended as good practice.

The WMP may include measures that contribute to tackling fires through provision of infrastructure or access.

Wildfire Response Plan (WRP)

A WRP describes the response required to tackle a wildfire that occurs in the area covered by the plan. A WRP should be developed for individual landholdings, but there would be benefit from working at a landscape / catchment scale so that plans are coordinated.

Wildfire Response Plans should include information that would prove useful for the initial response of the Fire and Rescue Services to a wildfire incident, such as location of infrastructure, access routes, water sources, specialist equipment, contact details and site maps.

A WRP is often developed in collaboration between local fire groups, land managers and Fire and Rescue Services (FRS). In some areas, plans can be submitted for approval by the FRS. If a WRP is not available, consideration should be given to preparing one, in parallel with a WMP.

An outline of a WRP is available to [download from the UMG website](#) and this includes a link to an example template. Individual FRS may have their own templates.

Feedback

Feedback from users of this guidance will be welcomed and a form to facilitate submission of it is [provided on the website](#).

Review

Please note that the guidance and templates will be reviewed and revised periodically to incorporate any feedback. Before using any of the guidance documents or any of the templates, please check that you have the latest version.