



The Moorland Association

Wildfire risk and temporary restrictions on CROW access land

Guidance for Moorland Association members in England

Periods of prolonged dry, hot or windy weather can create an exceptional risk of wildfire on moorland. Where land is subject to the public right of access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) landowners and managers should consider whether a temporary restriction of that access is necessary. This note explains the action members should take in England. Different arrangements apply in Wales, where Natural Resources Wales is the relevant body.

What to do now

1. Check that the affected land is CROW access land. This can be done [online here](#)
2. Identify the relevant authority: Natural England for most land outside a National Park; the appropriate National Park Authority inside a National Park; or the Forestry Commission for section 16 dedicated woodland.
3. Email the authority with a map, photographs and details of current conditions.
4. Telephone immediately afterwards and ask for urgent consideration under Section 25.
5. Ask whether an existing fire-prevention direction already covers the land and can be activated.
6. Ask the authority to confirm the relevant Fire Severity Index (FSI) grid square or squares, the current FSI level and whether an outline direction can be prepared if one is not already in place.
7. Copy the Moorland Association at info@moorlandassociation.org

Check that this guidance applies

This guidance applies to land over which the public has access rights under the CROW Act. This can be [checked online](#)

A section 25 restriction may apply to the surrounding CROW access land, but it will not close any public footpath, bridleway or other highway crossing that land. Separate action by the highway authority would be required. Section 25 restrictions also do not apply to “section 15 land”, where public access rights pre-date the CROW Act. Annex B explains how to identify this land. If the status remains uncertain, ask the relevant authority to confirm it before relying on section 25.

1. Who can close access?

The principal power to restrict CROW access because of exceptional fire risk is contained in Section 25 of the CROW Act. A Section 25 fire-prevention restriction can only be imposed by the statutory relevant authority. These are:

1. **Natural England** for most CROW access land in England
2. **National Park Authority** where the land is within a National Park
3. **Forestry Commission** where the woodland is dedicated for public access under the CROW Act. See Annex A for instructions on checking whether woodland is section 16 dedicated land.

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The authority may impose a restriction following an application from someone with a legal interest in the land, or may also act on its own initiative during exceptional fire-risk conditions.

The current Relevant Authority Guidance distinguishes between an outline direction and the restriction subsequently activated under it. An outline direction may be prepared in advance, but any restriction notified under it may take effect only when the required exceptional conditions exist.

2. Who may apply or raise concerns?

A formal application for a fire-prevention direction may be made only by someone who holds a legal interest in the affected land. This will commonly include:

- the owner;
- an agricultural or other tenant; or
- another person whose rights amount to a legal interest in the land.

A person holding sporting or other rights should establish whether those rights amount to a legal interest in the land. A personal or contractual licence will not necessarily be sufficient. Where there is uncertainty, the applicant should explain the basis of their interest and, where appropriate, coordinate the application with the owner or tenant.

Special restrictions apply where a person's sole legal interest is as a registered commoner. In particular, such a commoner cannot apply for a direction completely excluding CROW access, and other regulatory requirements may apply. Commoners should therefore contact the relevant authority and explain the rights they hold before submitting a formal application.

Anyone may nevertheless provide information, raise concerns or make a representation about wildfire risk, even if they are not entitled to make a formal application. The relevant authority should consider information suggesting that an assessment may be necessary and may give a fire-prevention direction without receiving an application.

Where different parties hold the ownership, tenancy, common, sporting or other interests, they should coordinate their approach where possible and make clear which legal interests each party holds.

3. When should members act?

Members should contact the relevant authority as soon as local conditions become severe, particularly where the Fire Severity Index is approaching level 5. Members should not wait until the threshold has been reached before asking whether an outline direction is already in place or can be prepared.

Under the current Relevant Authority Guidance, level 5 on the Fire Severity Index is used to identify the exceptional conditions required for a section 25 fire-prevention restriction. The FSI is calculated for individual 10 kilometre by 10 kilometre grid squares. A restriction may take effect only where level 5 applies in at least one of the grid squares specified in the direction.

