

D. S. A. McDOUGALL & PARTNERS

FARMERS, CATTLE BREEDERS REED & SEDGE GROWERS

THE 'FENSIDE' HERD
OF PEDIGREE SALERS CATTLE

THE 'CATFIELD' HERD
OF PEDIGREE POLL HEREFORD CATTLE

(Accredited to UK Cattle Health Scheme)

CATFIELD HALL FARM, CATFIELD, GT. YARMOUTH, NORFOLK NR29 5DB

Telephone STALHAM (STD 0692) 80220

KAMcD/RJH

7th June, 1991

The Regional Manager,
National Rivers Authority,
62/64 Thorpe Road,
Norwich.

NRA DISTRICT OFFICE
NORWICH
17 JUN 1991

Dear Sir,

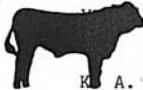
We wish to record, officially, our extreme concern at the lack of water on our SSSI fens on this Estate which are managed by us under an agreement with English Nature as a prime conservation area of high ecological value. We also crop the fens in the traditional manner for water reed and sedge for thatching. After 3 dry seasons the fens are now in serious trouble due to drying out and the delicate botanical balance in them threatened by invasive non-typical plants. Fish kills due to deoxygenated stagnant water are occurring and other fauna are suffering from an invasion of foxes who can now lie up with impunity in the dry areas of dense fen when, hitherto, they could not. Typically rare fen bird species are disappearing.

There are one or two discreet small springs within the fens. Run-off from our surrounding arable land is minimal due to the drought conditions.

We continue to note heavy abstractions of irrigation water throughout the surrounding farm lands with potatoes and barley having regular and massive application from bore holes which should never have been permitted by A.W.A. or the N.C.C. Our springs are drying up. We have had our own water abstraction licence (No 7/34/9/S/84) but have never used it to protect the fens and our own need to have a plentiful supply of water on our reed beds which produce an important economic farm crop

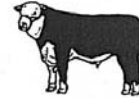
We would like a site meeting with you and English Nature at which I trust you will be able to prove to us that the constant pillaging of the aquifer resources in this area of Norfolk for irrigation is not having a detrimental effect on our marshes. Failing that we reserve the right to put in a claim against the water company for compensation to offset the deteriorating reed and sedge harvests we are experiencing.

Yours faithfully,



Keith A. McDougall

Keith A. McDougall



PARTNERS: DOUGLAS S. A. McDOUGALL KEITH A. McDOUGALL STRUAN C. McDOUGALL

c.c. to English Nature (Norwich & Peterborough), National Rivers Authority.
Registered V.A. No. 104 9886 46.

ENGLISH
NATURE

Mr Steve Dynes
National Rivers Authority
Cobham Road
IPSWICH
Suffolk
IP3 9JE

East Region Norwich Office

Nature Conservancy Council for England

60 Broadland
Norwich NR4 7BL
Telephone 0603 630338
Fax 0603 627007

Our ref CD3/TS/ 4780

11 August 1993

Dear Steve

CATFIELD FEN

I have just received a letter from Mr Keith McDougall, the owner and occupier of Catfield Fen. He again has expressed "grave fears for the future of Catfield Fen SSSI in relation to the insidious lowering of the ambient water levels over the last 25 years". I too share the same view and would ask that a thorough hydrological investigation of the catchment between the rivers Ant and Thurne be undertaken.

During discussions last year over the proposed Pymmesium borehole licence, your consultants verbally stated that Catfield Fen was being significantly derogated at present by both public water supply and local agricultural licences. This information would support our view that the fen water levels are being lowered. I believe I am right in thinking that the NRA have recently undertaken some new hydrological studies in the vicinity, perhaps these clarify the current situation.

I have asked for a meeting to discuss this subject on several occasions, most recently in a letter to Mr A Hockaday dated 14 April 1993. I do appreciate the pressure the water resources section is under, however in the interest of this sensitive wetland SSSI we must commence discussions without delay.

I will be away on leave from the 26th August to the 7th September but would be happy to meet you at your convenience at any other time.

Yours sincerely

C DOARKS
Conservation Officer
Norfolk Broadland

cc Richard Wright, EN Hydrologist



HILLCREST
MAIN ROAD
TUDDENHAM
NORWICH

7-11-10

Dear *Peter*

CATFIELD FEN

Thank you for showing me the report prepared by Clive Doarks comparing the results of two vegetation surveys ,one from the early 1990's ,the other from 2009. The report uses broad based surveys not designed to provide the critical detail required to assess the drying of the site.

My observations over a ten year period suggest that the site is drying and that the process has been gathering pace during the last two years.

