

King Charles, the muirburn at Delnadamph and the failure of the Cairngorms National Park Authority

Description



Muirburn on lower slopes of Carn Culchavie above Delnadamph with Ben Avon behind. Photo credit Parkswatch reader, taken from the Watchers viewpoint north of Cockbridge. Photo 27th February Parkswatch reader.

On 27th February I was sent this photo of muirburn on King Charles's estate of Delnadamph, which has no deer and is managed intensively for grouse shooting ([see here](#)). The reader commented it was very windy that day, as is evident from the near horizontal plume of smoke. That was confirmed by the forecast for the Lecht, about 6km away as the crow flies, which was for 20 mph WNW winds gusting to 35mph.

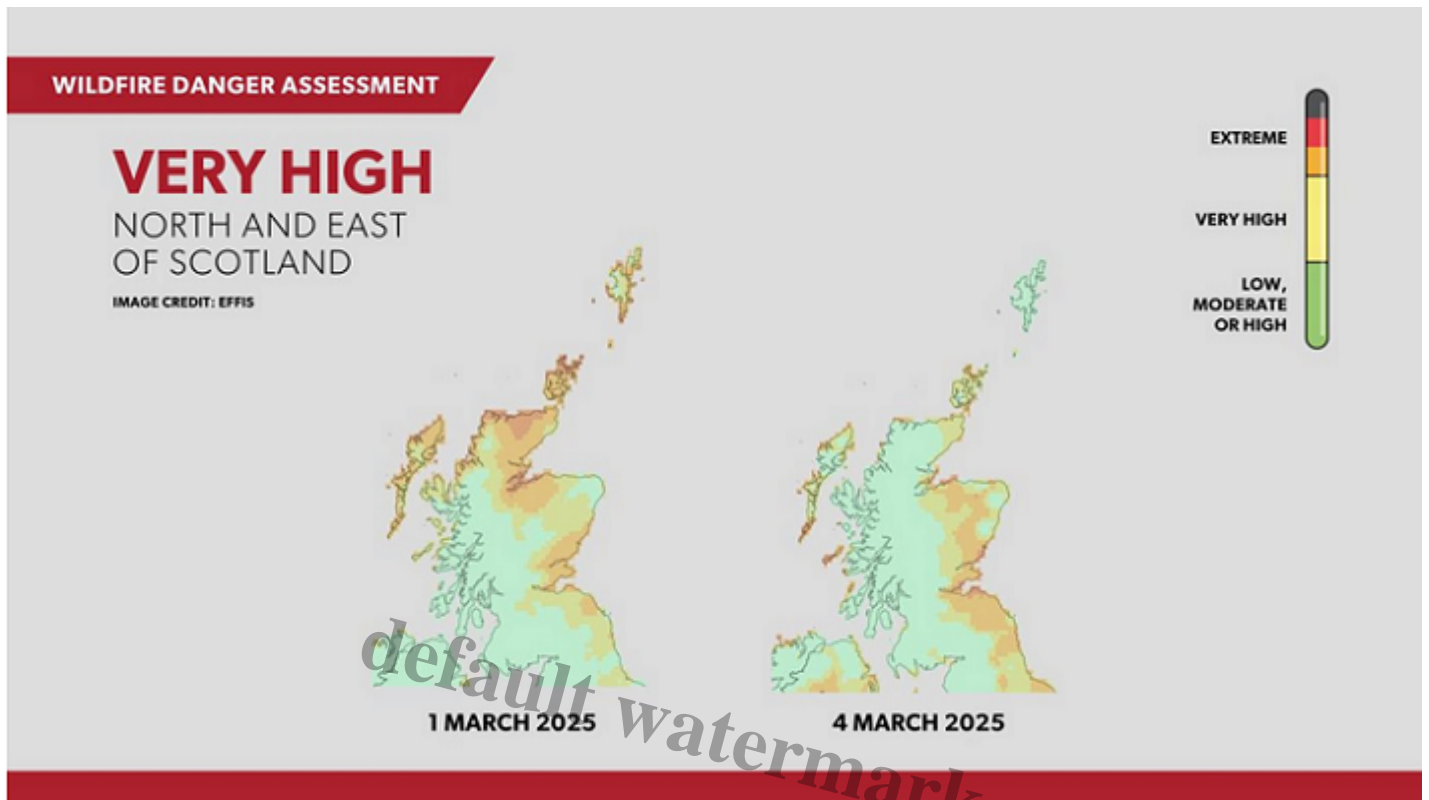
While the muirburn provisions of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024 are not yet in force ([see here](#)), the current voluntary Muirburn Code is clear. The appropriate Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Control Centre should be notified before burning each day and there should be

no burning in winds above 8-12 mph:

Table 5.2 - Burning Day Check List

Action	Detail
'Preparations for Burning' checklist	Confirm that all checks in Table 5
Fire & Rescue Service	<u>Notify the appropriate Fire & Res burning each day.</u>
Warning Signs	Erect warning signs, if burning cl access.
Weather conditions	Obtain a weather forecast Is the weather suitable for bu expected change during the c <u>not be above Force 3, 13-19</u> Is the condition of the vegetat Decide where to burn in the e conditions change, re-assess

Two days after the 27th the SFRS issued a warning of VERY HIGH fire risk for the North East of Scotland, which included the area around Delnadamph:



Had SFRS been asked by Charles's staff, therefore, one would have expected them to strongly advise against any muirburn both because of the dry conditions and the wind. I have submitted a Freedom of Information request therefore to SFRS to find out what communications took place.

