Healthy Hillsides Partnership

Partnership formed through finding common ground during the NRW Area Statement Trial in the Rhondda in 2015

Multiple social, economic and environmental impacts of Wildfires

- Risk to People and Property
- Risk to Fire Officers tackling the wildfires
- Risk to Public Health

- Impacts on environment
- Increased diffuse pollution
- Increased risk of soil erosion
- Increased risk of flooding
- Biodiversity Loss
- Loss of heritage sites

- Visual impacts
- Negative perception of the Valleys
- Disrupts access to recreation sites

- Economic cost to commercial forestry
- Cost to public purse both through damage to land and tackling the wildfires

Maerdy mountain wildfire was 'started ...
bbc.co.uk

Maerdy mountain wildfire was 'started ...
bbc.co.uk

tackle fires at Maerdy and Cwm Rhe...
bbc.co.uk

crews tackle Mynydd Cilgwyn wildfire ...
bbc.co.uk

Wildfires on Maerdy Mountain spread as ...
walesonline.co.uk
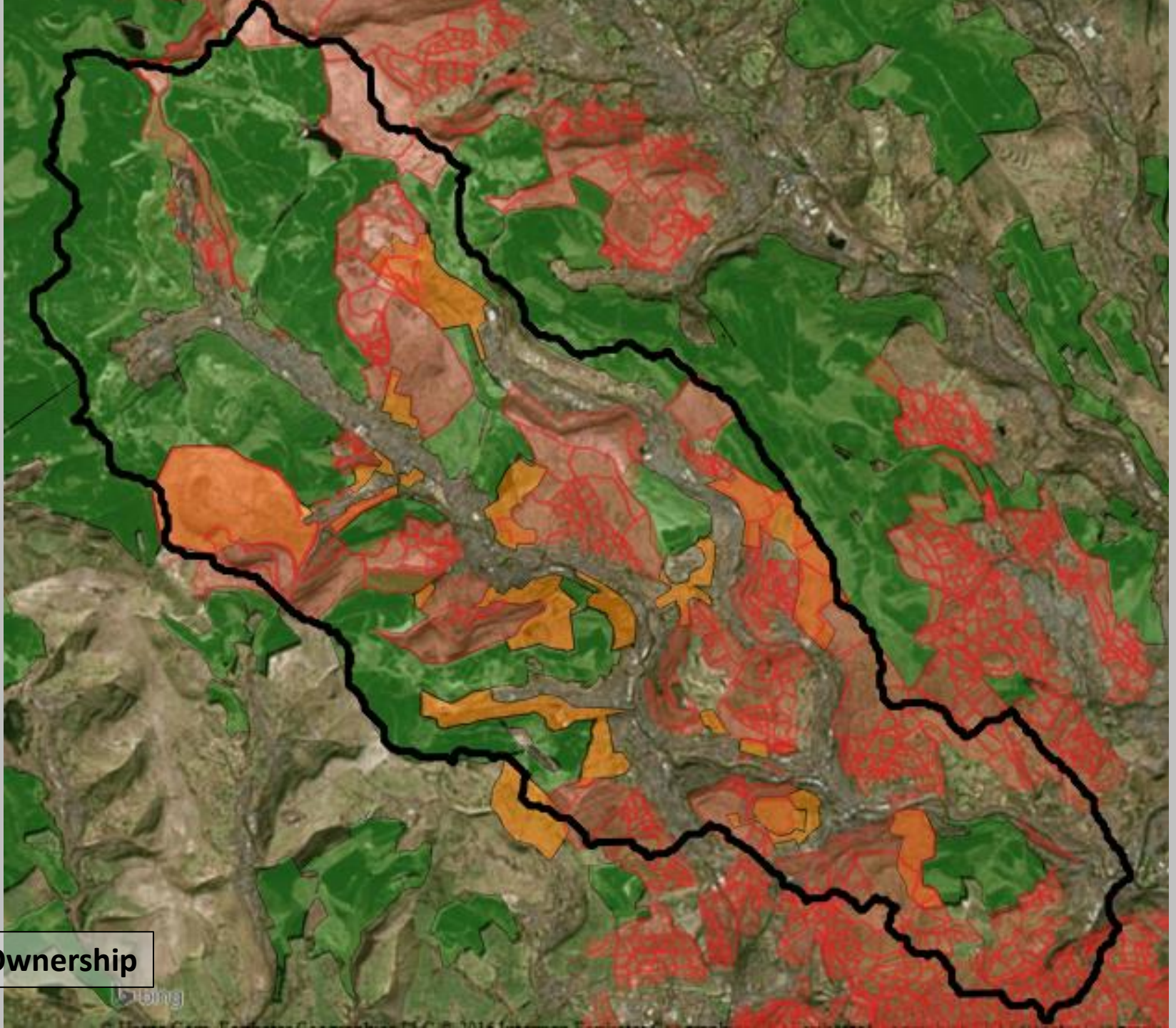
Maerdy mountain wildf...
bbc.co.uk

