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# *The UK Fire and Rescue Response to Wildfires*

## *Fires in Practice Seminar Series*

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# Why UK FRS need to focus on wildfires?

If conditions are right, it's **hard to stop** them happening

They're becoming **more frequent**

They're **increasing in severity**

They're becoming **more disruptive**

It's **probably** (*definitely*) going to get worse before it gets better.



# What do UK FRS class as a wildfire?

**For UK purposes;** *“Any uncontrolled vegetation fire which requires a decision, or action, regarding suppression”*

**FRS need to define what a wildfire is.....rather than which outdoor fires have the potential to become one!**

- *\*Involves a geographical area of > 1 hectare*
- *Has a sustained flame length of > 1.5 metres*
- *\*Requires a committed resource of  $\geq 4$  FRS appliances*
- *\*Requires resources to be committed for  $\geq 6$  hours*
- *Presents a **serious** threat to life, environment, property and infrastructure*

**Allows the significance of wildfires across a large range of service impacts including;**

- *Geographical area*
- *Risk to personnel*
- *Service resilience*
- *Resource Implications*
- *Economic Cost*
- *Impact on ‘Business as Usual’*
- *Impact on the wider community*



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# UK Wildfire Statistics



- Fire and Rescue Services attended almost **260,000 wildfire incidents in England** in this eight-year period (an average of about 32,000 incidents per annum). Weather conditions are likely to have had a significant impact on wildfire incidents in England.
- **The greatest number of incidents, area burned, and duration were each in 2011-12** (almost 50,000 incidents, over 14,000 hectares burnt and a total duration of 60,000 hours).
- National Operational Guidance Programme (**NOGP**) defined wildfire incidents estimated to be **7,141 incidents** in these eight years – **or 2.75% of the total**
- **National Reporting Tool** - **65** incidents 2018 / **96** incidents 2019 / **149** incidents 2020 and **178** incidents in 2021



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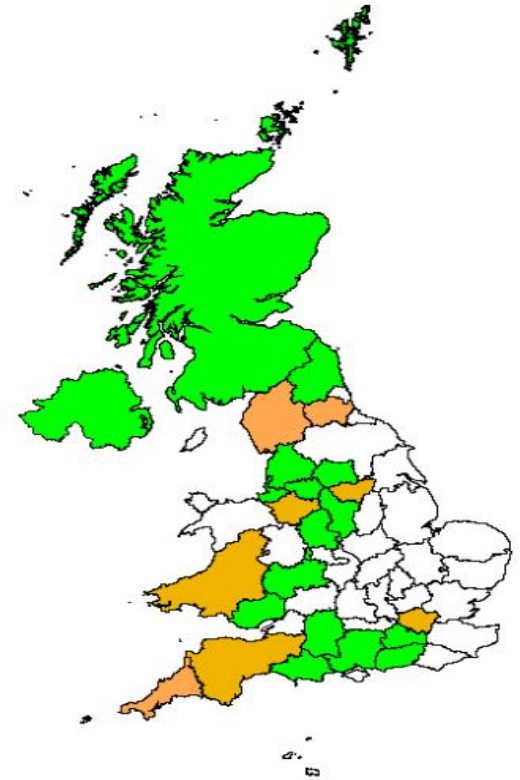
# Key Dates - FRS Wildfire Response

- NFCC (CFOA) Wildfire Group est. **August 2011**
- Development of multi tier FRS wildfire training packages
- Development of international wildfire networks
- Scottish Govt. Wildfire Guidance – **October 2013**
  - <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00436138.pdf>
  - UK FRS Manual of Firemanship Book 6b “*Fire in Rural Areas*” - first published 1946 and only 28 pages covered ‘wildfire(ish)’ issues.
- [Wildfire NOS and Wildfire NOG](#) developed and published **May 2016**.
- Prevention Programme SLA with NFPA and IAFC
- [Prevention tool kit - hosted on the NCC website](#)
- Wildfire Tactical Advisors (WTA) Concept of Operations **2017**
- Delivery of NFCC Wildfire Tac Ads in **June 2018**



# The Wildfire Tac Ad Capability

- Developed 2016/17 – first deployed July 2018
- **“Best Endeavours” - National Resilience**
- Currently 45 Wildfire Tac Ads
- Lead Officer for WTA is SM Dave Swallow H&WFRS
- Northumberland FRS leads national WTA training
- Regular CPD events
- 2020 – 13 major wildfire incidents / 19 WTAs mobilised - Inc. Hatfield Moor / Wareham Forest / Chobham Common




