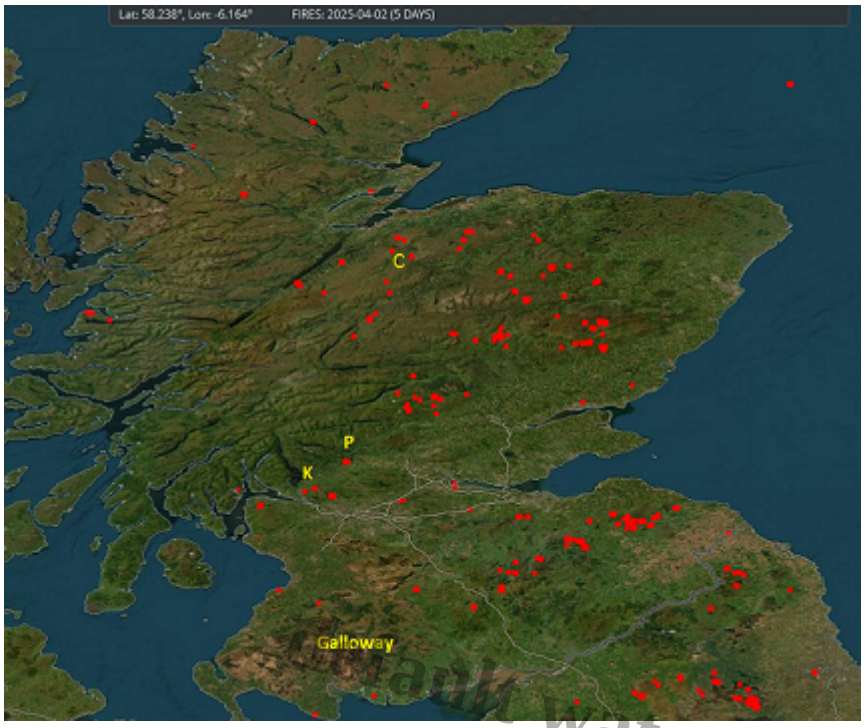
Reckless muirburn at a time of very high fire risk â?? without political will licensing will never work

Description



Smoke from muirburn 3rd April looking northwest from summit Tom an t-Suide Mhoir, Dorback estate to area north of Carrbridge. Photo credit Gordon Bulloch.

On 1st April the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) issued a â??Very High to Extremeâ?• warning for the period 2nd till 7th April (see here). It advised the public â??to avoid lighting fires outdoors across all areas of Scotland during this period.â?• The NASA global wildfire data base (see here) enables one to check the fires it recorded as taking place in this period.