What makes this area high risk?

- Dense linear urban population adjacent to rural open access land
- Land management changes
- Large proportion of publicly owned land
- The habitat is well-connected
- The terrain – steep slopes
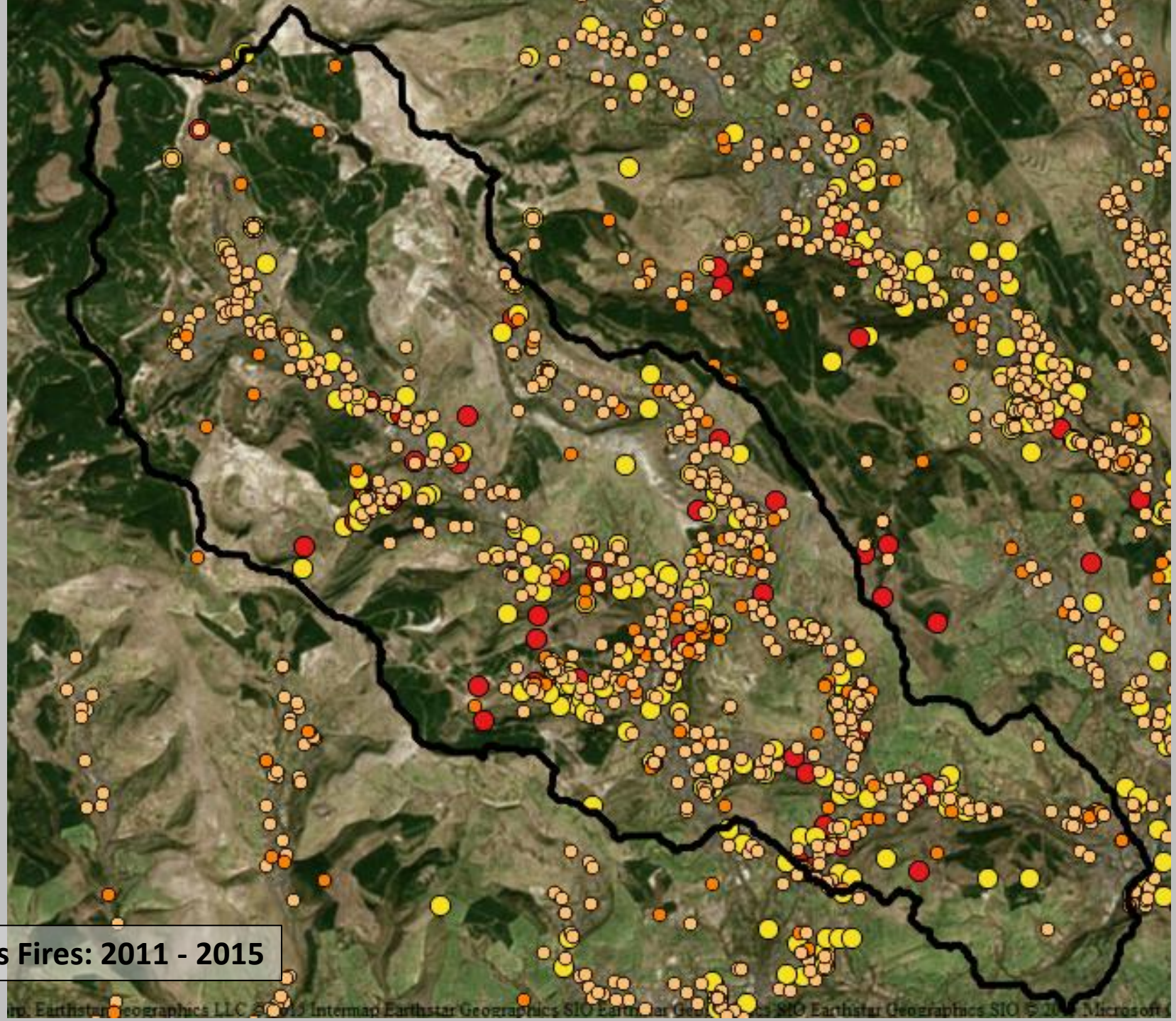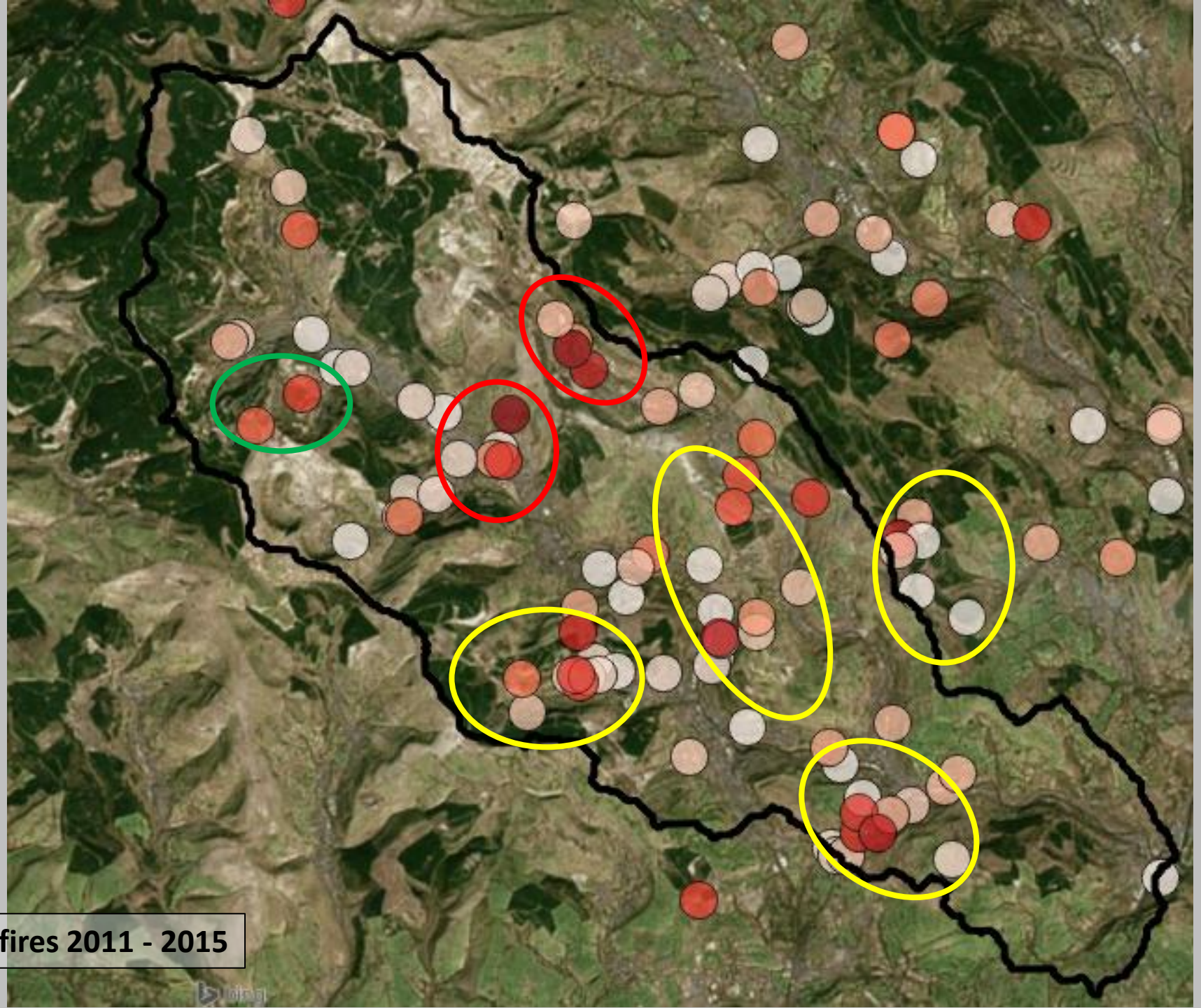- Cultural tolerance of wildfires

