

Forestry England Horse Riding Permits Survey

Online survey submitted on 6 April 2023

Response as: Not a horse rider, carriage driver, nor an equestrian organisation.

2. Do you use Forestry England sites for riding/carriage driving?



Yes

3. Forestry England is divided into Forest Districts, as shown in the image. If known, please select the Forest District that covers the woodland you access for riding/carriage driving (please select all that apply).

West

4. Do you know the name of the Forestry England woodland that you visit for riding/carriage driving? If yes, please write this in the box provided.

Numerous woods across Devon

Questions 5 – 24 were aimed specifically at individual horse riders, carriage drivers or equestrian organisations.

Additional comments

25. Do you have any additional comments not covered in the survey questions

The Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) responded to consultations in 2006 (England's Trees, Woods and Forests – Defra) and 2009 (Public Forest Estate). In response to both these the DCAF mentioned that the current permit system for horse-riders causes frustration as the permits are arbitrary, affecting both local riders and horse tourism and local riders. The DCAF advised that there should be no charge for informal recreational use. The situation over the past fifteen plus years does not appear to have caused a change to this advice.

The forests offer considerable physical health and wellbeing benefits for recreational access users and the DCAF is strongly of the opinion that there should be no charge for informal recreational use for any group of users, unless Forestry England offers very specialist facilities or there are organised horse events. To charge for one particular use seems to be discriminatory and there should also be consistency across forest districts and individual sites on this matter.

Forestry England tracks provide ideal horse riding in a safe traffic free environment and any financial disincentive to their use should be removed. Charging for permits may encourage horse riders onto other areas which are less suitable for horse riders or are less able to cope with increased visitor numbers.

Where there are problems associated with access use, for example where there are sensitive nature conservation sites, soil poaching or erosion of historic sites, the DCAF advises that these should be dealt with by management solutions and not by raising a charge. Some more heavily used sites, such as Haldon Forest Park, already charge for vehicle parking to cover some costs of facilities and maintenance.

In the initial background to the consultation, Forestry England mentioned some of the problems but did not provide details on how widespread permits are and the charge. No clear evidence was given on the extent of the issues and whether use by horse riders or carriage drivers results in significantly higher costs of maintenance or clean up than any other user group.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) is a local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). Its statutory remit is to give independent advice “as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area...” The Act specifies section(94)4 bodies that the forum has a duty to advise and these include the Forestry Commission and the Secretary of State for any Government Department.