



THE VERDERERS'
**Countryside
Stewardship
Scheme**



THE VERDERERS' COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME

The Verderers' Countryside Stewardship Scheme is the largest such scheme in England and covers some 17,000 hectares of the New Forest. Its aim is to support the continued depasturing of commoners' animals on the open Forest because of the vital contribution they make to its ecology and landscape. The Scheme is a ten year Agreement between the Verderers and DEFRA which commenced on 1 October 2003. To meet their obligations under the Scheme, the Verderers invite commoners to sign annual agreements,



avoiding the need for commoners to enter into long term commitments. This also makes the Scheme more flexible, as the terms and conditions can be varied each year, to ensure it meets its objectives. Under the terms of the Scheme, commoners are paid money for each animal they depasture, provided that it meets certain qualifying criteria, is entered into the Scheme and that it remains on the Forest for the minimum qualifying period – 7 months for ponies and donkeys, 4 months for cattle and 40 days during the pannage season for pigs. The rate is kept under review and can be adjusted as necessary to help in meeting the Scheme objectives. DEFRA has

set minimum and maximum numbers for animals on the Forest (3,500 and 7,000 respectively), and will only make payments under the Scheme if the number stays within these limits. DEFRA has also set minimum percentages of cattle and ponies – neither must fall below 25% of the total number of animals overall. That is important because of their very different grazing characteristics and the different benefits these provide for the Forest.



OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHEME

Landscape:

By grazing with a mixture of cattle and ponies, maintain the complex mosaic of unenclosed wood pasture, heathland and wet and dry grassland that is characteristic of the New Forest landscape.

Wildlife:

- Achieve 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' status, for all unfavourable compartments within the New Forest SSSI, where grazing is the primary factor affecting conservation status. The target date for achieving this is 2010.
- Graze the Open Forest with a minimum of 3,500 ponies and cattle per annum.
- Inhibit further decline in cattle numbers grazing the Open Forest and ensure that in every year, cattle and ponies each make up at least 25% of the grazing animals.

- Develop a grazing management plan for the Open Forest.
- Identify target areas for support under the geographical areas and winter grazing supplements to be supported under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.
- Support heathland restoration following woodland clearance in recently opened inclosures, through the provision of stock for grazing.

Archaeology:

- Protect sites of archeological interest from overgrazing. Support scrub clearance activity on archeological sites, by encouraging follow-up grazing.
- Encourage the ancient practice of commoning by supporting environmental grazing within the Open Forest.

Access:

Through the traditional practice of grazing, prevent scrub development and encroachment, allowing on-going and uninterrupted access to the Open Forest.

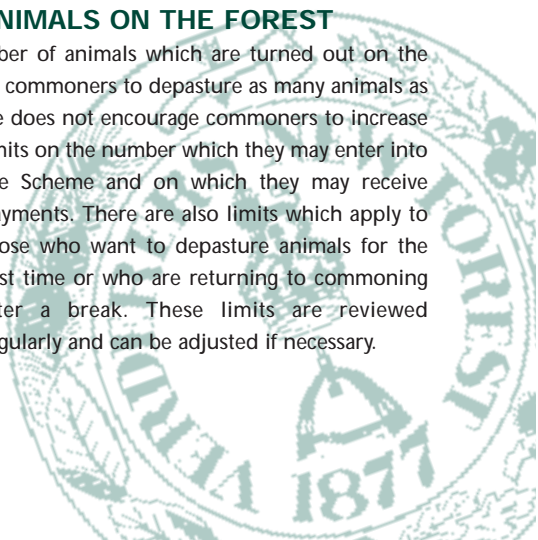
MANAGEMENT

The Scheme has a full time manager who reports to a Sub Committee comprising five Verderers. It is overseen by an Advisory Group with representatives from DEFRA, English Nature, the Verderers, the Forestry Commission, the Commoners' Defence Association, Forest Friendly Farming and the National Trust. Each year, commoners are sent an application form inviting them to apply to join the Scheme. They are then sent agreement forms which confirm exactly how many animals they have entered, and show the amount of money they can expect to receive.



CONTROLLING THE NUMBER OF ANIMALS ON THE FOREST

There is no mechanism for controlling the number of animals which are turned out on the Forest and the Scheme does not affect the right of commoners to depasture as many animals as they wish. So, in order to ensure that the scheme does not encourage commoners to increase the number of animals they turn out, there are limits on the number which they may enter into the Scheme and on which they may receive payments. There are also limits which apply to those who want to depasture animals for the first time or who are returning to commoning after a break. These limits are reviewed regularly and can be adjusted if necessary.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the Verderers' Countryside Stewardship Scheme is available on the Verderers' website: www.verderers.org.uk

CONTACT DETAILS

Scheme Manager Colin Draper
Telephone 02380 283134
E-mail colin@verdererscss.org.uk
Address Scheme Manager, Verderers' Countryside Stewardship Scheme,
The Queen's House, Lyndhurst, Hampshire, SO43 7NH

Published by the Verderers of the New Forest
The Queen's House, Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO43 7NH
Telephone: (023) 8028 2052 Fax: (023) 8028 3101
Web: www.verderers.org.uk E-mail: clerk@verderers.org.uk

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