

What we want

- * a ban on draining & burning blanket bogs
- * an end to creating loopholes in the Heather and Grass Burning Code & other regulations



Hebden Water flooded Bridgegate, June 2012

Alleviate flooding, restore blanket bogs, BAN THE BURN!

This is a summary of some of the issues around the draining and burning of the blanket bog above recently-flooded Hebden Bridge.

Some people have requested a straightforward explanation about why the “Ban The Burn” campaign has begun, to help them decide if they should support it.

Ban the Burn is campaigning for two simple things:

- a ban on blanket bog draining and burning

- an end to loopholes in laws that prohibit burning blanket bog

Why do we want these things?

Blanket bog is a rare, valuable habitat with a high level of legal protection under a wide range of European and UK laws that safeguard wildlife, habitats, biodiversity and water. Some of this legislation prohibits burning blanket bogs.

So far so good. But it appears that the Environmental Stewardship Agreement (ESA) between Natural England and Walshaw Moor Estate Ltd

provides a let-out from this prohibition, since it allows blanket bog burning, under specific controlled conditions. (For more info on the ESA, see the section overleaf, *The £2.5 million question.*)

find out more (overleaf)

- Why are healthy blanket bogs important in reducing flooding?
- Why is the bog being drained?
- The £2.5 million question

Ban the Burn

The Ban the Burn campaign was launched on August 12th. Around 90 people walked to the top of Heather Hill on Walshaw Moor to see for themselves the degradation of the blanket bog, and then attended a launch event at Hebden Bridge Trades Club where they heard from environmental scientist Dr Aidan Foley about the significance of blanket bog for controlling flooding, storing carbon and as a rare, biodiverse habitat. Ban the Burn can be contacted at changingmorethanlightbulbs@gmail.com and more information is available on the Energy Royd website - www.energyroyd.org.uk

Quick summary

The land around Hebden should be managed for the benefit of all

Blanket bog is a rare, valuable habitat that is protected under a wide range of European and UK laws. We want these laws to be properly enforced

Why are healthy blanket bogs important in reducing flooding?
Healthy blanket bogs act as huge sponges, or storage reservoirs, that absorb and then slowly release rainfall.

Why is the bog being drained at all?

This work is being carried out by Walshaw Moor Estate Ltd to encourage heather to grow where the bog was. Heather is required to raise grouse, since this is where they breed and feed

Why is the bog being burned? To keep the heather short enough for grouse to breed and feed in.

Why is Walshaw Estate allowed to do this to the blanket bog if it is so bad?

This is the £2.5 million question and we would like to know the answer.

Please support Ban the Burn

Spread the word about the need for “soft” flood alleviation measures that are based on managing the moorland so that it can do its job of storing water - rather than having run off cause flash flooding in the valley.

If you'd like to receive updates about the campaign, email changingmorethanlightbulbs@gmail.com to join the email list.



Healthy blanket bogs' ability to absorb and then slowly release rainfall is particularly important during heavy rainfall, as it reduces the impact of flooding. Sphagnum mosses in healthy bogs form great carpets that cover large areas, soaking up rainfall and slowly releasing it into streams and underground water systems. The bog at Walshaw Moor was like this for thousands of years. We know this because the peat, which is built up by sphagnum, is several metres deep on this protected Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Sphagnum moss requires wet conditions. Digging drainage ditches (grips) across bogs (as Walshaw estate has done) dries out the ground, so the mosses die back. Without the moss, the peat also dries out and erodes, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, discolouring water and increasing flash flooding in the valleys below. It is also devastating for the other plants, mammals, birds, insects and invertebrates that live in this rare, internationally important habitat.

The £2.5 million question

Why is Walshaw Moor Estate Ltd allowed to burn and drain the blanket bog? A new Environmental Stewardship Agreement (ESA) between Natural England (NE) and Walshaw Moor Estate Ltd will funnel over £2.5 million in public subsidies over the next ten years into the Estate, to pay for work to restore the moorland habitats, including the blanket bog. But, the ESA permits “controlled” burning activities on blanket bog, under an exemption from the Heather and Grass Burning Code's rule that burning must not take place on sensitive areas such as peat bog and wet heathland. A local journalist has asked NE why, and is waiting for their answer.

The ESA comes after a complicated legal battle that started in 2010 when Natural England served a notice against Walshaw Moor Estate to stop activities that were damaging the Site of Special Scientific Interest. It ended in March 2012 after Leeds High Court ordered a judicial review into Natural England's attempt to ban WME from heather burning, grazing and the use of vehicles on blanket bog. Natural England dropped its prosecution of WME and agreed a settlement package. The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee then saw fit to question Natural England about the adequacy of its law enforcement activities.

You cannot burn blanket bog without first draining it, and it seems that we are paying Walshaw Moor Estate to destroy a globally important habitat and increase the risk of further flooding in the valley.

STOPPING THIS WOULD HELP STOP SIMILAR PRACTICES AROUND THE COUNTRY.