

Green Cleugh Wildfire Debrief Report

Lessons learned, outcomes and strategic recommendations following the Green Cleugh wildfire

Debrief date
22 June 2026

Location
Easter Bavelaw Farm

Participants
32 representatives



Green Cleugh Wildfire – Michael Rummey

The Green Cleugh Wildfire Debrief Meeting was held at Easter Bavelaw Farm on 22 June 2026.

This report is based on contributions from 32 representatives of land management, public agencies, emergency services partners, organisations, farming businesses and community stakeholders.

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Executive Summary

17 ha land burned	397 volunteer hours	30 volunteers
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The Green Cleugh Wildfire in the Pentland Hills during late May represented a significant wildfire incident that demonstrated both the increasing wildfire risk facing Scotland and the vital role played by collaboration between public agencies, private land managers and local communities.

The fire was first reported on 25 May at approximately 16:00 and was largely contained by 22:30 that evening. However, burning peat and extreme dry conditions resulted in a significant re-ignition on 28 May, requiring extensive suppression activity and continuous monitoring until rainfall arrived on 1 June.

The incident burned approximately 17 hectares of land, including sensitive moorland habitat supporting several red-listed bird species and commercial grazing ground. Evidence presented during the debrief indicated that rapid intervention by local land managers, farmers, gamekeepers and volunteers prevented the fire from escalating into a much larger landscape-scale event with potentially severe environmental, economic and public safety consequences.

The debrief highlighted several key themes:

- The importance of local knowledge and rapid volunteer mobilisation.
- The value of fuel-load management, including controlled burning (muirburn) and firebreaks.
- Significant opportunities to strengthen coordination between the SFRS and land managers.
- The need for improved wildfire preparedness across the Pentland Hills.
- Concerns regarding public access management during wildfire incidents.
- The requirement for clearer public messaging and wildfire communications.
- The need for improved strategic planning and policy alignment at national level.

A clear consensus emerged that wildfire resilience in Scotland requires a genuinely integrated approach involving government, emergency services, land managers, environmental organisations and local communities.



Green Cleugh Wildfire Map

1. Incident Overview

Timeline

Initial Incident – 25 May

The wildfire was first observed at approximately 16:00 on 25 May, with Scottish Fire and Rescue Service alerted at 16:23. Local land managers, gamekeepers and Pentland Hills Regional Park representatives were mobilised shortly afterwards, with many personnel arriving on scene by approximately 16:40.

SFRS deployed six appliances and personnel from multiple south-east Scotland stations. The fire was largely brought under control by approximately 22:30.

Re-Ignition – 28 May

Despite initial suppression, peat continued smouldering beneath the surface. On 28 May, a combination of strong winds, changing wind direction and continuing dry conditions caused significant re-ignition. Local responders were alerted at 22:02 and mounted an immediate response despite the late hour. Operations continued until approximately 04:30 the following morning.

Monitoring and Recovery

Continuous monitoring was maintained until 1 June, including:

- 24-hour fire watches
- Thermal drone surveys
- Excavation and dampening of hotspots
- Ongoing suppression of peat fires

Meaningful rainfall eventually arrived on 1 June and assisted final extinguishment.

2. Scale of the Community Response

One of the most striking findings of the debrief was the scale and effectiveness of the volunteer response.

The incident saw support from:

- 10 estates
- 16 gamekeepers
- 14 farmers
- 7 rangers (Pentland Hills Regional Park)
- 30 individual volunteers
- 397 volunteer hours
- 6 overnight fire-watch deployments

Resources deployed included:

- All-terrain vehicles (ATVs)
- Tractors and agricultural equipment
- Water pumps
- Fogging units
- Leaf blowers
- Fire beaters
- Water bowsers

- Specialist wildfire suppression equipment

Participants consistently highlighted that local responders were able to mobilise rapidly because of existing informal networks, strong community relationships and extensive knowledge of the terrain.



Land managers battle to contain the Green Cleugh Wildfire – Jenny Cowan

3. Impact Assessment

Environmental Impact

The fire affected sensitive upland habitats and occurred during the peak breeding season for many species.

Species potentially impacted included:

Red-listed Birds

- Curlew
- Merlin
- Ring Ouzel

- Skylark
- Cuckoo

Other Wildlife

- Golden Plover
- Red Grouse
- Meadow Pipit
- Mountain Hare
- Brown Hare
- Numerous reptiles and invertebrates.

The incident occurred within a 5,000-hectare landscape-scale biodiversity project area and came within metres of recently established woodland creation sites.

Agricultural Impact

The wildfire destroyed approximately 17 hectares of grazing land, equating to approximately 31% of the Pinnacle heft grazing area. This represents a significant loss of forage and agricultural productivity.

