

## **British Horse Society Briefing Note on the ‘Forestry Commission England Consultation on The Long – Term Role of the Public Forest Estate in England.’**

The British Horse Society urges all equestrians to respond to this consultation.

The consultation can be accessed via the following link <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy> - select ‘Consultation’ on left hand side and then choose online or paper format. Note that all the questions do not have to be answered, and that you can simply respond by letter making the points that you want to make. The consultation ends on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

Responses should be sent to Dominic Driver, Senior Projects Officer, Policy and Programmes Group, Forestry Commission, 620 Bristol Business Park, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS16 1EJ.

The Forestry Commission England Estate extends to about 258,000 hectares of land and could provide more safe off road riding which is badly needed for all sections of the equestrian community.

### **Equestrian are required to purchase a permit to access the following forests:-**

**West Sussex** -Tilgate, Gravetye Woods, St Leonards Forest,  
**East Sussex** – Sheffield Forest, Beckley and Bixley Woods, Darwell, Battle Great Wood, Abbots Wood, Friston Forest, Barnes Wood, Snape Wood, Burwash Woods  
**Kent** – Clowes Wood, Bedgebury, Hemsted, Kings Wood, The Denge, Lyminge Forest, Covert Woods,  
**Surrey** – Abinger, Alice Holt, Chiddingfold, East Horsley  
**Berkshire and Hampshire** - Bramshill (Warren Heath, Heath Warren, Gorrick, Crowthorne, Bramshill Common), Chawton Park, Forest of Bere (West Walk, Hundred Acres, Creech) , Havant Thicket  
**Buckinghamshire** - Wendover woods  
**Isle of Wight** - Parkhurst Forest,  
**West Midlands** – Wyre Forest, Ludlow Forest, Cannock Chase .  
**Nottinghamshire** – Sherwood Forest  
**Dorset** – Ringwood, Wareham, Moors Valley Country Park  
**Cornwall, Devon, West Somerset** – Wootton Courtenay, Goatshurst, Wind Down, St Audries, Birds Hill, Kennisham Hill, Croydon Hill, Culm Davey, Blackdown Hills, Blackborough, Sheldon, Wild Warren, Parehayne, Farway, Monkton Wyld, Hole Common, Morganhayes, Est Hill, Great Plantation, Canonteign, Soussons, Fernworthy, Abbeyford, Berydown, Eggesford, Bithefin, Wadland, Northcombe, Witherdon, Burley Down, Lydford, Denham, Cann Woods, Herods Foot, Burley Down, Bradbridge, Quoditch, Holsworthy, Cookbury, Melbury Hill, Hartland Group, Stowe Wood, Swannacott, Wilsey Down, Halvana, Cardinham, Laneskin, Grogley, Bishops – Hustyn, Idless.

Annual fees of £ 55 per adult and £45 per child are required to ride in those forests where TROT administer permits on behalf of the Forestry Commission. For a family of 4 this represents an annual charge of £200, a fee that is not required from walkers and cyclists.

**Points to consider making when responding to the consultation.**

- Oppose the Forestry Commission's requirement for equestrians to buy a permit to ride in forests when walkers and cyclists do not have to purchase such a permit to enter the forest.
- Assert that informal access on horse back, by horse drawn carriage, on foot and on bicycle should be free in forests where access is permitted.
- Stress that the Forestry Commission should not discriminate against equestrians when providing informal access to forests.
- Support car parking charges when these apply to all users.
- Assert that access to the forests is especially essential for equestrians, as horse riders have access to only 22% of the public rights of way network and carriage drivers to only 5%.
- State that there is no justifiable reason to exclude equestrians from forest tracks on the grounds that they can cause damage, as walkers and cyclists are not excluded when they cause damage – in such instances maintenance is carried out to improve the tracks for them to use, at no cost to them.
- State that contributions for maintenance of routes for informal access should not be sought from equestrians when these are not sought from walkers and cyclists.
- Point out that 75% of horse riders are female, 31% are aged under 16, 18% are aged 16 to 24 and these groups particularly need safe places to ride.
- Point out that many equestrians are not rich, as sometimes perceived and cannot easily pay a permit fee. 25% of horse owners earn less than £10,000 per annum. Paying for access particularly discriminates against lower socio – economic groups.
- Equestrians who cannot purchase permits may have to ride on the roads which is inherently less safe than off – road riding. The BHS supports aim 5 of the British Horse Industry Confederation 'Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales' to 'Increase access to off-road riding and carriage driving'.

- In Scotland under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 the FCS is proactive and has entered into the spirit of access by improving tracks in the forests for riders and promoting at no cost to the riders, for example in Loch Lomond the Trossachs National Park.
- No permits are required in Scotland, access is free to all unstructured recreational users.

The BHS believes that local riders should be able to access Forestry Commission woods on equal terms with other user groups. Those that arrive under their own steam should not be expected to buy permits. Those that arrive by motorized transport should be expected to pay car parking fees as do other user groups.

The BHS recognizes the value of Riding Associations to encourage responsible use of forests, monitor numbers, enhance communication and make voluntary financial contributions. It does not support financial contributions by one user group.