

Impact statement:

The Lords Hall Estate (TLHE) owns c.300 acres of land in the centre of Darwen Moor, plus the freehold sporting rights over the full c.1500 acres most of which is land owned by UU and BwDC. Therefore, we have interests and assets across the entire moor.

Most of our work on the moor is conservation and restoration led, including re-wetting (creating dams in old drainage ditches) and transplanting of rare plant species, construction of owl boxes, installing and maintaining public benches, footpaths, bridges, litter bins, fingerposts etc.

Our Head Keeper was first responder on site when the wildfire started on Darwen Moor on Saturday 30th May 2020 on UU land, and he quickly assembled a team of volunteer firefighters. We supplied various equipment such as fire beaters, backpack leafblowers etc and were joined by other volunteers including UU tenant farmers. Representatives from the TLHE continued to support LFRS firefighting operations over the weekend and were still fighting the fire when we had to evacuate The Lords Hall itself as it was surrounded by fire. During the course of Monday, the fire was largely brought under control, with activities becoming responses to flare-ups from peat burning below ground.

Two of the (TLHE staff) both received recognition from LFRS for their proactive firefighting, as per one action where they stopped the fire from leaping the ravine onto the northern section of the moor.

The incident was traumatic for our team of staff and volunteers. In addition to putting themselves at risk, they witnessed the deaths and remains of much wildlife killed by the fire, as well as seeing 3 years of restoration work going up in smoke. It was distressing to see adult birds circling and calling for their brood of chicks. It was also very concerning to find out the fire had burnt over the top over a high-pressure gas pipeline, which if affected could easily have resulted in fatalities.

In all, 630 acres of SSSI moorland was ravaged by the fire, being most of the land owned by TLHE plus UU land subject to our sporting rights. In conjunction with Natural England, we have estimated that 15,000 tons of carbon were released into the environment.

In addition to millions of small animals, mammals, invertebrates, frogs etc that perished, a local independent ornithologist compiled a list of birds killed (the timing of the fire meant that most chicks had hatched but were not able to fly and therefore perished):

Red Grouse 78 territories, Golden Plover 5 pairs, Curlew 6 pairs (one young from one pair survived), Snipe 2 territories, Skylark 45 territories, Willow warbler 2 territories, Grasshopper warblers 1 territory, Wren 3 territories, Stonechat 1 pair, Meadow pipit c160 territories, Linnet 3 pairs, Reed bunting 1 pair. Additionally, c.40 grouse butts were burned in the fire and will need to be rebuilt.

It can be seen from the above that as many as 300 nests / broods, probably containing over 1200 young, would have succumbed to the fire; a year's lack of production of young that some of these red and amber species cannot afford.

The Red Grouse also have a significant financial value., as breeding stock for future years.

The estate lost much of its restoration work. We have had to rebuild many wooden footbridges and fences, gates, stiles etc. We have hired-in contractors to flail and re-seed burned areas to try to reinstate the heather/whinberry/sphagnum moss mix that characterises this moor.

Planning permission had recently been obtained to rebuild the hall and the overall value of the estate has been impacted by the fire.

In order to become more self-sufficient for the future, TLHE have recently invested in:

Valtra A124 dual-wheeled tractor with 2.8m flail plus a large plough, a Takeuchi 5-ton digger, additional backpack leafblowers and other firefighting equipment.

We have not yet assessed the full financial impact of the fire, but it is estimated that this will likely run in the order of £1m.

The Lords Hall Estate would welcome a PSPO banning the use of BBQ's, campfires, Sky lanterns, fireworks and all burning on the moorland.