



Northumberland Collaborative Burning Project

CASE STUDY

The Northumberland Collaborative Burning Project began in September 2013 and has been co-financed by Northumberland National Park Authority's (NNPA) Sustainable Development Fund, the Cheviot Futures Programme and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS). The project has also received strong support from the [Northumberland Fire Group](#) (NFG).

This innovative project involves the organisation of prescribed burns which involve partners from public agencies, land owners, land managers and others in the private sector. The partners have been working together to share knowledge, expertise and experience while helping to reduce the potential risks associated with wildfires. Each collaborative burn involves members of the partnership attending sites in remote rural locations to plan and implement controlled prescribed burns. The burns are completed to remove vegetation, to ultimately reduce the risk of fire spread, but they are also used to simulate wildfires in order to provide the opportunity for training with live fire.

Each collaborative burn is meticulously planned and the sites of the burns are specifically identified to ensure that high risk locations are targeted. The high risk areas that have been identified are those that are:

- hard to burn for fuel management; and/or,
- that could represent a significant risk to wildfire spread if a wildfire were to occur; and/or,
- where there is a need for additional trained personnel to help support safe and effective controlled burning.



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The identification of high risk sites exemplifies the significant level of partnership working required to make the project a success, with NFRS liaising closely with NNPA, Natural England and land owners/managers to identify sites where burning will have significant positive impacts. For example, some of the burns are being planned to create fire breaks or buffer zones that could help to provide better protection to sensitive habitats (for instance blanket bog and wet heath) from wildfires.

All of the collaborative burns are being completed by wildfire trainers and wildfire support officers from Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, retained fire firefighters who work from the community fire stations in/near the National Park, and local landowners and managers. There are significant benefits of involving multiple agencies in the burns. Firstly, firefighters and land managers get to know one another and can develop a good working relationship, which may be of significant importance if they need to work together in the future during a wildfire incident. Secondly, firefighters and land managers have the opportunity to exchange knowledge and good practice on burning and suppression techniques.

During the project, NFRS has been delivering specialist wildfire training to fire fighters working at rural community fire stations at Bellingham, Rothbury and Wooler, all of which are situated adjacent to the Northumberland National Park. The training is designed in two parts: theory sessions delivered at each fire station; and, hands-on practical training delivered during collaborative burns held at a number of sites throughout the National Park.

New equipment

To aid the additional training, and to further support NFRS's response to wildfire incidents within the Northumberland National Park, the project has also financed the



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purchase of additional equipment. Four different types of new equipment are now available on the three fire stations included within the scope of the project:

- Long handled beaters - these are more effective than traditional fire beaters and help keep firefighters further away from flames and heat.
- Backpack sprayers – these are common across FRS in the UK, but NFRS has purchased new backpack sprayers which are more comfortable to wear and which have a dual-pump action. NFRS firefighters wearing backpack sprayers work alongside their colleagues with long handled beaters at wildfire incidents.
- Pulaskis – a hand tool which was originally created in the USA. Pulaskis are used to remove vegetation on the ground to prevent fire spread. The tool has a handle and a dual purpose metal head with a mattock on one side and an axe on the other.
- Tailor-made maps of the Northumberland National Park – fire crews are being supplied with tailor-made maps that strategically cover the whole National Park. The maps have a waterproof coating to help improve tactical planning at wildfire incidents.

Training the next generation

The Northumberland Collaborative Burning Project is not just focusing attention on current wildfire risk. Wildfire specialists and retained firefighters from NFRS have been delivering training to young people aged 13-17 years old who attend branches of the Young Firefighters Association at Rothbury and Wooler Fire Stations. The sessions have provided young people with wildfire awareness training and map reading and navigation skills. These skills are of vital importance for firefighters attending wildfire incidents, but they are also key skills for those employed in land management professions. Young people have also attended sessions co-led by NFRS wildfire specialists and National Park Rangers which have raised awareness



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of the rare and valuable environmental habitats of the Northumberland National Park and the potential devastation that wildfires can cause to these areas.

Conclusions

The experience of all the organisations and individuals involved in the Northumberland Collaborative Burning Project has so far been extremely positive. The project has provided an effective mechanism through which NFRS and NNPA can work very closely with local landowners and managers to identify, assess and manage wildfire risk. One of the important successes of the project so far is that the various activities that have been organised to date have helped a range of local stakeholders to better understand each other's' knowledge, skills, experience and priorities with regards to prescribed burning and wildfire.

Following the successes of this initial three year project, NFRS, NNPA and the NFG are now designing and planning for a second phase project. This second phase will include the delivery of further specialist wildfire training to the three stations targeted in phase one, but will also include purchase of equipment and delivery of additional training to at least one other fire station situated toward the southern end of the Northumberland National Park. Phase two will also look to identify a number of new burning sites that represent a high risk and which could benefit from collaborative burning.

If you would like any further information¹ about the Northumberland Collaborative Burning Project, please visit the website <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=4604> or contact robert.stacey@northumberland.gov.uk

¹ Further information about the Northumberland National Park Authority Sustainable Development Fund can be found online at: <http://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk/livingin/grantsandsupport/sustainabledevelopmentfund>