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From:

Sent: 08 January 2015 18:39

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: Review of Section 40

The present restrictions on hedge cutting and burning of heather should remain and be enforced. The NPWS needs retiring staff to be replaced and staff shortages in recent years to be reversed so that it has the manpower to carry out its remit. Currently breaches of Habitats Directive and National legislation are not given sufficient attention. Last July I witnessed illegal scrub removal and burning within the boundary of an NHA. Smoke was visible for miles.

The danger of bog and forest fires has to be taken into account. In other countries there is knowledge and tradition of restricted burning which Irish landowners do not have. It is a specialised task for experienced people.

It is possible for landowners and County Councils to operate within the present rules on hedge cutting. Hedgerows are particularly important given our limited native woodland cover. Overgrown or potentially overgrown hedges can be identified before they come into leaf or nesting season begins. Wild fruit and berries add to biodiversity and make the landscape more attractive for tourists, rural dwellers and wildlife. Too much of our wild fruit and berries are destroyed long before winter.

Agricultural contractors and landowners are not thinking of the wider implications for our biodiversity and people when they seek a relaxing of restrictions.

In mountain areas I would like to see incentives given to farmers to change cattle breeds and grazing regimes to allow a longer season of grazing and consequently less flammable mass and so reduce the need for clearance and burning. This needs to be done in under EU schemes such as GLAS.