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# WTA Concept of Operations

- Technical wildfire capability advice to the Operational / Tactical Incident Commander (IC) inc. full 360° incident ground assessment
- Review of the current tactical fire plan and advise on any immediate safety concerns inc. the location and tasking brief of any deployed Safety Officer / Lookouts.
- Advice to the IC team to develop suppression / defensive tactics to contain / suppress the incident.
- Provide initial advice based upon expected weather / fire behaviour in the next 4-6 hours. Then the next 12 / 24 / 36 / 48 hours and analyse probable fire development / behaviour.
- Liaison with partner agencies e.g. Forestry Commission, land owners/agents, Environment Agency, Police, Local Authority.
- Advice regarding potential future wildfire logistical requirements e.g. personnel and appliance resources, specialist vehicles and assets, external partner and expert advice.
- Advice on suitable, safety zones, escape routes access / egress routes for assisting wildfire assets.
- Advise whether any external agencies should be requested to attend as advisors to the IC team.
- Support research teams who may deploy to the incident after initial emergency phase - **Excellent Local Contacts.**

Wildfire Tactical Advisor – Concept of Operations



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**Wildfire Tactical Advisor – Concept of Operations**

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Draft - Version 0.3 Wildfire Tactical Advisor – Concept of Operations Page 1 of 41

# What should FRSs already be considering?

- **IRMP / CRR – identification of RUI risk**
  - 2015 v 2021
- **Gap analysis - NOS / NOG**
- **Review wildfire training at all levels - is it appropriate and embedded?**
- **Partners - Multi Agency Exercising and Tactical Wildfire Plan development including researchers**
- **Does the FRS have a role within local or regional fire groups?**
- **Populate the National Reporting Tool / Wildfire Asset Register**
- **Burn Suppression Teams**
- **Night-time operations**
- **Are you confident your service can map and mitigate fuel risk?**



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# Manage the Fuel – Reduce the Risk



*Fire break being made at the top of a steep slope to stop fire reaching forestry*



**Do you know what the fuel risk is?**

**Do you know where it is?**

**Do you know how it will change?**

**Can you reduce it? How?**



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# Development of Tactical Burn Teams

- Limited number of teams across UK
- Would like to grow the capability to compliment the Wildfire Tac Ads
- 10-12 teams with 8-10 personnel would be ideal.
- Significant benefits for FRS
- Have proven their value at a number of large wildfire incidents – notably Winter Hill
- But capability development not without some challenges!!
- **Great opportunity for FRS to support academic research**



# Greece Deployment 8<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020

- Offer of support made by Home Secretary
- Very fast response (a few days) utilising existing UK FRS International Search and Rescue (ISAR) framework for necessary speed of deployment
- Teams from London, Merseyside, Lancashire, West Midlands and South Wales plus National High Volume Pump Capability Lead – this was not a dedicated NFCC Wildfire response.
- 7 day deployment was very well received and a was successful deployment – but not optimal. Looking to enhance the offer for the next mobilisation.



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# Greece Deployment cont.

- Very high media interest and very positive coverage.
- Embedded Sky News team followed the UK deployment – some media challenges.
- NFCC working with National Resilience / ISAR / Home Office / FCOD on future deployment models.
- Rapid Assessment / Light / Medium response models (?)
- Will require some changes to the current NFCC Wildfire Tac Ad procedures and model



The Telegraph 

@Telegraph

 British firefighters came close to being encircled by flames as they battled wildfires in Greece, enduring temperatures of 40C and searing winds



[telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk)

Greek islanders defy evacuation orders to defend their homes from raging wildfires



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# Some current and future areas of focus

- **Enhancing the relationships within HMG - Home Office / Defra / FCOD / Cabinet Office etc.**
- **Embedding the Wildfire Tac Ads as a funded / partially funded capability within NR and NCAF (National Coordination and Advisory Framework) – resilience and sustainability.**
- **Development of a Wildfire Framework for England – demarcation of roles and coordinated activity.**
- **UK Fire Danger Rating project - game changer for FRS?**
- **Via South Wales FRS – partner on the EU AFAN project (Advanced Fire Analyst Network) – take advantage of the expertise across EU and the technology that is already available.**
- **Looking to develop a Wildfire Tac Fire Analyst Cell to provide remote advice to the incident command team – NIFRS model.**



# Current and future focus

- **Better understanding of public perceptions of wildfire risk and threat to shape and target prevention messaging.**
- **Working with partners across Northern Europe who are in a similar position regarding increasing wildfire threat to the UK.**
- **Better understand of the health impacts of wildfires on responders and the public.**
- **Provided input as consultee into the Defra project developing land management prescribed burn training.**
- **Ability to better understand the impacts of climate change and climate projections.**
- **Better engagement with research community to assist FRS to understand, plan and prepare for wildfire more effectively and how can we support the research more effectively as a sector**



Thank you for your time.....

Any questions?

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