

“Be Fire Aware” campaign launched in Peak District

The Peak District National Park launched their “Be Fire Aware” publicity campaign at the Edale Moorland Centre in Derbyshire in July 2014. The campaign highlights the risk and consequences of accidental wildfires to the public. The campaign was launched by representatives of the National Park, the England and Wales Wildfire Forum and the Chief Fire Officers Association.

Centrepiece of the campaign is an innovative multimedia display which provides real time fire risk mapping. The interactive system relies on a continuous feed from a local weather station to provide up-to-the minute predictions of current fire risk at all points in the Dark Peak area. This real time wildfire forecasting system for the area is directly based on published research in the *Journal of Environmental Management* on “forecasting the outbreak of moorland wildfires in the English Peak District” undertaken by Julia McMorrow and Jonathan Aylen of the University of Manchester and Gina Cavan and Kevin Albertson of Manchester Metropolitan University.



Julia McMorrow demonstrating the Fire Aware real time risk software

Speaking for the National Park, Debra Wilson said this real time mapping is the first of its kind in the UK. It combines weather and geographical data to give an immediate picture of fire risk on the moors. The interactive fire awareness map is readily available for public use at Moorland visitor centres at Edale and Fairholme which attract over 80,000 visitors a year, and on-line. It also allows users to explore fire risk history across the upland areas. The aim was to make science relevant to the real world.

Welcoming the “Be Fire Aware” campaign, Jim Dixon, Chief Executive of the PDNP, stressed the importance of the Peak District upland ecosystem and praised the work of the local collaborative Fire Operations Group in suppressing wildfires. The campaign was inaugurated by Simon Thorp of the Heather Trust and Vice Chair of the England and Wales Wildfire Forum who pointed to the emergence of a national policy on wildfire as a sign of growing awareness of the problem throughout the British Isles. Other fire group partnerships have followed the example of the Peak District and collaborated to share knowledge, equipment and resources to tackle wildfires. Alan Clark, who leads on wildfire prevention strategies for the Chief Fire Officers Association, spoke about the better equipment, improved training and safer tactics adopted by his own force, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, following a major fire on Thursley Common, a lowland heath area, in 2006. Alan highlighted the importance of learning from European experience and growing national awareness of the issues posed by wildfire among Fire and Rescue Services across the UK.

Notes:

1. Moors for the Future “Be Fire Aware” website: www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/be-fire-aware
2. Link to *Journal of Environmental Management* paper (Albertson et al., 2009): <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301479709000498>