

Our ref: SJ 24.1
Ffordd Gaer/Chester Road
Bwcle/ Buckley
Sir y Fflint/ Flintshire
CH7 3AJ
Epost/Email: BethanBeech@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk
Ffôn/Phone: 03000 653 3814

Denbighshire Scrutiny Committee 20.3.19. Morning Session. Evidence from Natural Resources Wales (NRW). NRW role in the fire on Mynydd Llantysilio in July and August 2018.

1. Background.

Mynydd Llantysilio is part of the Ruabon/Llantysilio Mountains and Minera Grasslands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that was notified as an SSSI in 1991. The designation as an SSSI recognises the National (UK) importance of the upland heath and blanket bog communities found on the mountain along with an assemblage of upland breeding birds including species such as red grouse, black grouse and curlew.

The majority of the SSSI is also part of the Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This European designation highlights the European importance of the heathland habitats found on Mynydd Llantysilio. All of the land is within the AONB.

Mynydd Llantysilio is a series of contiguous registered Common Land Units. The freehold is owned by four main landowners with a series of smaller landowners around the periphery of the mountain. (Annex 1 Map showing the boundary of the SSSI on Mynydd Llantysilio).

Given this area is private land the role of NRW in the fire was as a Category one responder under the Civil Contingencies Act and also in our role as the Nature Conservation Authority in Wales in relation to SSSIs.

“We are a Category One Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, giving us an important legal responsibility to respond directly to incidents and to support the incident management roles of other organisations such as the emergency services, health boards and local authorities by providing advice and information.” (NRW Incident Management Enabling Plan 2015-2020)

2. Timeline for NRW response.

Please See Annex 2 for copies of the relevant internal Situation Reports (SITREPS) from NRW.

NRW provided information and advice to the NWFRS from the outset and worked closely with the Denbighshire Countryside Service who were out on site.

NRW provided equipment and skilled operators on request. These are usually used on the Berwyn National Nature Reserve (NNR), which is land owned and managed directly by Natural Resources Wales. The NRW machinery was used on site under the direction of the NWFRS.

2a Key dates.

Thursday 19 July 2018. NRW made aware of the fire on Mynydd Llantysilio.

Friday 20 July 2019. NRW discuss equipment available with NWFRS and Denbighshire Countryside Service. NRW Offer use of off road vehicles. Tracked vehicle not required at this time.

Thursday 26 July. NRW agree with NWFRS that a trench can be dug within the SSSI on the edge of a woodland block to protect the forestry and the adjacent properties. (The wind changed direction and this was not then dug).

Friday 27 July 2019. NRW asked to provide machinery and expertise to undertake the mowing of fire breaks. Two men and machinery deployed. Remain on site for 6 days

Saturday 28 July 2019. Ponderosa café evacuated overnight.

Monday 30 July 2019. Further NRW tractor and hedge flail deployed to the NWFRS on request. Local NRW staff visit the ICU every day up to the 17 August.

Wednesday 1 August 2019 am. All off road vehicles withdrawn from the site.

Wednesday 1 August 2019 pm. Meeting of all the agencies at the Incident Command Unit (ICU). NWFRS, Denbighshire Countryside Service, Denbighshire Highways, Police, County councillor, NRW Operational team, NRW Local team.

NRW requested to withdraw public access the Access Land on Mynydd Llantysilio when the road is re-opened.

Thursday 2 August. Main road (A525) re-opens. NRW unable to support suspension of public access "The Fire Severity Index (FSI) has not reached the exceptional level for the area which would suspend the right of access for fire prevention (s21 1a)."

Monday 6 August. Fire smouldering in area of the road in the Horseshoe Pass itself. NRW would have no objection to home owners cutting vegetation in this area. Safety Concerns from NWFRS.

Tuesday 7 August. Meeting between NRW, Agent for the Llantysilio Estate, Denbighshire Countryside Service and the NWFRS to discuss whether any further mowing is required.

Friday 10 August. NWFRS request assistance with further flailing. NRW equipment not available due to annual servicing and main operator on annual leave.

Tuesday 14 August. Contractor for the Estate meet NWFRS and NRW on site, areas contractor happy to mow agreed on site. Mowing carried out that evening.

Friday 17 August NWFRS Press release – Fire out. Still some smouldering on site

Wednesday 5 September. NRW informed by the NWFRS that the Incident Command unit has been removed from the site.

3. Estimated costs of NRW involvement in the Llantysilio fire.

Below is the estimate of the cost of dealing with the fire on Llantysilio mountain to NRW. This is based on staff time, the equipment used and other expenses.

Name of incident	Llantysilio Grass Fires 2018	
Operations	£	2,408.63
Staff time	£	11,959.20
Travel and expenses	£	1,124.30
Total	£	15,492.13

4. Final Extent of the Fire

Please see Annex 3 am for a map showing the estimated area of the fire. The area burnt is estimated by NRW at between 610 and 630 acres (247-255 ha). The total area of Mynydd Llantysilio up to the A525 is 2842 acres 1150 ha. This has been drawn up using the NRW drone footage and from field mapping.

The most accurate way to measure the extent of the fire will be from the next series of aerial photographs when they become available.

5. Lessons Learnt.

- Fire Risk Index on Access Land. Index not accurate. Needs review on a UK level.
- NRW could have called for the Tactical Command Group (Silver) to aid co-ordination and sharing of information with common land graziers, local residents and the public.
- Joint Familiarisation session for NWFRS with NRW and Local Authorities to improve understanding of equipment and expertise available.
- Work with NWFRS and Local Authorities to develop Fire Plans for high risk sites.

Annex 1. Map Showing the Boundary of the Llantysilio section of the SSSI

Annex 2. Natural Resources Wales. Timeline taken from SITREPS and other information.

Annex 3. Map of Estimated Area of the fire.