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# Moor body calls for pause on work to bogs

'Damaging and pointless activity'  
— Dartmoor Society chairman

by **John Hutchins**

AN IMPORTANT environmental project to Dartmoor bogs has come under criticism from the Dartmoor Society for causing damage to the very moor it is purporting to protect.

The £1.1-million five-year project aims to establish and investigate the feasibility and effects of restoration of Dartmoor's blanket bog.

It is a partnership between DNPA, Natural England, the Environment Agency, South West Water, the Duchy of Cornwall and Dartmoor Commoners' Council with non-partner the University of Exeter undertaking its research. The project's major funder is South West Water.

Dartmoor contains around 8,500 hectares of blanket bog and the project is aiming to restore 120 hectares and gather scientific research for future environmental management.

Organisers say it will 'conserve and enhance the crucial habitat for upland wildlife, improve water supply and increase the potential of blanket bog to store carbon and mitigate the impacts of climate change.'

Project works have been carried out at Winneys Down, west of Fernworthy and three miles from the nearest road. Now the Dartmoor Mires project is looking to move in August to another, more remote part

of the moor — Flat Tor Pan north of Postbridge at the watershed between the rivers Tavy and Cowsic, a tributary of the Dart.

But the Dartmoor Society says the use of heavy, digging machines with caterpillar tracks are causing damage to the moor's wild and natural environment.

Society chairman Dr Tom Greeves welcomed some of the research being conducted but said he saw absolutely 'no scientific justification' for heavy machinery to go across and dig up undisturbed, virgin ground.

'We consider the machine work associated with the Mires Project to be the most damaging and pointless activity generated by Dartmoor National Park Authority and its project partners on the high moor of Dartmoor since the creation of the national park more than sixty years ago.'

'A pause will allow time for rigorous assessment of what has been done so far. Until this has been undertaken no further machine work should take place. The heart of wildest Dartmoor is being changed, in the face of fundamental conservation principles.'

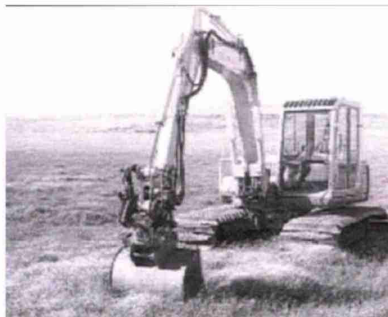
The partnership behind the scheme say the Dartmoor Mires project is developing understanding of the internationally important blanket bog. These are a huge asset for

society and the project will help determine how to conserve these areas effectively for multiple benefits.

Prof Richard Brazie, of Exeter University, who is leading the hydrological research, said: 'Levels of loss of dissolved organic carbon recorded in water from the Dartmoor monitoring site at Flat Tor Pan are significantly higher than expected.'

'Peak concentrations observed are comparable to those from damaged peat bogs in the north of England which are being restored, and are twice those of damaged bogs on Exmoor. This emphasises the importance of undertaking restoration on Dartmoor.'

Kevin Bishop, the chief executive of Dartmoor National Park Authority responded to criticism that the heavy machinery was unnecessarily damaging the ancient landscape: 'Machines are essential to undertake restoration. Highly modified machines with special tracks, operated by experienced environmental contractors, have been selected to undertake the work. Machine movements are kept to a minimum and are supervised by project staff as is all restoration work.'



● Digging machines are causing damage, says the Dartmoor Society