Land Ownership

Grass Fires: 2011 - 2015

Wildfires 2011 - 2015

Public participation

NRW asked people in the Rhondda to answer 3 questions on A5 flyers. The answers are below:

1 What do you most like / love about your area?

- **46% love the Rhondda's countryside (mountains, woods, rivers)**
- 15% love the community spirit of the Rhondda
- 14% love the scenery and views
- 12% love the parks and urban green space
- 5% love the wildlife, 2% the tranquillity, and 6% were other aspects.

2 How do you use the outdoors in your local area?

- **58% use the outdoors for walking**
- 14% cycle and use bike trails
- 10% like to both walk and cycle
- 16% participate in other sports including climbing, golf, cricket, rugby and football, 2% use their local rivers to fish

3 What are your ideas for improving your local area?

- **26% of the community want crime and anti-social behaviour to be addressed**
- 20% want more activities / things to do for children and teenagers
- 17% want improved access to recreation
- 16% want more jobs and skills training
- 6% want their local environment improved for wildlife
- 5% want traffic congestion reduced and 5% want empty buildings to be used
- 3% want greater promotion of the South Wales Valleys and 2% had other suggestions, including community food growing

Scenarios

- **1. Do nothing** – reactive wildfire control only
- **2. Education** – reduce the number of fires being lit
- **3. Reduce the risk** - establish fire breaks and enable more effective firefighting
- **4. Reduce the fuel load** - How? Landscape is not only impacted by wildfires

- **5. Resilient landscape**
  - Pro-active communities – FireWise around homes, using the wider countryside
  - Sustainable management regimes – conservation grazing, manual cutting, targeted control of dominant species, creation of mosaic habitats
  - Requires extra capacity within the partnership

Land Management Options for a Resilient Landscape

Creation of multi purpose fire breaks

- Prescribed burns
- Cutting
- Sustainable options include being used as pathways – people and grazing animals

Vegetation Management Options

- Grazing – intensive or extensive – both require infrastructure
- Prescribed burns – dominant bracken and purple moor grass habitats
- Bracken management – bruising e.g. heavy horses, mechanically
- Cutting regimes – preference for cut and collect – requires delivery team

These resilient landscape options do not manage the fuel at a level that will prevent wildfires as a result of deliberate arson

How do we fund the work?

Publicly owned land therefore not eligible for agri-environment schemes etc.
High risk project involving large scale capital – difficult for funders
We have a mix of demonstration sites and solutions – some with a strong community option and others with a stronger land management aspect

WG: Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Across Wales.

