



THE CUMBRIA COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS PARTNERSHIP BOARD

*To: Sarah Lloyd,
Natural England,
John Dower House,
Crescent Place,
Cheltenham,
GL50 3RA*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the consultation regarding the activation of fire prevention restrictions.

This attached is a joint response by:

- Cumbria County Council countryside access, the access authority for Cumbria outside the National Parks,
- Cumbria Local Access Forum, its statutory adviser on countryside access, and
- Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service

We note with some dismay that Fire and Rescue Services were not consulted. We are therefore submitting this as a joint response in partnership with Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service.

It is a great disappointment and shame this consultation does not seek to alter the FSI more profoundly. It is a missed opportunity. For example, using more local grid squares, giving more detailed advice on responses to levels 3 and 4, possibly making the FSI more sensitive (a 10-scale system) and local, etc. In particular, the need for clear, concise and precise information so it is quite clear what is happening on the ground. These points have been made to Natural England before.

Cumbria Local Access Forum and Cumbria County Council advocate the use of the least restrictive option when managing open access. In other words, to use the restriction system only when it is necessary. We would also advocate the aim of giving the public up-to-date, sensible, local information that they can trust.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Ecroyd,
Cumbria Local Access Forum
Member

Abi Mansley
Countryside Access
Development Officer

Duncan Taylor
Group Manager,
Operational Planning

Feedback form:

Activation of fire prevention restrictions

1. The following day forecast on the FSI should be used only as a warning, and no longer act as a trigger for fire prevention restrictions when it reaches a level 5. Level 5 on the current day FSI will be the only trigger for activating fire prevention restrictions.

Agree:

Disagree:

No view:

Further comment: Clearly 3 errors shown in your table 1 were due to forecasting errors and this would eliminate this. However, this raises some practical questions. Land owners and land managers would have serious concerns about how to get the information to potential users. Also at what point or what time does the FSI decision get made? Midnight? What is the new process and procedure?

2. An email will be sent out to relevant authorities, access authorities and any additional email contacts, warning the recipient that exceptional conditions are forecast for the following day.

Agree:

Disagree:

No view:

Further comment: We think you could do more amongst land owners and land managers of open access land to publicise the email service / text service you offer. Many are not aware of this service. You will have all the data and information from looking at the records of restrictions applied for. You should avoid sending letters for this sort of notification as so often the letter may get caught in some delay, especially during postal strikes or bank holidays.

Have you also thought of sending faxes?

It may also be valuable for Natural England to work towards sending out an email or text message or fax warning of "level 4" the following day.

3. a) The warning email should be sufficient without any site notice.
b) The warning email should include a generic site notice with blank start date.
c) The warning email should include a site notice specific to the case number with a blank start date.

a:

b:

c:

No view:

Further comment: It depends. How much do you trust the land managers to be sensible with how they use the information? Also there is potential for confusion. One land manager may own 2 parcels of land in 2 different grid squares – one could be level 5 and one level 4. Option b is therefore the least restrictive and the most effective.

4. A warning email would only be sent out prior to any restriction being activated and would not be a notification of a fire prevention restriction.

Agree:
Disagree:
No view:

Further comment: You would have to state this clearly on the email so that people got used to the change. However, further clarification is needed – what time is the email sent out? When would the formal notification be sent out? Because of farming practices and hours of working etc, you cannot use “office hours” in this instance, to be sure that a landowner has received their notification. How would the landowner / manager ensure that he/she had the notice in time to ensure it could be stuck up in time?

5. The following day forecast on the FSI should be used only as a warning, and no longer act as a trigger for fire prevention restrictions when it reaches a level 5. Level 5 on the current day FSI will be the only trigger for activating fire prevention restrictions.

Agree:
Disagree:
No view:

Further comment: This information should be clearly explained to walkers who are using the website tool to check for restrictions on the following day for a walk they may have planned. However, it also must be issued to landowners / managers at the earliest opportunity so that restriction notices can be put up – with the aim of these notices being as effective as possible.

6. Restrictions should not be prolonged on the basis of the 5-day FSI forecast. The expiry rules should instead be aligned with the Relevant Authority Guidance, solely on the basis of the current 3-5 day wind down period. The 5-day forecast should only be used as a warning.

Agree:
Disagree:
No view:

Further comment: It is possible land is being restricted for longer than is necessary and this leads to difficulties for the public to understand the system. On the other hand, there is a time and resources issue involved with going round sites and changing notices. There might still be a need for some “dampener” effect. The local conditions are important – to land managers, to walkers, to rangers, to fire-fighters. This is why we are disappointed that you haven’t taken this opportunity to make the system more responsive.

We would also appreciate clearer guidance on what sort of responses should be taking place at level 3 and 4. This is all part of awareness to the general public.

Natural England should be explaining more to people about why restrictions occur, what the mechanism is, and why it is. In March 2007 we attended a seminar about having FSI info as part of the weather forecast – what has happened to this idea?

7. If a restriction is already in place, there will be no warning email for exceptional conditions the following day.

Agree:

Disagree:

No view:

Further comment: No need to repeat the information and make it unduly cumbersome. The first email should make it clear how the person will be notified of a relaxation of the restriction.

Please state here your name and the organisation you represent:

This attached is a joint response by:

- Cumbria County Council countryside access, the access authority for Cumbria outside the National Parks,
- Cumbria Local Access Forum, its statutory adviser on countryside access, and
- Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service

We note with some dismay that Fire and Rescue Services were not consulted. We are therefore submitting this as a joint response in partnership with Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service.

Abi Mansley – Countryside Access Development Officer – Cumbria County Council countryside access

Charles Ecroyd – Cumbria Local Access Forum and partnership board member

Duncan Taylor – Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service – Cumbria County Council

Please email your completed feedback form to sarah.lloyd@naturalengland.org.uk by **Monday 1 October 2007**.