

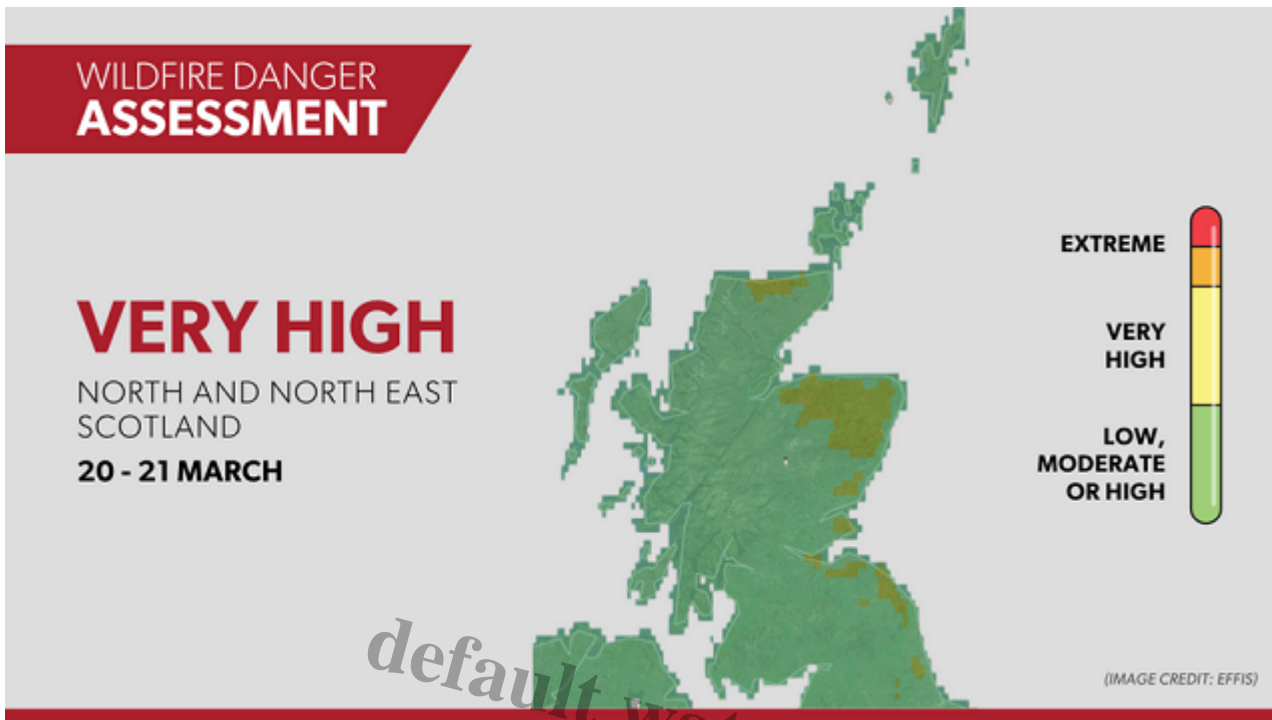
## Wildfire risk, muirburn and the Cairngorms Park for the protection of grouse moor owners

### Description



Multiple fires on the Rhiedorrach Estate, Glen Shee, 17th October 2025. Photo credit Parkswatch Reader.

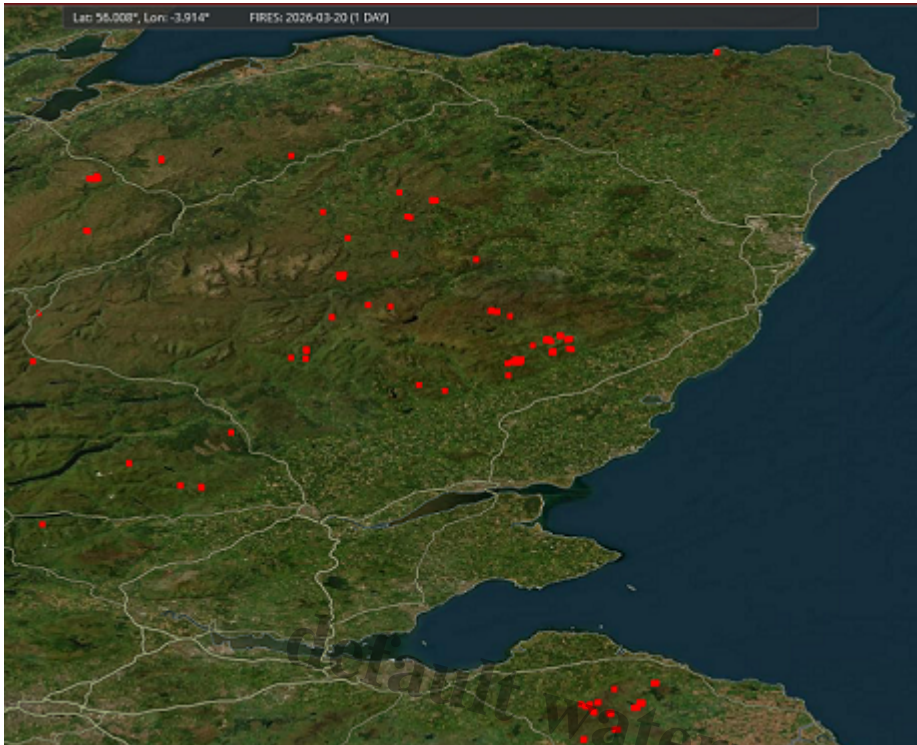
Having burned late into the autumn last year, NASA Firms data base ([see here](#)) shows Scotland's grouse moor owners and managers started burning again at the start of March. At the end of this last week the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) issued their first very high fire risk warning ([see here](#)) of the year, for the period 20th-21st March:



