

## 1. Personal details

Name: Gwyn Rowlands	Role: Former Glastir Commons Development Officer
Agency: The Horseshoe Pass Graziers' Association	Contact number: 01490 340500

## 2. In what capacity were you involved in the response to the incident?

### Please provide brief details of your role during the response.

For background information:

This Grazing Association covers that part of the common, as delineated on the attached map, the area between the two lines marked in green.

There are 10 farming partnership members but only four graziers turn sheep onto the open mountain with two further graziers utilising enclosed areas of the common.

2 The graziers' role, apart from some initial contact in order to establish access points etc was limited.

## 3. What key aspects of the response, from your own perspective, did not go well and why?

3. As indicated in 2 there was little discussion with the graziers apart from initial contact in order to establish access points to the mountain and also directions to the fire position during the initial outbreak.

It would appear that the fire service was reluctant to involve graziers in any way, where the graziers feel that they had a useful knowledge of the area, quite possibly better than anyone else.

All offers of assistance were declined and advice given as to the unsuitability of certain areas for small appliance use was ignored. There were incidences of these vehicles overturning.

Little or no discussions were held particularly with the graziers who had stock on the mountain at that time.

Assistance offered:

A local water supply, from a borehole. (possibly insufficient in the long term)

The transport of water in agricultural tankers.

The cutting of fire breaks using own machinery.

As regards the fire service role, it was felt that there was no continuity, in that with different shifts of personnel, then the supervisors had different ideas and policies, with no one person in control of works on the ground.

It was also perceived that many had little or no experience of dealing with such incidents and insufficient care was taken to ensure that the initial outbreak, which was quickly brought under control, was completely extinguished before leaving the site. The fire reignited resulting in the subsequent major incident.

#### **4. What key aspects of the response from your own perspective went well and why?**

No meaningful comment was made in response to this question.

#### **5. What actions are required to improve future multi-agency response?**

Llantysilio Mountain is not alone as regards current habitat status and the overall lack of any management on similar sites across North Wales.

In many areas livestock numbers have reduced for several reasons, political policy and economic and the general feeling is that this decline will continue. Grazier numbers are reducing, leading to reduced manpower available for the routine habitat management. As the habitat is not maintained, then accessibility for grazing is limited and the general husbandry, gathering etc becomes more difficult.

The somewhat smaller Welsh Mountain lambs produced in these areas are currently out of fashion and generating less income than the larger lowland breeds, therefore less incentive to maintain flocks of pure Welsh Mountain and other hill breeds.

The Association now feel that a cooperative policy should be drawn up and agreed between all parties with interests in managing this and other areas, namely Natural Resources Wales, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB, the landowners and graziers.

It is believed that a change of stance is required with a relaxation of some of the rules which have constrained any management. It is interesting to note that on the Berwyn, significant fire breaks are being put in place by NRW, this in addition to the small blocks of land previously controlled.

The graziers would like to see the cutting or burning of firebreaks reintroduced. There is also the need to manage larger areas being controlled as in the past, this in addition to the more recent practice of managing only small blocks.

Roadside verges also need to be increased in size, being wide enough to prevent any fires caused by passing motorists.

## 6. Any other comments

These findings follow a meeting held to discuss this questionnaire.

I have tried to mention the more factual and salient points raised during the discussion, omitting many which may have been based upon rumour/hearsay etc. but there are strong feelings amongst the graziers that NRW have taken the responsibility of the management of the mountain away from hill farmers, who warned them of the potential dangers of their management but ignored this advice.

As an aside, one rumour indicates that as the fire progressed then there was no urgency in extinguishing as when incidents extend beyond a certain period then the costs of control are directly met by the Welsh Government.

Another rumour is that a Section 16 agreement was in place between the landowner and Natural Resources Wales in respect of Habitat Management.

### **Reinstatement & Future Management**

A meeting attended by the graziers, the landowner, representatives of Natural Resources Wales and the AONB has been held recently together with additional meetings with individuals where these aspects have been discussed. As is often the case opinions are divided.

Fortunately, nature has the ability to regenerate itself and there will be regrowth, at this stage, the level of success in terms of plant type etc is unknown. The extent of long-term damage caused to the soil structure is also unknown, this leading to erosion in its differing forms with the reduction in general soil fertility to sustain any regrowth of vegetation.

Management of the common is difficult, but Llantysilio is not unique in this situation, the underlying factors affect commons throughout Wales.

There is an underlying trend in the reduction of graziers utilising their rights to graze. This has led to a reduction in sheep numbers, an invaluable tool in habitat management. In tandem with this then the availability of labour to undertake any habitat management has also reduced.

At present, due to many factors, economics being one, there is no indication of a significant change within this trend.

There is also the perceived level of governance. Llantysilio Mountain along with many others is designated as a SSSI and SAC and therefore falls within the responsibility of Natural Resources Wales. Any form of habitat management here has to be authorised by them. The window of opportunity for burning/cutting etc is short, and there is a need to implement actions at relatively short notice when conditions are right. There is also

the concern with individuals, that if errors are made then they are open to the possibility of prosecution and financial penalties

In order to improve the level of habitat management and help reduce the potential for fire outbreaks in future and lead to more effective control there must be greater cohesion between all parties, an awareness of each other's requirements, working towards a common goal.

In an ideal situation, the appointment of one person to develop a cohesive plan, endorsed by all interested parties and to subsequently put the proposals into effect. However, the funding for such a post will undoubtedly be limited.

For general interest please see the following documents:

The Heather and Grass Burning Code for Wales 2008:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=2ahUKEwiYiJP8gP3gAhXDuHEKHRSDAYkQFjABegQICRAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbeta.gov.wales%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2F2018-01%2Fheather-and-grass-burning-code.pdf&usg=AOvVaw03N41DyVPEmaaU\\_TpSXemd](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=2ahUKEwiYiJP8gP3gAhXDuHEKHRSDAYkQFjABegQICRAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbeta.gov.wales%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2F2018-01%2Fheather-and-grass-burning-code.pdf&usg=AOvVaw03N41DyVPEmaaU_TpSXemd)

Upland Commons of South East Wales Natural Resources Management Plan:

<http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjh3f6Xgv3gAhX0QxUIHfEdA18QFjABegQIChAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.visitblavenon.co.uk%2Fen%2FPublications%2FWorldHeritageSite%2FLookingAfterBlavenon%2FUpland-Commons-of-South-East-Wales-Natural-Resources-Management-Plan-Non-technical-Summary.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2B-cn1tNgfvudJoPJKNR1C>

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and participating in the Debrief process.**