Additional Impact

Testimony from several volunteers highlighted the challenges of organising childcare and catering for family members at short notice. The effects of the fire were felt far beyond the exhausted responders and there were indirect impacts of the fire on the families and friends of those involved.

4. Risk of Escalation

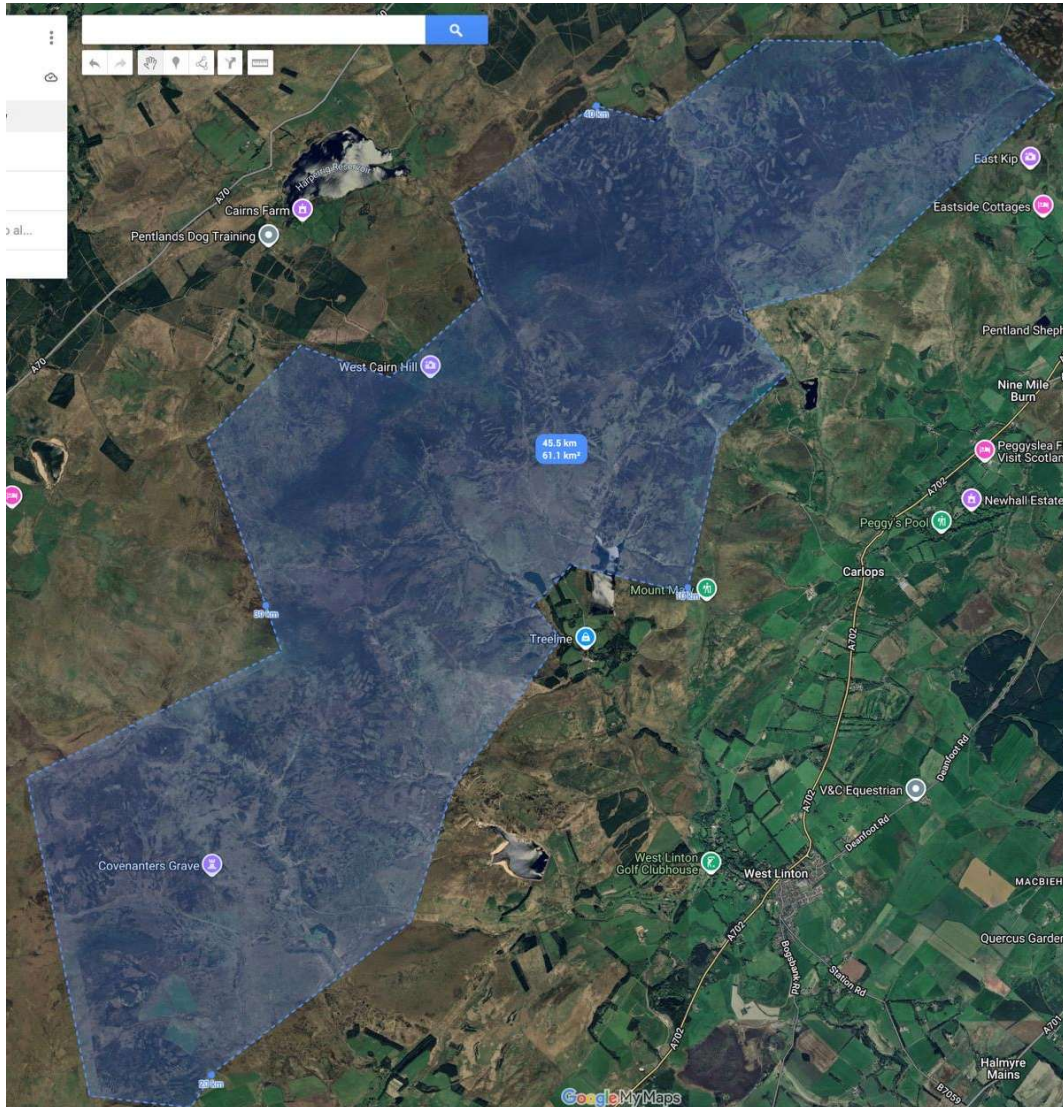
A major focus of discussion was the realistic possibility that the fire could have developed into a substantially larger incident.

Scenarios presented suggested:

Escalation scenario	Potential area burned
Spread to Black Hill / Gask Hill / Bells Hill	560 hectares
Spread towards Carnethy and Scald Law	1,070 hectares
Landscape-scale wildfire following wind shift	6,120 hectares

The largest scenario would have affected approximately **61% of the Pentland Hills Regional Park**.

Participants generally agreed that a combination of rapid response, existing fuel management and favourable intervention opportunities prevented a significantly larger wildfire.



Map showing actual fire extent and potential escalation scenarios.