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The FSI is calculated from meteorological information rather than direct measurements of the particular land. It estimates the condition of vegetation and the immediate ground surface using rainfall, temperature, wind speed, relative humidity and rainfall history. Members should therefore provide detailed local evidence in addition to the FSI.

Local evidence is relevant to deciding whether a restriction is necessary, what land it should cover and whether an area-wide exclusion or a more limited restriction is appropriate. Relevant factors may include:

- prolonged dry conditions
- high temperatures or strong winds
- exceptionally dry vegetation, peat or surface fuels
- recent fires in the area
- warnings from the fire and rescue service
- pressure on local firefighting resources
- exceptionally high visitor numbers
- previous ignition points or areas with a history of wildfire
- the current Met Office Fire Severity Index

The Relevant Authority Guidance states that restriction of moorland will normally be necessary during exceptional conditions because of flammable vegetation, exposed terrain and, often, the presence of deep peat.

Where level 5 has not yet been reached, members should ask the authority to assess the information provided, confirm the relevant grid squares and consider preparing an outline direction so that a restriction can be activated immediately if the threshold is subsequently reached.

Where level 5 has been reached, members should request immediate consideration of whether a restriction is necessary, taking account of the local evidence supplied.

When conditions are exceptional or close to exceptional, the Relevant Authority Guidance advises authorities to give priority to fire-prevention cases, take full account of local factors and be prepared to act quickly.

4. How to contact Natural England

For CROW land outside a National Park and outside dedicated woodland, contact Natural England's Open Access Contact Centre:

Email: open.access@naturalengland.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 060 2091

Where the risk is urgent, members should:

1. send the information by email
2. telephone the Open Access Contact Centre immediately afterwards
3. ask for the matter to be treated as urgent

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4. request an acknowledgement and case reference
5. ask Natural England to confirm the relevant FSI grid square or squares and the current FSI level
6. ask whether an outline or full fire-prevention direction already covers the land
7. where no direction exists, ask whether Natural England will prepare an outline direction or urgently consider making a full direction, as appropriate, and
8. copy the Moorland Association into the correspondence info@moorlandassociation.org so that any recurring delays or difficulties can be raised collectively.

5. Contacting a National Park

Where the affected land is within a National Park, the National Park Authority is the statutory relevant authority responsible for deciding whether to impose a CROW restriction.

In an urgent wildfire situation, members should:

1. email the appropriate National Park Authority using the details at Annex D.
2. state clearly that the request is for urgent consideration by its CROW/Open Access or Access Team
3. telephone the National Park Authority immediately after sending the email, and
4. request an acknowledgement, case reference and the name of the officer dealing with the matter.

The request should ask:

- whether the land is already covered by a pre-prepared fire-prevention direction capable of activation
- which FSI grid square or squares apply to the affected land
- whether the FSI has reached or is approaching level 5
- if the land is covered, whether the conditions for activating the restriction have been satisfied, and
- if no existing direction applies, whether the authority will urgently exercise its power under section 25 of the CROW Act, either following the member's application or on its own initiative.

Land crossing a National Park boundary

Where an estate or moor crosses a National Park boundary, different relevant authorities may be responsible for different parts of the land.

Members should therefore send the request to:

- the appropriate National Park Authority for land within the National Park, and
- Natural England for CROW land outside the National Park.

The application should include a map clearly showing the National Park boundary and the different parcels of land for which restrictions are sought.

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Dedicated woodland

The Forestry Commission is the relevant authority for woodland dedicated as open-access land. This can be checked online, see Annex A. How to contact them is at Annex C. Members who are uncertain whether woodland is dedicated should contact the National Park Authority or Natural England's Open Access Contact Centre and ask them to confirm the correct authority before submitting the request.

6. Information to provide

A formal application must be made in writing and should include the following mandatory information:

- the applicant's name and postal address
- the applicant's legal interest in the land
- a sufficient description or map of the location and extent of the affected land
- the purpose and nature of the requested restriction, for example an area-wide exclusion or a restriction to specified routes or access points
- the period for which the restriction is requested, if known, and
- an explanation of why the restriction is considered necessary.