- Perfect fit of the funding scheme and our project
- Successful application for £800k+ project
- At a proceed at risk stage during this year
- Found out this Autumn that all projects in our funding stream are required to re-submit their projects
- Complications led to change in project lead, deadline this Friday!
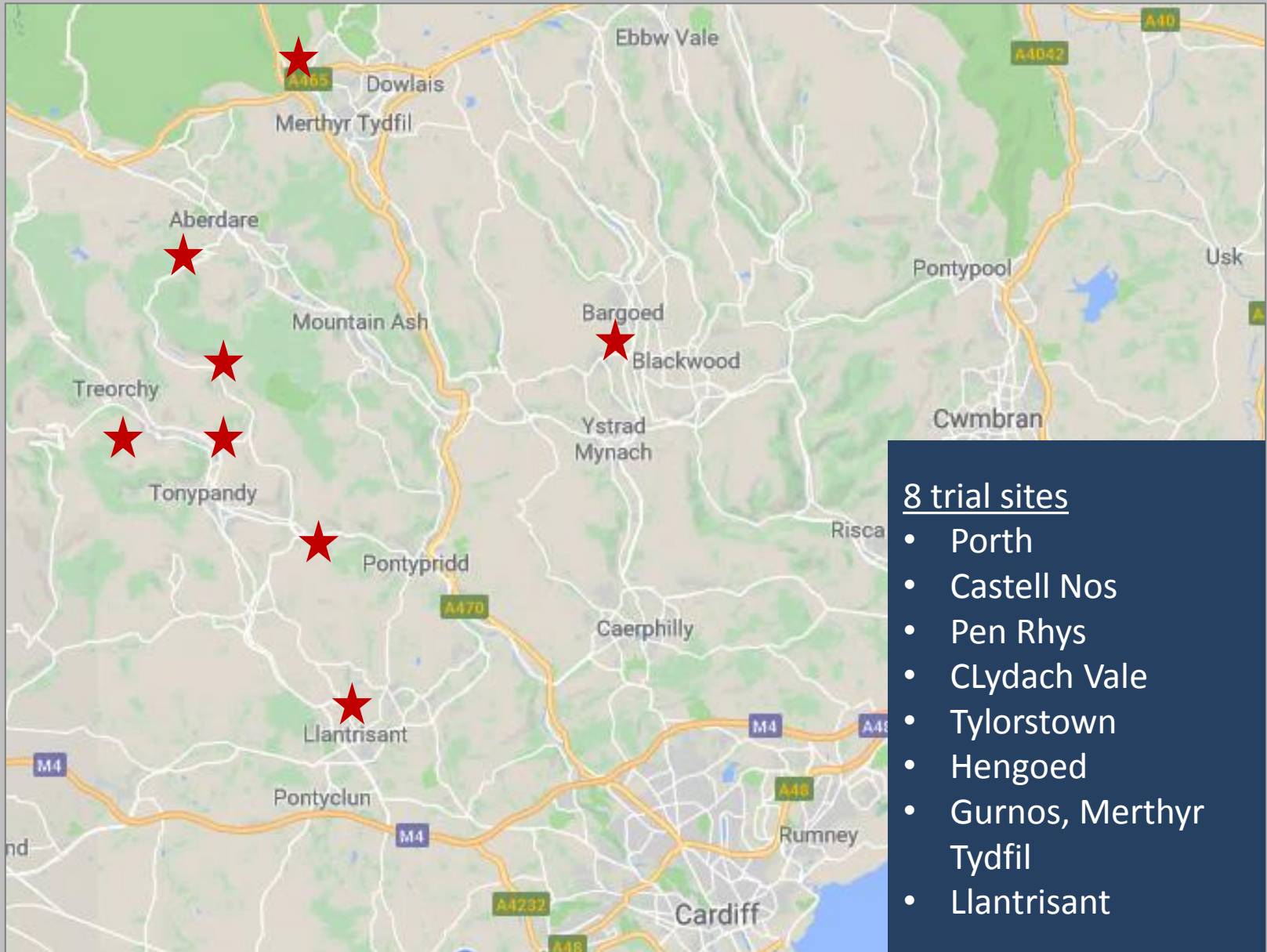
The Project objectives

- Create **eight Demonstration site**s and implement physical site improvements through access enhancements, mechanical fuel/habitat management, site preparation and introduction of conservation grazing and volunteer community management of safe zones and firebreaks.
- To transition over 100 ha of **hillside habitat in sustainable positive management**
- Engage the local community on to the sites
- Establish and support four **FireWise communities**
- **Engage schools in the sites** encouraging access to the sites to undertake the 'Mile a Day' challenge
- Use **new communication tools** to increase community understanding of the value of the hillsides and perspective of wildfire.
- Develop a **Wildfire strategy and a land management "tool kit"** for wildfire arson with the aim of a place-based implementation with cross-cutting themes that can act as "lessons learned" for wider application.

