

South England Forest District
Forestry Commission
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Deputy Surveyor
Bruce Rothnie

26 April 2018

Excessive Poaching of Crown Lands by Forest Stock

I write in support of the letter to all commoners from the Official Verderer expressing concern for areas of the Forest that have been excessively poached this winter.

All the Crown Lands of the New Forest are fully designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As land manager we carry a duty under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to further the conservation of the special features for which it is designated.

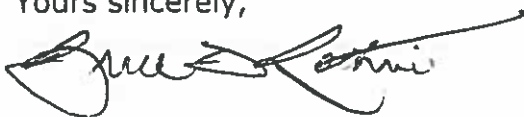
Our obligations under this Act require us to notify and seek approval from Natural England of any operations that are likely to damage the features for which it is designated. This would include any changes to the intensity of grazing regime or the location of stock feeding areas.

The right to depasture stock on to the Forest is vital to the management of the SSSI but when this intensifies to a level where poaching of the ground is damaging the special features then commoners may be in breach of the Act.

It is also possible that some of the areas being poached may impact on the condition of access tracks across the Crown Lands that serve a number of properties. We have recent examples where the damage caused to an access track, legally shared by a number of properties, is causing unrest amongst local residents and this is not reflecting well on the commoning community.

In most cases it is the responsibility of those with an access licence from us to maintain the access tracks in a useable condition. We will seek to enforce that obligation on anyone who recklessly damages an access track and limits its use by other legal users.

Yours sincerely,



Bruce Rothnie
Deputy Surveyor