

REF: 2015S40/0099

From:

Sent: 09 January 2015 14:16

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: End rural arson

Two whom it may concern:

It is long overdue for the annual arson, perpetrated over large areas of rural upland, to be outlawed. I live in SW Kerry, and for three months every year the landscape is literally hellish. Poorly-controlled, and barely-contained, fires rage through the days sending up noxious smoke. The smoke settles in valleys and creates a choking smog worse than that in the world's worst-polluted cities, and because of local farmers' quaint rustic customs everyone has no choice but to breathe in this gunk - on air-pollution grounds alone, surely it is time to put an end to this deeply dubious form of 'land management'?

It's not always possible to escape the areas where this happens either. Firstly because it is so widespread in rural areas - some days there is an inferno on every visible hillside. Secondly, because the fires are so badly managed, it can be potentially lethal to drive away: last spring, on the one-track road leading out of our valley, fires were raging on BOTH sides of the narrow road, right down to the tarmac. We had to turn back.

And that's before you get onto any wildlife concerns. The burning starts just when many birds and animals are starting to nest and breed - the carnage must be profuse. Heaven help any creatures caught in the fires' path. Apologists for the burning claim that it clears invasive plants and promotes the growth of grass for sheep - but in the odd area which isn't burnt, the grass appears in spring just as vigorously as in the burnt areas. And in the burnt areas, the gorse, rhododendrons etc bounce back with renewed vigour. So from what many of us have observed, burning doesn't even do what it is supposed to do.

Also, there is the threat to life, limb and property. Every year, in our valley alone, out-of-control fires get dangerously close to houses, causing people to abandon their homes until the danger is past. Costly and resource-wasting calls have to be made to the local cash-strapped volunteer fire crews who then have to risk their lives to put right other people's criminal carelessness. Every year, there is at least one instance of somebody getting killed by the fires.

In any other context, this practice would be called by its correct name: ARSON, and the perpetrators punished severely. Please end it now.