Evidence

- Increase in public land in positive management
- Increased resilience to grass fires
- Increase in biodiversity value
- Evidence base for appropriate measures to tackle wildfire
- Community Beneficiaries
- Wider Landscape Benefits "Ecosystem Benefits"
- Knowledge gathering and sharing

8 trial sites
- Porth
- Castell Nos
- Pen Rhys
- CLydach Vale
- Tylorstown
- Hengoed
- Gurnos, Merthyr Tydfil
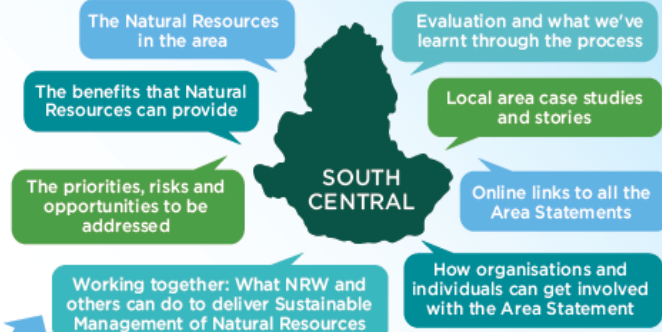- Llantrisant

WHAT ARE AREA STATEMENTS?

WHERE HAVE THEY COME FROM?

The Environment (Wales) Act was passed in 2016, and it gave Natural Resources Wales (NRW) a new duty to prepare Area Statements (AS). Their primary purpose is to facilitate the implementation of the Natural Resources Policy (NRP) published by Welsh Government.

The Natural Resources Policy sets out Welsh Ministers' priorities for Wales' natural resources, which are:
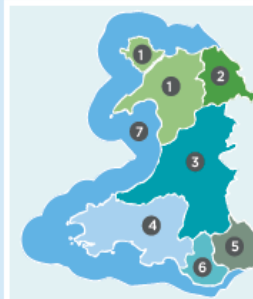- Delivering nature-based solutions
- Increasing resource efficiency and renewable energy
- Taking a place-based approach

The Area Statements are hosted on our website, with all the Area Statements accessible to everyone, to promote sharing and learning. In the AS you will see:

- The Natural Resources in the area
- The benefits that Natural Resources can provide
- The priorities, risks and opportunities to be addressed
- Working together: What NRW and others can do to deliver Sustainable Management of Natural Resources

SOUTH CENTRAL

- Evaluation and what we've learnt through the process
- Local area case studies and stories
- Online links to all the Area Statements
- How organisations and individuals can get involved with the Area Statement

FLOW

7 AREA STATEMENTS ACROSS WALES

1 North West
2 North East
3 Mid
4 South West
5 South East
6 South Central
7 Marine

"The Area Statement is designed to be... flexible, collaborative, evolving, accessible, adaptive, helpful, innovative and a hub for local and national knowledge."

AREA STATEMENT COORDINATORS

Each of the 7 areas has co-ordinators who co-create the Area Statement.

"We facilitate the two-way flow of information, collaborating with stakeholders, who bring valued 'lived experience' and local knowledge."

SMNR PRINCIPLES

The Areas Statements embed the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) principles: Adaptive Management, Collaboration & Engagement, Evidence, Long-term, Multiple Benefits, Public Participation, Scale, Preventative Action and Building Resilience. They support the delivery of the Well-being of the Future Generations Act.
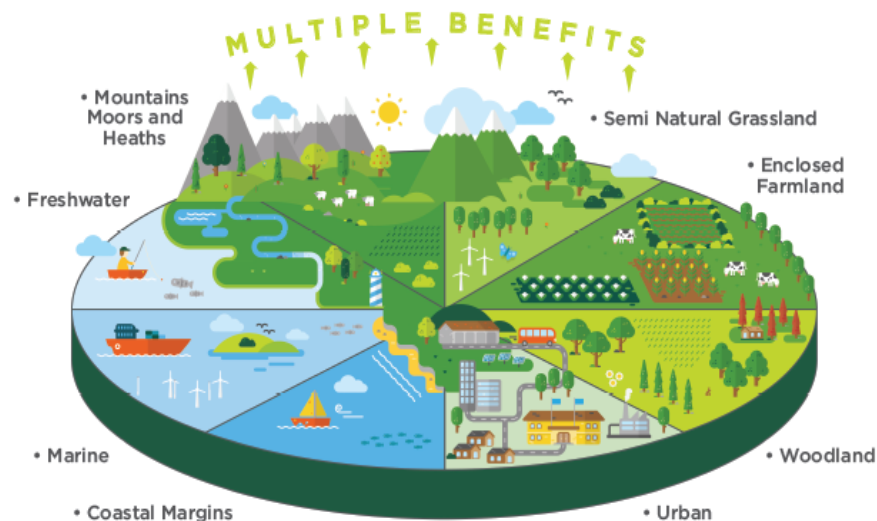
We all need to look after our Natural Resources* and Ecosystems so they can continue to provide us with the things we need now, and in the future.