A good test for the adequacy of the provisions of the muirburn licensing scheme, if and when they eventually appear, is whether King Charles would have lost his license at Delnadamph for what was done under his aegis on 27th February.

Muirburn – the failure of the Cairngorms National Park Authority

Meantime, our public authorities continue to allow King Charles to mismanage his land at Balmoral and Delnadamph, in what is supposed to be a National Park, without any regard for the voluntary Muirburn Code, as limited as it is, or the natural environment.

The most recent example of this is the draft Integrated Wildfire Management Plan presented to the CNPA Board last month along with the draft fire byelaws ([see here](#)). It contains just one reference to the Muirburn Code in 44 pages. That concerns how estate staff must first complete e-learning on the Muirburn Code to get on a recognised muirburn training course. The plan highly recommends such a course since "wildfires themselves are obviously not training environments" but otherwise completely ignores the Code, from a fire prevention perspective. It also contains not a single reference to the risks of wildfires caused by muirburn getting out of control, as happens in high winds. As the SFRS website states, one of the main causes of wildfires is "controlled burns gone wrong" and a consequence of its failure to address this issue the CNPA's plan is worthless.

This failure appears to originate in Section A7 on Fire Management in the CNPA's National Park Partnership Plan 2022-27 ([see here](#)) which omits any reference to the Muirburn Code and created a rigid distinction between muirburn and wildfires, with the former being up to the Scottish Government to address. As a result the CNPA's commitment to ensuring muirburn follows best practice will apparently only come into effect when the "muirburn licensing scheme" is implemented:



OBJECTIVE

Ensure that all managed burning (muirburn) follows best practice as defined by the muirburn licensing scheme, supporting habitat restoration and recovery.

It is wrong that the CNPA is apparently prepared to wait years before doing anything about muirburn. They could now be putting pressure on King Charles by publicly criticising the irresponsible behaviour of his gamekeepers, in as strong terms as they do members of the public who light fires in dry and windy conditions. They could also withhold all future public funding for the Royal Estates.

There is a precedent for this under the cross compliance conditions of the Rural Payments Scheme, which contains some provisions to abide by the Muirburn Code ([see here](#)). Having helped pay for peatland restoration at Delnadamph ([see here](#)) one would have thought the very very least the CNPA should require is that King Charles abides by the Muirburn Code.

The CNPA's failure, however, goes far deeper than that.

Paying King Charles to restore peatland to reduce carbon emissions while allowing him to continue to spew carbon into the atmosphere through muirburn does nothing to address climate change and is complete waste of public money. It brings the £250m Peatland Action scheme into disrepute.

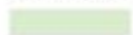



Delnadamph, along with Mar Lodge, Mar, Balmoral, Glenavon and Glenlivet is also part of the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership which, under the National Park Partnership Plan, is supposed to be a key vehicle for improving moorland management:

