

Fire Interdisciplinary Research on Ecosystem Services: fire and climate change in UK moorlands and heaths (FIRES)

SEMINAR 2

The impact of wildfire on ecosystem services: relationships between wildfire, climate change and people

The University of Manchester, 24th June 2008

'Wildfires and Climate Change: An American perspective on Global Climate Change'

James Smalley, US National Fire Protection Association

24 June 2008

Rapporteurs' Report of Discussion

Ethan Bigelow, Rural Development Initiatives

What are some of the lessons from the US wildfire history that can be applied to the UK?

- Mismanagement of natural resources for a period of almost a century has led to an increase in forest fuel loading which is the main cause of catastrophic wildfires.
- The "fear of fire" factor: the public should be made aware of the natural place that wildfire has in an ecosystem and that not all fires can be deemed destructive.
- Property zoning in the rural/urban interface has been under-regulated in the US, which has led to the destruction of a large amount of property landholdings by wildfire.

What will the US do in the future to combat these catastrophic wildfires?

- Institute an effective fuels reduction program in rural areas that focuses on high-risk areas for wildfire.
- Update wildfire suppression strategies to make wildfire fighting more effective, both tactically and economically.
- Encourage safe planning of properties in rural areas with a high-risk of wildfire, strictly regulate the expansion of property zoning into rural areas, and provide incentive programs for the creation of "fire-safe" properties.
- Deliver education programs built around the lessons learned from the 20th century and high-lighting the role that wildfire must play in the wild land/urban interface, where fire has been present for thousands of years, but where people must live as well.