Where a person applies solely as the holder of rights of common, additional information may be required, including details of those rights and, on a first application, a certified copy of the relevant entry in the register of common rights. Special restrictions on applications by commoners also apply, as explained in section 2.

The initial email should include:

- the name of the estate, common or moor
- the applicant's contact details and legal interest
- a map showing the affected CROW land. This can be found [online here](#)
- grid references
- the area and period for which the restriction is requested
- the principal access points
- the form of restriction sought and why a lesser restriction would not be sufficient
- any known FSI grid-square reference and the current FSI level, and
- a mobile number for the local contact

Where available, also attach:

- photographs of current ground conditions
- the current Fire Severity Index. This is [online here](#)
- the forecast FSI or relevant weather forecast
- details of nearby fires
- fire and rescue service warnings or advice
- information about wind and visitor pressure

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- information about vegetation, peat, slopes, exposure and any history of previous fires or ignitions
- details of any warning signs, patrols or other measures already taken and why they are not considered sufficient, and
- details of public rights of way crossing the land.

Members should not delay making an urgent representation because all supporting evidence is not yet available. However, where a formal application is being made, the mandatory information listed above should be supplied as quickly as possible.

An incomplete application may be rejected or treated as not yet valid, although the authority should still consider whether circumstances justify acting without an application.

7. Suggested wording

Members may use the following wording in their initial email:

Version A: Where the FSI is at level 5

Subject: Urgent request for CROW Section 25 fire-prevention restriction – [name of moor]

I am writing as the [owner/tenant/holder of sporting or other property rights] of [name of land] to request urgent consideration of a fire-prevention restriction under Section 25(1)(a) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The Fire Severity Index for grid square[s] [reference, if known] is currently at level 5.

Local conditions on the land include [describe dry vegetation and peat, fuel load, wind, exposed terrain, slopes, recent incidents, visitor pressure, fire-service advice and other relevant evidence].

Any fire starting on the land is likely to spread readily because [give reasons]. Warning signs, patrols or other informal measures would not adequately manage the risk because [give reasons].

I request a restriction covering the area shown on the attached map from [date/time] for approximately [period], subject to review as conditions change.

The restriction sought is [an area-wide exclusion/a restriction to specified routes or access points]. I consider this to be the lowest effective level of restriction because [explain].

Please confirm urgently:

- whether this land is already covered by a fire-prevention direction capable of immediate activation;
- if not, whether the authority will now make a direction under section 25;
- whether any further information is required; and
- what arrangements will be made for notices and public communication.

Please acknowledge receipt, provide a case reference and give me the direct contact details of the officer handling this request.

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Please copy the Moorland Association at info@moorlandassociation.org.

Version B. Where the FSI has not yet reached level 5

Subject: Urgent request for assessment and outline CROW section 25 fire direction – [name of moor]

I am writing as the [owner/tenant/holder of another legal interest] in [name of land] regarding the developing wildfire risk on the land.

The Fire Severity Index for grid square[s] [reference, if known] is currently at level [number] and is [forecast/expected] to increase. Although level 5 has not yet been reached, local conditions indicate a severe and rapidly developing wildfire risk.

The relevant local factors include [describe dry vegetation and peat, fuel load, wind, exposed terrain, slopes, recent incidents, visitor pressure, fire-service advice and other evidence].

I request that the authority urgently assess this information and confirm whether an outline fire-prevention direction is already in place. If it is not, please consider preparing an outline direction now so that a restriction can be activated immediately if the level-5 threshold is reached.

Please confirm urgently:

- which FSI grid square or squares apply to the land;
- the current and forecast FSI level;
- whether the land is already covered by an outline fire-prevention direction;
- if so, what steps are required to notify or activate a restriction when the threshold is reached;
- if not, whether the authority will prepare an outline direction;
- whether any further information is required; and
- who will be responsible for monitoring the FSI and notifying affected landholders when the activation conditions are satisfied.