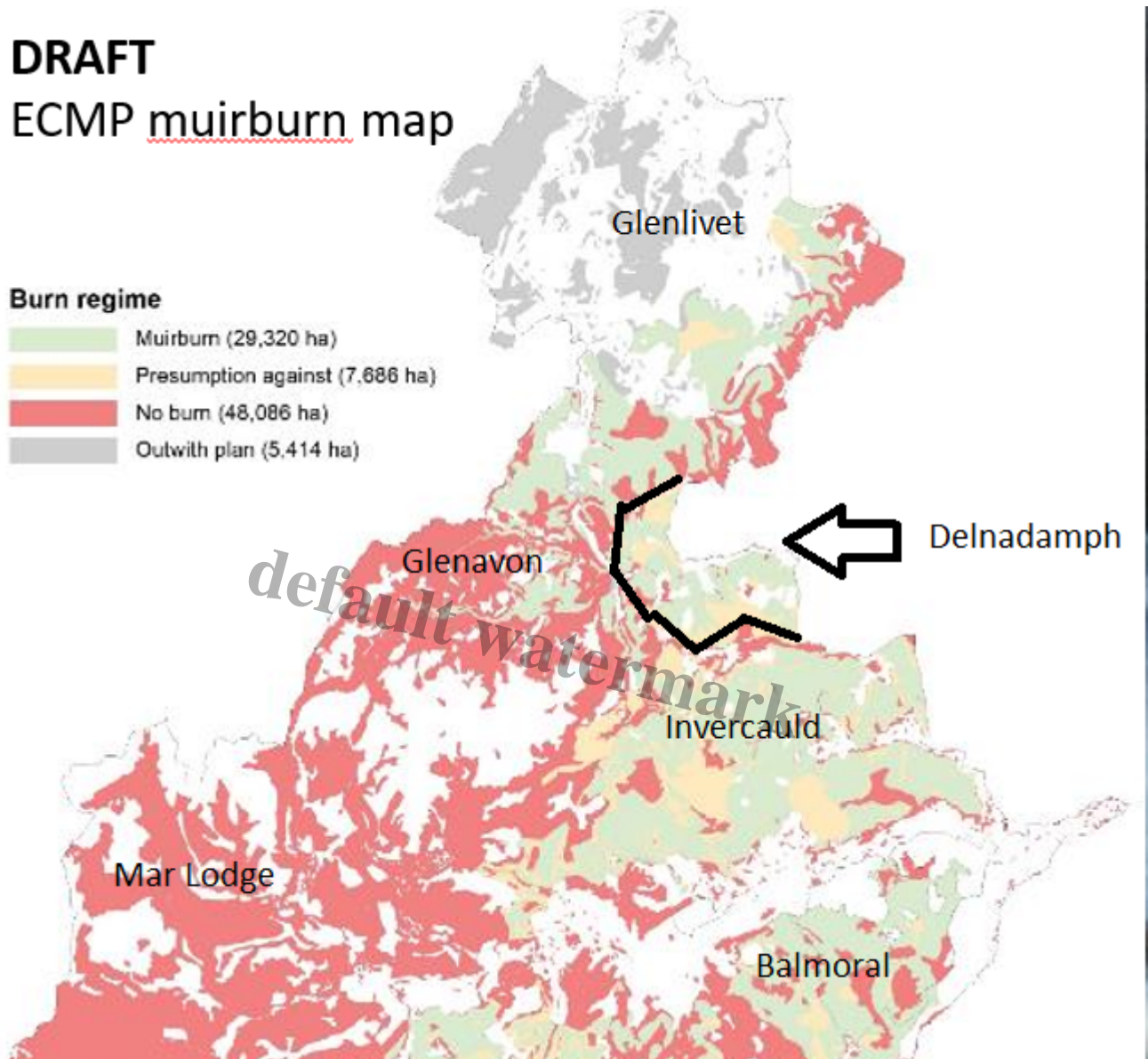
"specifically, the purpose of the partnership is to collaborate on a landscape scale across land holdings on woodland and scrub expansion, peatland restoration, raptor and other priority species conservation, and landscape enhancement"

Section A11 of the NPPP is about Ecological Restoration and commits the CNPA to work with "Cairngorms Connect, the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership and others to expand the area of the National Park under ecosystem restoration." The photo above shows there is absolutely not a chance of that happening at Delnadamph because King Charles is burning the land to bits in an attempt to produce more grouse to shoot.

DRAFT ECMP muirburn map

Burn regime

	Muirburn (29,320 ha)
	Presumption against (7,886 ha)
	No burn (48,086 ha)
	Outwith plan (5,414 ha)



Map from 2020 powerpoint presentation to CNPA Board showing the extent of muirburn, the green not the red, in the northern half of the ECMP area (before Invercauld left the group because of raptor persecution on its land). The black line marks the very approximate boundary of Delnadamph.

While the map is now almost five years old, it illustrates the extent of muirburn in the ECMP area and that the percentage of land burned on Delnadamph appears to be higher than the other estates. What an example from the King! The reinforces the fact the only real conservation going on in the ECMP area is on Mar Lodge where the National Trust for Scotland eventually stopped all muirburn ([see here](#)).

Meantime, if the idea was that the ECMP was going to be a vehicle to influence others, the news from the CNPA on 28th February ([see here](#)) that a Red Kite had been shot in Glen Buchat, not far from Delnadamph, provides further confirmation that that hasn't worked either. When King Charles is allowed to flout the rules in order to produce as many red grouse to shoot as possible, it is hardly surprising others take the law into their own hands.

An alternative approach to fires and fire risk

The SFRS's current very high fire risk warning figures shows that both CNPA's Fire Management byelaws agreed last month, which would impose a complete ban on fires by visitors between 1st April and 30th September, and the muirburn season, which currently operates from 1st October to 15th April, are unfit for purpose. Neither covers the current very dry period in the Cairngorms, while the fire management byelaws cover all the wet periods during the summer months when there is little fire risk over most of the National Park. As the SFRS states *"almost 80% of large outdoor fires since 2010 were recorded between March and May"*.

In my view we need a completely different approach to the risk of wildfires which covers the whole of Scotland. This should be based on the SFRS being given the statutory power to ban all types of fire during periods of high fire risk. Consideration would need to be given as to who would be given powers to enforce such bans.

Where further protection is necessary for conservation purposes, such as protecting areas of Caledonian Pine Forest or peaty soils, this should also apply on a Scotland-wide basis and not just to areas like the Cairngorms. This protection should involve not just bans on fires/barbecue for visitors but also bans on muirburn and the like by landowners.

Such an approach would be proportionate and fair to all unlike what is happening at present.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. climate change
2. CNPA
3. conservation
4. landed estates
5. landscape
6. natural environment
7. wildlife persecution

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Author

nickkempe