Wales Climate Change and Resilience Summit – wildfires

22 October 2026

<u>Agenda Item 3</u> – Land use and land management in the context of increasing wildfire resilience in Wales

This paper sets out key points to support discussion under agenda item 3.

The severe wildfire incidents experienced in Wales during summer 2026 have raised concerns about the resilience of landscapes, ecosystems and communities to increasing wildfire risk associated with climate change.

This item will focus on the role that land management can play in supporting wildfire resilience across Wales and consider what changes in our approach to land management are needed now to ensure our landscapes are resilient to increasingly frequent and severe wildfire events.

Of particular interest is the role that different land management policies and practices can play in managing 'fuel load'- the quantity of flammable vegetation and other combustible material present in a landscape that is available to burn. Evidence indicates that high fuel load, particularly in heath and moorland habitats, alongside hotter, drier summers is already increasing the risk of wildfires in Wales and, based on current climate change forecasts, this risk will continue to increase. The risk is both that fires will start more easily, but also that once started they will burn for longer and have more serious impacts for ecosystems and communities.

Under this item we would also like to hear from attendees on what action they think is needed to support post-wildfire recovery of ecosystems and landscape resilience, and to manage post-fire environmental risks such as flooding, soil erosion, water quality deterioration and environmental hazards (including links to impacts on human health).

Context – the changing nature of wildfires in Wales

In the last two years the area of Wales impacted by wildfire has been significantly higher than historic trends with 13,969ha burned area in 2025 and 15,650ha burned area in 2026. The timing and nature of wildfires also appears to be changing. Historically most wildfires in Wales took place in spring, but we are seeing a sharp increase in summer wildfires, with burns of a higher intensity. The Summer 2026 wildfires were primarily located in South Wales, but with significant fires also occurring in North and Mid Wales *(Annex 1).*

In 2026 38% of the burn area was on common land, including the Epynt (compared to 53% in 2025), and 53% of the burn area was on Claimed Agricultural Land (compared to 41.3% in 2025). SSSIs were significantly impacted, making up 67% of the burn area in 2026 and 49% in 2025. Deep peat was also significantly impacted

with 40% of the 2026 burn area taking place on deep peat (compared to 27% in 2025). Conversely woodland (as classified by the National Woodland Inventory) has been much less impacted, making up only 4.7% of the 2026 burn area and 4.2% of the 2025 burn area.

Developing the evidence base

Attendees are invited to consider the state of the evidence base in relation to the role that land management can play in supporting wildfire resilience in Wales. This should include evidence relating to the effectiveness of land management interventions in:

- Reducing risks associated with future wildfires; and
- Mitigating environmental impacts following wildfire events

In this context, reducing risks associated with future wildfires includes any land management or land use measures to reduce their likelihood, frequency, duration and extent, and the severity of their impacts on the environment and human health when they do occur.

As part of this, attendees are invited to consider any evidence they want to draw to the attention of Welsh Government. Attendees are also invited to provide views on the best way to draw together consensus on the currently available evidence and to highlight any key evidence gaps that they feel need to be addressed.

Management Approaches and Policy levers

Attendees are invited to consider the role of different approaches to vegetation management and habitat structure in supporting improved landscape-scale wildfire resilience.

Active vegetation management could include:

- Managed grazing regimes
- Targeted conservation grazing using cattle, sheep, ponies or mixed grazing
- Strategic cutting and vegetation removal
- Mechanical management where grazing is not viable
- Managed and controlled burning where evidence supports its use

More resilient habitat structures are likely to include more structurally diverse habitats, mosaic landscapes, mixed vegetation heights and ages and the inclusion of natural firebreaks.

Attendees are invited to consider the role that existing policy levers and associated funding schemes (such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme, the National Peatland Action Programme, Natural Flood Management schemes and Nature Networks

Programme) could play in incentivising the kind of management which will improve wildfire resilience across Wales, including what changes/adaptations would potentially be needed and where there might ‘quick wins’.

Attendees are also invited to consider whether some current incentives unintentionally allow unsustainable fuel accumulation in certain landscapes.

Post-wildfire ecosystem recovery

Attendees are invited to consider what action needs to be taken to support ecosystem recovery following wildfires, including ensuring landowners and managers can access the right advice, helping them to take appropriate action where it is needed, whilst complying with legal requirements related to Commons and Agriculture EIA legislation.