I notice that:-

The royal Fern is declining

In S7 there has been one of the best colonies of crested buckler fern in Norfolk, in June 2010 the drying out of the sphagnum appeared to be threatening the whole population

Populations of the following species are all declining suggesting drier conditions

soft hornwort,
marsh stitchwort
round leaved sundew
marsh cinquefoil
cowbane
milk parsley
greater bladderwort
frogbit
cotton grass
slender sedge
heath spotted orchid

sphagnum papillosum
~~cryptothalpus mirabilis~~
moerckia hibernica

This suggests that the site is under severe pressure and that the decline will be cumulative. My last visit to the site was on Monday the 24th October and that visit confirms my view that the site is drying out

Yours sincerely
Alec

ALEC BULL

Letter to Peter Riches, land agent to Catfield Hall Estate, from Alec Bull

07 April 2011
Our ref:
Your ref:



Jonathan Thompson
Environment Planning Team Leader
Environment Agency
Icenl House
Ipswich
IP3 9JD

Norfolk Land
Management Team
Dragonfly House
2 Gilders Way
Norwich
NR3 1UB

Dear Jonathan

Catfield Fen, Units 3 and 11, Ant Broads and Marshes SSSI
The Broads Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Please find enclosed a copy of a Compendium of Ecological and eco-hydrological evidence from Catfield Fen.

In light of concerns raised regarding the potential drying out of Catfield Fen, Natural England has been reviewing its own evidence, and evidence supplied by Mr & Mrs Harris. This Compendium is a statement of the factual evidence arising from the various sources of evidence and has been prepared between Natural England and Mr and Mrs Harris representing an agreed understanding of the information available.

The evidence presented demonstrates a long-term trend of drying on this site which appears to be accelerating. There is evidence of vegetation change consistent with drying of the wetland habitat.

It is possible that local abstraction may be contributing to this drying. Whilst the scale of this impact is unclear, Natural England considers that it is not possible to conclude that water abstraction does not have a significant effect either alone or in combination with other factors as would be required under the Habitats Regulations tests when considering any new application for water abstraction. Further, based on the information available to Natural England, we consider that the Appropriate Assessment would not be able to conclude that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of the Broads SAC.

Natural England is aware of other factors contributing to the current unfavourable condition of Catfield Fen. We are in discussion with landowners and managers to resolve these land management issues.

Yours faithfully



Sarah Dawkins
Team Leader
Norfolk Land Management Team

cc Mr & Mrs Harris

Natural England
Head Office
1 East Parade
Sheffield S1 2ET

www.naturalengland.org.uk

From: [Alexander Holburn](#)

To: andrew.alston@farmline.com

Sent: Sunday, May 22, 2011 1:32 PM

Subject: Catfield Marshes

Hi Andrew,

You asked for my recollections of traditional water management practices on Catfield marshes.

My experience of the Catfield and adjacent marshes dates from 1973. My father-in-law Percy Neave, and his father Herbert before him, owned or rented most of these marshes. They owned the Moores Head Marsh beside Barton Broad and two marshes to the north of Shoals Dyke at Irstead. They rented marshes from three local charities: Irstead, Neatishead & Barton, and Catfield Pools. The Neaves are also past tenants of Catfield Hall marshes including those parts now owned by the Butterfly Trust. The Neave family's involvement in management of marshes continues to this day.

Percy Neave was immensely knowledgeable and experienced in the day-to-day management of the marshes. He was born in 1914 at Fenside and lived there until his marriage when he moved up to Catfield village where he lived for the rest of his life. Percy made regular inspections of the marshes in his care. I was a frequent visitor to his home and used to keep him company on these expeditions.

In brief, the Neave family has been engaged in harvesting reed and sedge and in maintenance of the Catfield marshes and dykes for many decades. Maintenance included regular clearance of dykes, vital for water flow and for access to the marshes. A sluice through the rond provided further means of control of water levels on Catfield Hall marshes. In times past intermittent 'turving out' of reed beds was undertaken to facilitate water flow onto the marshes and to restore their productivity. The turfed out peat was dried and taken off the marshes to be sold as fuel. Under this regime of active maintenance these marshes were formerly immensely productive of both reed and sedge.

What is also clear is that the Second World War brought an abrupt end to orderly management of the Catfield marshes. Before the war these marshes provided employment for 10 or more marsh-men but few returned to this activity after. Harvesting resumed post-war but output was much reduced. And, while major dykes have been cleared, traditional turving out of marshes virtually ceased.

Before the rond was restored in recent times there was only a single sluice allowing passage of water to and from Catfield Hall marshes. In Percy's childhood the sluice was located a bit down the rond. This old sluice was replaced by Percy with another sluice at a more convenient location near Fenside. For many years Percy regularly checked the water levels and adjusted the boards and flows accordingly. His purpose was, as far as was within his powers, to retain optimal water levels for growth of reed and sedge on Catfield Hall marshes and to sustain sufficient water levels in the inner dykes to permit boating out of product. As water levels inside the old rond tended to be on the low side, he would also permit inflow through the rond when external conditions permitted. Issues of water quality were not then a major part of the decision-taking process for determining optimal water flows and levels. I am not aware of anyone other than Percy controlling the operation of this sluice which was eventually replaced by two new sluices when the rond was restored and control of the sluices passed into other hands.

I think the most likely explanation for the present state of Catfield Hall marshes is persistent failure to apply traditional marsh management techniques. Turving out may be out of fashion but, given the inherently low water levels inside the rond, this procedure may well be crucial to restoring the Hall's reed beds back to health and productivity.

With best wishes,

Dr A M Holburn

32 St Margaret's Road

Oxford OX2 6RX