

Request for information - Walshaw Moor Estate compliance with 2012 Consent and current Catchment Restoration Plan – Questions

Reference Number: RFI 4698

1. Ditches on Heather Hill (unit 49) within 50 metres of the line of grouse butts appear to have been enlarged. (photo attached: Heather Hill drainage ditch)
Large caterpillar tracks are clearly visible (photo attached: Caterpillar track, Heather Hill) in the blanket bog and the ditches have been scraped out and deepened mechanically using the digger.
In addition it looks as if there are two newly dug ditches east of the large natural Y-shaped gully between the last two sunken butts.
I attach a screen grab from Bing Maps (Satellite photo) showing the easternmost 6 grouse butts in the Heather Hill line. If you look on this map the ditches are small, insignificant and vegetated. Whereas they are now bare, deeper and wider.
 - Is Natural England aware of this?
 - If not, please will you investigate it?
 - Is this permitted by the 2012 Consent and the terms of the Higher Level Stewardship agreement?

2. In March this year, a line of 10 grouse butts were installed in deep peat/blanket bog adjacent to Hole Sike at SD 945349. The line appears to be the blue line in Fig 23 of the Walshaw Moor Estate Catchment Restoration Plan 2017-2042. This says “Throughout the term of this plan it may be necessary for the Estate to ...potentially install new lines (subject to obtaining Natural England consent for new butt lines).”
 - Did NE consent to these 10 grouse butts?
 - If so, why? Particularly knowing that Walshaw Estate would then be entitled to dig over 10 drainage ditches to keep them drained, risking serious damage to the Blanket Bog?
 - And if NE did consent, please will you send the HRA for this development and also let us know if planning permission was sought for the new line of butts? Particularly since Walshaw Moor estate would then put grips in to drain them.
 - How does this fit into the Walshaw Moor Estate Catchment Restoration Plan 2017-2042?

3. The Long Term Management Plan says that the blue line in Fig 23 is served by an existing track "so additional vehicle access is not required and access on shoot days will be from track network." And you can see a track right of the line of new butts.
 - a) There is clear peat damage where they are building steps up from the track, and also draining water off the blanket bog. (Photo attached: damage to redirected stream).
 - Is Natural England aware of this damage?
 - Is such damage to the peat permitted?
 - b) As there is already an existing track right of the line of new butts, why has Walshaw Moor Estate made another vehicle track in a former watercourse (marked on the OS map as such) in the Field of the Mosses area with car parking area (grid ref SD947

343), that is clearly intended to take shooters up to grouse butts? (On the OS Map, there is a footpath alongside the Watercourse, but NOT a vehicle track.)

c) On Google earth map, on 31/12 /2003 there were no grouse butts or track. It was then still a Watercourse, a year after Bannister took over the estate. It looks like the track and butts went in/ were constructed around 2006, as the grouse butts look new and unfinished on Google earth map of 17/7/2006.

- Did N.E give consent for Walshaw Estate to redirect the watercourse so that Walshaw Estate could make it into the vehicle track?
- If so, please send us the HRA and explain how this fits into The Walshaw Moor Estate Catchment Restoration Plan 2017-2042 where it states "it will ' deliver estate wide environmental benefits ' and "maintain and enhance the unique landscape of the South Pennine Moors.
- Is allowing a water course to be re-directed for a track for vehicles really achieving either of those aims ?

4. In the Walshaw Moor Estate Catchment Restoration Plan 2017-2042 it states that up to 100 hectares of fully functioning Bog will be restored yearly.

- Can N.E provide the figures for this in 2017 and 2018 and tell us where these 200 hectares of restored fully functioning blanket bog are?

5. The 2017-2042 Catchment Restoration Plan says that if cutting has been ruled out, burning on less active and modified blanket bog can take place but must leave the moss intact.

- Are NE aware that in February 2017 burning took place which did not leave the moss intact? The burning was at Dean Gate on Wadsworth Moor, just below the Walshaw Dean Middle reservoir. A photo is attached of the burnt sphagnum.

6. The Walshaw Catchment Management Plan 2017-42 says that the Agreement is subject to annual reviews, in order to respond to changing environmental and social needs.

Since Calderdale Council has declared a Climate Emergency and this Emergency is also widely recognised nationally and internationally, how does Natural England intend to respond to this environmental need in its next annual review?

Will you consider tightening all the measures relating to banning burning and draining of the moors, and other peatland restoration actions that, if successful, will lock in existing carbon, prevent the oxidation of peat that creates carbon emissions, and promote the creation of new peat?

7. Why has N.E ever given the Estate permission to dig grouse butts flush into Blanket Bog? You knew how incredibly damaging this would be on two counts. It would result in grips being dug that would drain Blanket Bog - and create pitfall traps for amphibians and mammals. This has been clearly documented and brought to your attention on previous occasions. What will you do to address this?