Please acknowledge receipt, provide a case reference and give me the direct contact details of the officer handling this request.

Please copy the Moorland Association at info@moorlandassociation.org

Reporting the outcome to the MA

Members should tell the Moorland Association whether:

- an existing direction was identified
- an outline direction was prepared
- a restriction was activated
- an application or request was refused
- additional information was requested, or
- there was any material delay in receiving a decision.

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This will help the Association identify delays, inconsistencies and areas where collective representations may be needed.

8. Public rights of way are not automatically closed

A restriction under the CROW Act suspends or limits the statutory right to roam over the affected access land. It does not automatically close:

- public footpaths
- bridleways
- restricted byways, or
- other public highways crossing the land.

These are separate legal rights. Any restriction of a public right of way must be considered by the relevant local highway authority, usually the county or unitary council. Members should therefore identify any public rights of way crossing the proposed closure area and contact the highway authority separately where those routes present a material wildfire risk.

Members should also consider whether a section 25 restriction would be effective where unrestricted public rights of way continue to cross the affected land and should explain this in their application.

9. The separate 28-day landowner restriction

The CROW Act also provides a separate ability to restrict access for up to 28 days in each calendar year without making a formal application. However, this power is subject to important limitations. It cannot normally be used on:

- bank holidays, Christmas Day or Good Friday
- Saturdays between 1 June and 11 August
- Sundays between 1 June and 30 September, or
- more than four weekend days during the calendar year.

On tenanted land, the 28-day allowance generally belongs to the farm tenant rather than the landowner. Members should therefore not rely on the 28-day provision as the sole response to an extended period of exceptional summer fire risk. Members must notify the Open Access Contact Centre when using a 28-day restriction.

10. Signs and communication with the public

Once a lawful restriction has been confirmed, it will be published on the official online open-access map. The relevant authority should confirm what notices are required and who is responsible for displaying them.

A restriction under an outline direction takes effect in accordance with the terms of that direction and the notification arrangements specified by the authority. Members should not assume that a request, warning sign or informal agreement has itself lawfully suspended CROW access rights.

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Members should ask the authority to confirm in writing:

- the land covered by the restriction
- the date and time it takes effect
- the expected duration
- the FSI grid square or squares to which it is linked
- the arrangements for reviewing or ending it
- who will erect and remove signs, and
- how the restriction will be communicated to the public and emergency services.

Under the Relevant Authority Guidance, restrictions will normally cease after the FSI has remained below the specified levels for the prescribed period. The precise expiry arrangements should be confirmed from the terms of the individual direction.

Note: This guidance provides general information only. Members should seek specific legal advice where there is uncertainty about land ownership, tenancies, common rights, sporting rights or other access rights.

The Moorland Association is seeking clarification from Natural England about the operation, legal basis and continuing suitability of the current Relevant Authority Guidance, including the use of FSI level 5 as the exceptionality threshold. This guidance describes the procedure members should follow under the arrangements currently being applied.

Andrew Gilruth
Version 1.8
3 August 2026

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Annex A: Section 16 dedicated woodland. This can be found on the [Forestry Commission map](#)

1. Under Map Layers – click on the word “Constraints”
2. Scroll down and tick the box “Crow SI6 Dedicated Land”
3. Section 16 woodland is shown with a purple outline infilled with purple dots.

Section 16 dedicated land is not separately identified on the standard Defra MAGIC Map. Members should use the Forestry Commission Map Browser as explained above. If the mapping is unclear, ask the Forestry Commission to confirm the land’s status.

Annex B: Section 15 Land. This can be found on [Defra’s MAGIC Map](#)

1. Click “Get started”
2. Open “Map Layers” (icon in the top left corner, looks like a pile of books)
3. Expand “Access” (the top option, click on the chevron to the left of the word Access)
4. Select “Countryside and Rights of Way Act, Section 15 Land (England)” (tick the box)
5. Search by postcode, place name or grid reference and zoom to the relevant parcel of land (Section 15 land is shown in hatched out purple).