5. Key Findings

Prevention

Growing Public Risk

Several contributors highlighted increasing incidents involving:

- Disposable barbecues
- Open fires
- Campfires
- Unauthorised cooking activities

Participants reported observing open fires during and immediately after the wildfire period itself, highlighting the challenge of public awareness and compliance.

Fuel Load Management

One of the strongest themes throughout the meeting was concern regarding increasing fuel loads across upland landscapes.

Numerous land managers argued that:

- Managed muirburn had reduced wildfire spread
- Previously managed ground provided opportunities for suppression
- Fuel-load reduction remains a critical wildfire mitigation tool

Participants expressed concern that current policy changes (e.g., muirburn licensing) may reduce future management capacity and increase wildfire risk if alternatives are not adequately implemented.

Readiness

Need for a Pentlands Wildfire Working Group

There was strong support for establishing a formal multi-agency wildfire group for the Pentlands.

Potential areas of work include:

- Risk mapping
- Resource coordination
- Access planning
- Training exercises
- Communication protocols
- Funding applications
- Strategic wildfire planning
- Back-up volunteers

Community Asset Register

A key proposal was development of a comprehensive wildfire resource register containing:

- Equipment inventories
- Skilled personnel
- Water sources
- Rendezvous points
- Access routes
- Gate codes
- Specialist contractors

Joint Training

Stakeholders repeatedly called for more regular engagement between SFRS and local land managers through:

- Joint exercises
- Site familiarisation visits
- Wildfire-specific training
- Relationship building before incidents occur

Response

What Worked Well

Participants identified several strengths:

- Rapid local mobilisation
- Effective volunteer leadership
- Strong community cooperation
- Effective use of local knowledge
- Good cooperation between farmers, gamekeepers and estates
- Flexible deployment of specialist equipment

Challenges Identified

Key challenges included:

- Access and navigation difficulties
- Communications between responder groups
- Unhelpful public messaging from the Pentland Hills Regional Park
- Perceived differences in operating approaches between agencies
- Limited wildfire-specific equipment availability
- Coordination during re-ignition phases
- Lack of clarity around authority for path closures and public exclusion zones

Recovery

Discussion highlighted the need to integrate wildfire resilience into future landscape management decisions.

Priority areas include:

- Strategic firebreak planning
- Peatland restoration design
- Woodland protection
- Fuel-load management
- Risk assessment across all major landholdings

Strategic Recommendations

Strategic focus: The recommendations below are intended to strengthen prevention, preparedness, response coordination and long-term wildfire resilience across the Pentland Hills landscape.

Recommendation 1

Establish a Pentlands Wildfire Partnership to coordinate prevention, preparedness and response activities across all major stakeholders.

Recommendation 2

Develop a Pentlands Wildfire Action Plan including fuel management, access arrangements, communications protocols and emergency response procedures.

Recommendation 3

Create a shared community asset register detailing equipment, personnel, water sources, access routes, gate codes and specialist capabilities.

Recommendation 4

Implement annual joint wildfire exercises involving SFRS, land managers, the PHRP, Police Scotland and volunteer partners.

Recommendation 5

Review authority and procedures for temporary path closure and public exclusion zones during wildfire incidents and recovery operations.

Recommendation 6

Review wildfire messaging arrangements, particularly from the Pentland Hills Regional Park, to ensure public communications remain consistent, timely and evidence-led during periods of elevated risk.

Recommendation 7

Consider legislative or byelaw options to restrict open fires, disposable barbecues and similar ignition sources during high wildfire risk periods.

Recommendation 8

Ensure future land-use and environmental policy decisions fully consider wildfire resilience, fuel-load management and practical suppression requirements.

Priority area	Recommended action
Partnership	Establish a Pentlands Wildfire Partnership and shared action plan.
Preparedness	Create a shared asset register and deliver annual joint exercises.
Prevention	Strengthen public messaging, access management and ignition-source controls.
Resilience	Ensure land-use and environmental policy supports wildfire resilience.

Conclusion

The Green Cleugh Wildfire was a significant but ultimately contained wildfire incident. The event demonstrated both the increasing wildfire threat facing Scotland and the remarkable commitment of local communities, land managers and volunteer responders who mobilised rapidly to prevent a potentially far larger disaster.

The debrief revealed a clear appetite for stronger partnership working, improved preparedness and a more integrated approach to wildfire management. Participants shared a common

objective: reducing the likelihood and impact of future wildfires while protecting people, communities, biodiversity, agricultural livelihoods and Scotland's upland landscapes.

The Green Cleugh incident should be viewed not only as a wildfire event, but as a valuable learning opportunity that can help shape a more resilient and coordinated national approach to wildfire prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.



Site visit in July – Nic MacLeod