The warning was for areas along the east coast, in the North East on the north coast of Scotland:

SFRS is strongly urging the public in these impacted areas to **avoid lighting fires outdoors** during this period. There's no such thing as a harmless fire. **Every spark, even the smallest, has the potential to become a wildfire** and cause a large amount of damage. As Spring approaches, we often find vast areas of dead and dry vegetation across the countryside which has just finished thawing. **These vulnerable areas are essentially wildfire fuel. Most wildfires are human caused, which means they are also preventable.** It is imperative that we all act responsibly while enjoying the outdoors not just during a period of heightened risk, but all year long.

While the SFRS was urging the public not to light any fires in the affected areas, grouse moor managers in the east and north east of Scotland carried on regardless:



Screenshot from FIRMS data base 20th - 21st March. The cluster of fires bottom right is on the Lammermuir Hills and most of those above that either in the eastern half of the Cairngorms National Park or its fringes.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) also issued a fire alert, which was again targeted at the general public and failed to mention landowners.

## 🔥 Very high wildfire risk - 20 and 21 March

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has issued a wildfire warning impacting north and eastern Scotland on 20 and 21 March. If you are out and about in the Cairngorms National Park please observe the following guidance:

- Do not light any fire or barbecue.
- Always ensure cigarettes are fully extinguished and take your litter (including glass) away with you.
- Enjoy the outdoors responsibly - most wildfires are caused by human activity.
- Stay alert - with dry vegetation and warm weather, fires can start easily, spread rapidly, and be difficult to extinguish.
- If you see a wildfire, dial 999.

For further updates on wildfire risk across Scotland, visit the [Scottish Fire and Rescue Service website](#) or [fire management byelaw](#).

On 1st April, the CNPA's fire management byelaws, approved by Scottish Ministers, come into effect. They make it an offence punishable by a £500 fine for any member of the public, but not landowners, to light a fire or barbecue in the National Park until the end of September. After the Scottish Government last year delayed the implementation of the Muirburn Licensing Scheme, grouse moor owners and other landowners can still burn the land, whatever the risks, until 15th April ([see here](#)). To quote the SFRS again:

*There's no such thing as a harmless fire. **Every spark, even the smallest, has the potential to become a wildfire** and cause a large amount of damage.*

The hypocrisy of our public authorities and the Scottish Government, who single out the public while ignoring landowners, stinks. As if the very high fire risk was not enough, Windy.com, shows that muirburn was being conducted in some places despite wind speeds being above the 12 mph maximum recommended in the current iteration of the Muirburn Code. So where has been the condemnation of landowners by our public authorities?



Close up of muirburn on the Cairnwell 17th October 2025. Photo credit Parkwatch reader.

Prof Douglas MacMillan has written an excellent article on muirburn in the latest issue of Reforesting Scotland. This brings together some of the research he has conducted with Euan Stevenson and has been featured on Parkswatch ([see here](#)). His conclusion goes to the heart of government hypocrisy:

*“Our findings raise challenging questions for decision-makers in the CNP [Cairngorms National Park] and the Scottish Government, as they would cast doubt on two influential claims about muirburning and wildfire: campfires are not the greatest source of wildfire in the CNP and muirburning does not mitigate the intensity or spread of wildfire”.*

### Category

1. Cairngorms

### Tags

1. CNPA
2. grouse moors
3. landed estates

4. muirburn
5. NatureScot
6. Scottish Government

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