Our Natural Resources help to keep us healthy, improve wellbeing and provide multiple benefits.

*Natural Resources includes animals, plants, air, water soil and minerals, as well as the climatic processes and flow resources derived from them.

WALES' NATURAL RESOURCES & ECOSYSTEMS

MULTIPLE BENEFITS

- Mountains Moors and Heaths
- Semi Natural Grassland
- Freshwater
- Enclosed Farmland
- Marine
- Woodland
- Coastal Margins
- Urban

Area Statement Themes in South Wales Central

Valuing the Natural Environment..

Improving People's **Health** Outcome through the Natural Environment.

Working with our **Water** Environment

..Building Equitable Partnerships …

Improving **Air Quality** which can impact Health, Well-being and Biodiversity

..putting the Environment at the Heart of Decision Making

Improving the **Connection** Between **People and Nature**.

Rebuilding **Resilient Ecosystems**

Healthy Hillsides Case Study

Case study

Healthy Hillsides: partnership approach to help tackle wildfires in the Rhondda

Healthy Hillsides is a collaborative approach to better manage the Rhondda's natural resources to help minimise the impact and severity of wildfires.

Wildfires deliberately caused by arson affect the South Wales valleys every year.

When we spoke to local people, tackling this problem was a priority for them.

The **risks** associated with wild fires are broad and as well as environmental damage include potential damage to life, property, livelihoods and health.
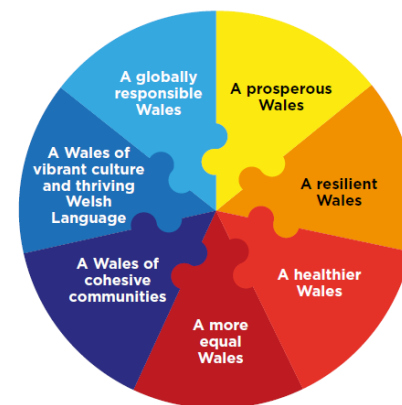
The **opportunity** was to implement proactive land management techniques, which can help reduce the extent of wildfires and prevent them spreading across whole hillsides, devastating local wildlife and endangering communities.

In spring 2015, there were 513 deliberate fires in Rhondda Cynon Taf. 244 of these were in the Rhondda.

Principles of sustainable management of natural resources		
	Adaptive management	manage adaptively by planning, monitoring, reviewing and where appropriate, changing action
	Scale	consider the appropriate spatial scale for action
	Collaboration and engagement	promote and engage in collaboration and cooperation
	Public Participation	make appropriate arrangements for public participation in decision-making
	Evidence	take account of all relevant evidence, and gather evidence in respect of uncertainties
	Multiple benefits	take account of the benefits and intrinsic value of natural resources and ecosystems
	Long term	take account of the short, medium and long term consequences of actions
	Preventative action	take action to prevent significant damage to ecosystems
	Building resilience	take account of the resilience of ecosystems, in particular the following aspects: (i) diversity between and within ecosystems; (ii) the connections between and wit (iii) (iv) (inc fun (v)

Well-being goals

- A globally responsible Wales
- A prosperous Wales
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language
- A resilient Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales

Contact us…

southcentral.AS@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Area Statement leads

Geoff Hobbs Geoff.hobbs@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Leila Thornton Leila.Thornton@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

We have an online questionnaire that is populating our external Stakeholder database so if you would like to register interest please go to:

http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/AreaStat/

Here you can opt in to receive regular updates around the Area Statement process in general.