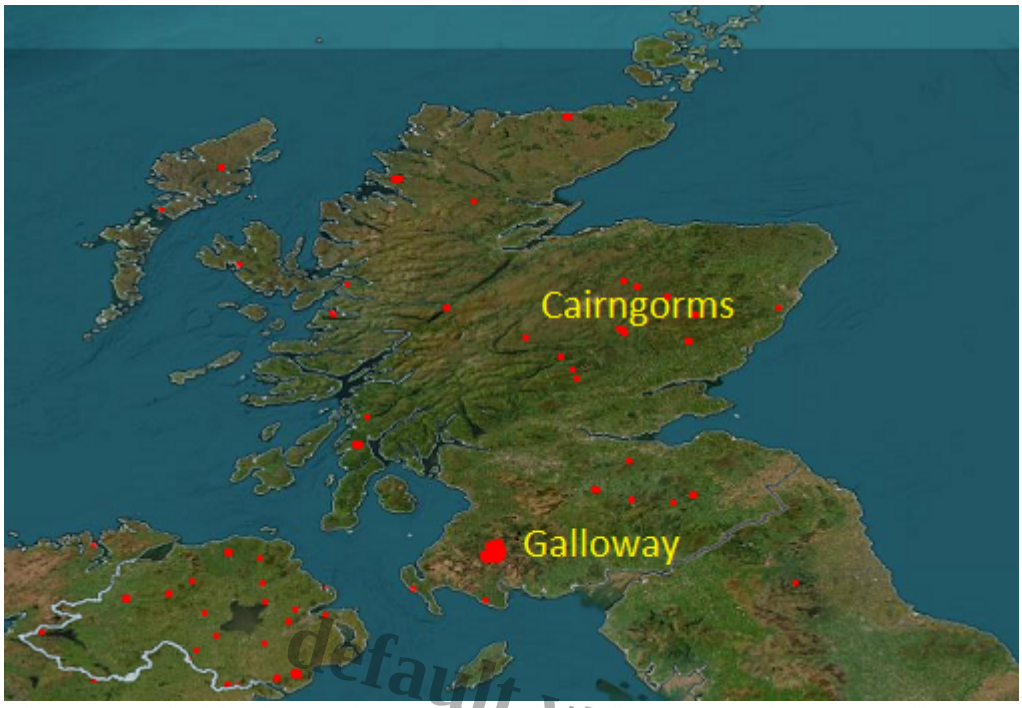


C = area north of Carrbridge; K = Kilpatricks; P = Port of Menteith Fires recorded on NASA Firns wildlife database for Scotland 2nd â?? 6th April

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Anyone with a reasonable knowledge of land-use in Scotland will realise at once that the vast majority of these fires have been on grouse moors. A number of fires are recorded for the area north of Carrbridge (top photo). The map shows the extent to which sporting estates are ignoring SFRSâ??s advice and the voluntary provisions of the Moorland Code and are carrying on with muirburn regardless.

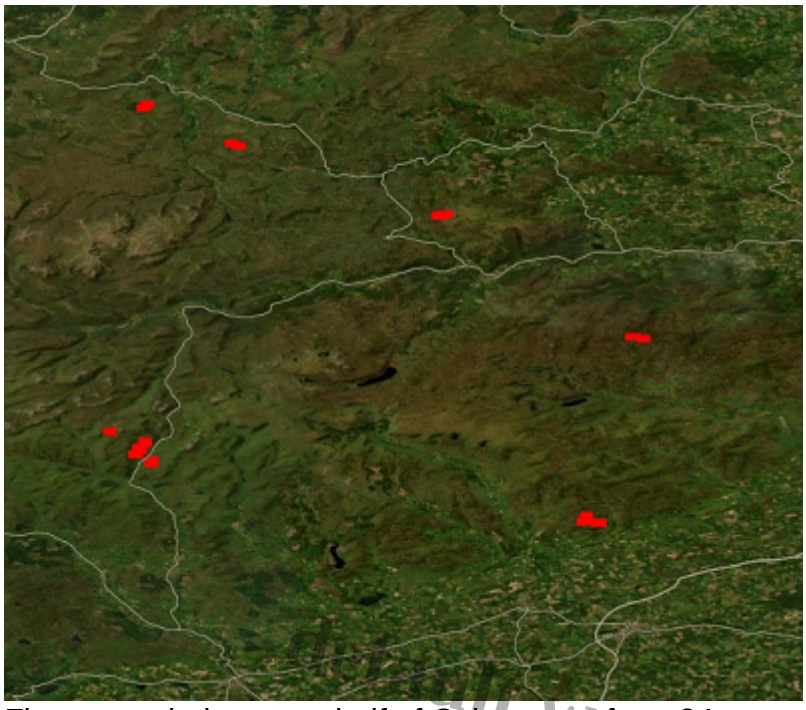
By zooming into the map you can see the fires reported in the media for the Kilpatrick Hill (see here) and Port of Menteith (see here). For some reason â?? presumably a technical glitch â?? the enormous fire in the Galloway Forest Park (see here) did not appear in my searches for 2nd â?? 6th April but did appear in a search for fires recorded in the the 24 hours up until 6th (when I started writing this post):



Fires recorded in the 24 hours until 6th April. Map and data credit NASA.

