

Wildfire 2007

5th & 6th June 2007

Dalby Forest, North York Moors

Promoting and sharing good practice in wildfire management

Countryside managers in the relatively damp and mild British Isles have become familiar with the spectacle on television news programmes of raging wildfires consuming vast areas of California, Australia, various Mediterranean countries or wherever it happens to be. Yet in recent years the same people have had to come to terms with the fact that such incidents are increasingly becoming a reality in the UK. Whatever the causes – and it seems certain that climate change is a factor – forest and moorland fires in Britain are becoming more frequent, more destructive and more expensive to contain.

MORE ABOUT THE EVENT

It is against this background that Rural Development Initiatives Ltd. (RDI) is hosting Wildfire 2007 on the 5th & 6th June at the Forestry Commission's Dalby Forest on the North York Moors. Previous Wildfire events in 2003 and 2005 have been held in conjunction with Defence Estates at the Otterburn Ranges on the Northumberland Moors and have attracted well over 100 delegates from across the UK and further afield, with backgrounds as diverse as countryside managers, fire brigade personnel and central government policy makers.

The emphasis on Wildfire 2007 is 'prevention is better than cure' and thus a series of presentations will look at how to prevent fires starting, how to predict when and where they might occur and how to manage them so as to minimise the damage – both from the fire and the control methods. The event will be organised around a menu of plenary sessions and optional seminars so that delegates will be able to choose a programme that is of most relevance and practical use to their own situation.

At the time of writing, confirmed presentations include, the effect of wildfires on the historic environment, setting up and running local fire groups and their value in preventing and managing wildfires and strategies for increasing water supplies to remote locations. Delegates will also benefit from speakers experienced in managing wildfires in the USA and Australia and hear about a European group looking to promote best practice across the EU. Field visits will include a trip to Fylingdales Moor, where one of the largest and most destructive moorland fires took place in 2003 and the opportunity to discuss the implications and restoration methods with project officers from the North York Moors National Park Authority. An accompanying exhibition will feature suppliers of related equipment and organisations working to prevent wildfires.

GETTING ON LIKE A HOUSE ON FIRE

One of the most valuable features of Wildfire 2007 will be the chance to meet up with other people and share experiences. Neil Harrison, a Director of RDI, said 'We know from feedback from previous Wildfire events that people really value the opportunity to meet up with people both from similar backgrounds to themselves and also from different professions. For example, many fire brigade personnel have said that as a result of meeting countryside managers they now appreciate the ecological damage

that wild fires can cause and how to deal with them in such a way as to minimise further damage'.

Ample networking opportunities will be allowed for, including the conference dinner on 5th June which will feature as guest speaker Lewis Southard, Deputy Director of Fire & Aviation, USDA Forest Service, talking about the Smokey Bear Programme, for over 50 years the symbol of a programme designed to discourage arson and other man made wild fires.

THE VENUE

The venue for Wildfire 2007, Dalby Forest Visitor Centre, will be of interest to many countryside managers and will add to the enjoyment of the conference. Only recently completed and due to open to the public at Easter, the visitor centre is an exemplar of sustainable development. Built from timber from the local forests, it features such cutting edge technology as water recycling, a wood fuel based space and water heating system, automatic passive air circulation and shop fittings and toilet doors made from recycled plastic bottles and mobile phones!

Accommodation can be provided in a wide range of local establishments, from forest campsites and cabins to country house hotels. And delegates wanting to stay on for a few days can take advantage of the wonderful landscapes of the North York Moors and coast.

Wildfire 2007 is one of many regional and national projects managed by RDI, who work at the forefront of sustainable rural development in partnership with public, private and charitable bodies across the UK. Formed in 2005, they deliver programmes which make a significant difference to the rural economy, the environment and the fabric of rural society including business support projects, research and training courses. Their team of highly experienced and skilled staff provides broad capabilities plus specialist expertise in a wide variety of disciplines.

In addition to RDI, Wildfire 2007 is supported by the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service and the North York Moors National Park Authority.

More details of Wildfire 2007 can be found at www.wildfire2007.org.uk, e-mailing enquiries@wildfire2007.org.uk or by calling 0845 226 2890.

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