MAGIC is the best online starting point, but it should not necessarily be treated as conclusive proof of the precise legal basis of access. Section 15 status can arise from historic legislation, schemes, agreements or deeds. Where the mapping is unclear (or where a closure is urgently needed) the member should ask the relevant authority to confirm whether the particular parcel is section 15 land before relying on CROW restriction powers. Section 25 CROW restrictions cannot be used where the public’s access rights arise under section 15.

Annex C: Contacting the Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is the relevant authority for woodland dedicated for public access under section 16 of the CROW Act. Annex A explains how to check whether land is shown as section 16 dedicated woodland.

Send an urgent request to: Forestry Commission Woodland Access Team

Email: woodlandaccess@forestrycommission.gov.uk

The email should be headed:

Urgent: request for CROW section 25 fire-prevention restriction – [name of woodland]

Copy the relevant Forestry Commission area office:

- Yorkshire and North East: yne@forestrycommission.gov.uk 0300 067 4900
- North West and West Midlands: nwwm@forestrycommission.gov.uk 0300 067 4029
- East and East Midlands: eandem@forestrycommission.gov.uk 0300 067 4574

Telephone the area office immediately after sending the email and ask for it to be referred urgently to the officer responsible for the Forestry Commission’s CROW relevant-authority functions.

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Ask:

- whether the woodland is confirmed as section 16 dedicated land
- whether an existing fire-prevention direction covers it and can be activated immediately
- which FSI grid square or squares apply and whether level 5 has been reached
- if no existing direction applies, whether the Forestry Commission will urgently make an outline or full direction under section 25, as appropriate, and
- what further evidence or notices are required

Where responsibility remains uncertain, copy Natural England's Open Access Contact Centre at open.access@naturalengland.org.uk.

Annex D: National Park Authority Contact Details

Peak District National Park

Email: customer.service@peakdistrict.gov.uk

Telephone: 01629 816200

Ask for the email to be referred immediately to the Access Team dealing with CROW restrictions.

The Peak District National Park Authority has existing fire-prevention directions linked to the Fire Severity Index. Members should ask whether their land is covered and whether the relevant direction has been activated. Where an existing Peak District fire-prevention direction covers the land, the immediate request should be for activation of that direction, rather than for an entirely new restriction.

Where the FSI has not yet reached the required threshold, members should ask the Authority to confirm what preparatory action can be taken and who will monitor and activate the direction if level 5 is reached.

North York Moors National Park

Email: general@northyorkmoors.org.uk

Telephone: 01439 772700

Ask for the email to be referred immediately to the officer responsible for the Authority's CROW/Open Access relevant-authority functions.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Email: info@yorkshiredales.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 456 0030

Ask for the email to be referred immediately to the Authority's Access and Recreation Team or the officer responsible for CROW restrictions.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority also states that certain fire-risk closures are automatically activated when the Fire Severity Index reaches "Exceptional". Members should nevertheless contact the Authority where local conditions are serious, to confirm :

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- whether their particular land parcel is covered
- which outline direction and case reference applies
- which FSI grid square or squares govern activation
- whether the restriction has been activated, and
- how landholders will be informed when the restriction begins and ends.

Northumberland National Park

Email: enquiries@nnpa.org.uk

Telephone: 01434 605555

Ask for the request to be referred immediately to the Authority's Access and Recreation Officer or the officer responsible for its CROW relevant-authority functions.

Members should ask:

- whether the land is covered by an existing or pre-prepared fire-prevention direction and, if so, what conditions are required for its activation
- which FSI grid square or squares apply and the current FSI level
- if no existing direction applies, whether the Authority will urgently consider an individual application under Section 25
- what local evidence it requires and how that evidence will be assessed alongside the Fire Severity Index
- who will make the decision and within what timescale, and
- what arrangements will be made for notices, publication and communication with affected landholders.

The Authority's public information confirms that substantial areas of the National Park are CROW access land and that local restrictions may apply, but it does not currently set out a published procedure for urgent Section 25 fire-prevention applications. Members should therefore telephone immediately after emailing and request an acknowledgement, case reference and the direct contact details of the officer handling the request.

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