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The political point â?? and everything about grouse moors is political â?? is the amount of muirburn that was undertaken over the weekend even after the evidence of what had happened in the Kilpatricks, near Port of Menteith and in Galloway, and despite the windy forecast. Using NASA and Andy Wightmanâ??s database, Who Owns Scotland (see here), it is not difficult to identify the landowners who are responsible. For example, the cluster of fires on the bottom left of the map below are just north of the Spittal of Glenshee in the Cairngorms National Park: those to the west of the road (the A93) are on the Rhiedorrach Sporting Estate (see here) and the one on the east is on Invercauld (where the Cairngorms National Park Authority is currently funding peatland restoration):



Fires recorded eastern half of Cairngorms for a 24 period 5-6th April. Map and data credit NASA

Stil Watermark

So why arenâ??t the public authorities with responsibility for preventing wildfire and controlling muirburn publicly calling on these landowners to do the right thing and stop burning? The short answer is these bodies have uncritically swallowed the line that the people who conduct muirburn are the wildfire experts (see here), turn a blind eye to all the evidence that indicates otherwise and focus their attention on campfires instead. The longer answer is our public authorities are not prepared to challenge the interests of sporting estate landowners, from King Charles downwards (see here). As a consequence estate staff can ignore advice on wildfire risk with impunity.

On estate staff competence, in the last few weeks I have learned of several examples of uncontrolled muirburn which have caused extensive damage BEFORE the current SFRS warning was issued.



Muirburn near Tomintoul, which appeared not fully controlled, 19th March viewed from the north. Photo credit Gordon Bulloch.

Just off Glen Banchor, near Newtonmore, a recent fire â?? attended I understand by only one person (three are advised under the Muirburn Code) â?? burned from the floor of the glen to the summit slopes (photo to be published in due course). Another was described in this comment on another parkswatch post:

â??Last week Turret Estate above Crieff burnt a section of the west face of Coinachan Hill from just above the loch to near the summit. A really steep rocky hillside [contrary to muirburn code ed]. I could see the flames clearly from Crieff. My son was up there and said they were over 15ft high and out of control; noone could be seen attending it.â?•

It is scandalous that no-one in the Scottish Government, SFRS, NatureScot or the Cairngorms National Park appears to be documenting any of this (unlike campfires) or assembling evidence to counter the propaganda emanating from grouse moor interests. Section 12 of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024 states that a *â??person intending to make muirburn on land to which the licence relates **must** complete a training course approved under section 13A before making muirburnâ?•*. Proof there is a problem! However, instead of stopping this my understanding is one of the justifications for the delay in the implementation of the muirburn provisions of the Act was to allow time for estate staff trained. The reckless and incompetent burning shows the right thing to have done would have been to introduce the provisions of the Act immediately and ban anyone from conducting muirburn until they had proved themselves competent and willing to abide by official advice.

NatureScot is currently consulting on a revised version of the Muirburn Code (see here). The content does not appear an improvement on the existing Code but, whatever its strengths and weaknesses

(which I will consider in a further post), it will have no teeth because â??the licensing approach will be delivered in line with theâ?¦â?¦ Principles of Better Regulationâ?•. Those principles state that regulation will be *â??proportionate, consistent, accountable, transparent and targeted only where neededâ?•*. That ignores the scale of the problem. The evidence for muirburn â?? and other evidence like that for raptor persecution â?? shows that regulation of grouse moors and their activities needs to be comprehensive not targeted.

The updated warning from SFRS about the current very high fire risks on 7th April (see here) once again called on the general public to act responsibly without calling on landowners to do the same. Given this, and the silence from the Scottish Government, NatureScot and the CNPA about reckless burning by grouse moor owners, it should now be clear the revised Muirburn Code will make little difference, whatever it says. There is simply not the political will in government.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Other parts Scotland

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Tags

1. CNPA
2. fires
3. grouse moors
4. landed estates
5. muirburn
6. NatureScot
7. Scottish Government

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