

VERDERERS' GRAZING SCHEME

On 1st March 2012, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme was replaced by a new Verderers' Grazing Scheme (VGS). It is administered by the Verderers as part of their responsibilities under the Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS). The new Verderers' Grazing Scheme is a partnership with the owners of the adjacent commons i.e. Hampshire County Council, Minstead Manor, National Trust, Waterslade Farm and Wellow Parish Council. All of these adjacent commons have their own HLS agreements with Natural England which requires them to support the VGS.

The New Forest is of very high importance for biodiversity particularly the internationally important mosaic of heathland, mire and wood pasture which occurs nowhere else on such a scale, and owes its character to centuries of common grazing. The new Verderers' Grazing Scheme is designed to support commoning financially, by making payments to commoners to maintain the continuity of their animals' grazing, and these terms and conditions outline the responsibilities of those receiving this payment. The purpose of the scheme is to pay money to commoners for good practice; it does not alter or infringe common rights.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. **Eligibility.** To be eligible for the Scheme a commoner must:
 - 1.1 Hold common rights for the animals that they enter in the scheme.
 - 1.2 Actively depasture all their animals that are entered in the scheme, for the full qualifying periods.
 - 1.3 Pay Marking Fees for all their animals that are depastured.
 - 1.4 Enter all depastured animals into the Scheme, both those on the Crown Lands and those on the adjacent commons.
 - 1.5 Comply where they apply with the Verderers' byelaws, the New Forest Acts, the Forestry Commission byelaws, National Trust byelaws, the 1964 Commons agreement, and the terms and conditions of the Scheme, at all times.
 - 1.6 Meet the Verderers' standards for animal welfare and any additional welfare requirements introduced by law or good agricultural practice.
 - 1.7 Own all the animals that he or she enters in the Scheme and provide proof of ownership to the Scheme Manager on request.
 - 1.8 Have a valid Equine or Bovine Passport, or an entry in the Verderers' List, for all of their ponies and/or cattle that are depastured – regardless of whether or not they are entered in the Scheme.
 - 1.9 Comply with all directives issued by or on behalf of the Verderers.
 - 1.10 Maintain reasonable commoning standards and practices at all times (as determined by the Verderers).
 - 1.11 Not encroach on the Crown land or other common land
 - 1.12 Not park machinery, vehicles, materials or equipment on the common land without the consent of the Forestry Commission or other common owner.
2. **Qualifying Criteria for Animals entered in the Scheme.**
 - 2.1 To qualify for entry to the Scheme, ponies cattle and donkeys must be liable for the payment of Marking Fees for at least the period for which they are required to be depastured.
3. **Minimum Age of Scheme Members.**
 - 3.1 Applications from children under the age of 18 must be countersigned by a parent or guardian. Such applications will be accepted on the basis that the parent or guardian assumes full responsibility for the management, health and welfare of the animals turned out.
4. **Qualifying Periods.**

4.1 **Members.** To qualify for membership, commoners must legally depasture animals in accordance with the principles of the scheme, for the previous 3 years. Commoners who have already completed this qualifying period will be allowed to join immediately.

4.2 **Stock.** To qualify for the Scheme, animals must be turned out for the following minimum qualifying periods in the scheme year 1st March – 28th February:

Ponies – 7 months

Donkeys – 7 months

Cattle – 4 Months

Pigs – 40 days – or other period notified when the pannage season is announced (this will depend on the number of acorns available) – during the pannage season.

5. **Farming Standards.**

5.1 Scheme members must abide by DEFRA’s standards of Good Farming Practice across the whole of their holding (copies of this are available from DEFRA) – and must also meet DEFRA cross compliance requirements on their holding – including any land that is rented or leased, and on the common land within the New Forest.

5.2 Scheme members must maintain safe stock proof fences on any boundary of their land with the open Forest/common land.

5.3 Scheme members and their animals must not damage the SSSI in any way that contributes to that part of the SSSI becoming “unfavourable” in condition.

5.4 Scheme members must comply with any request from the Verderers to move, or remove, animals if they are contributing to damage to the SSSI.

5.5 Payments may be made to members who move or remove animals in response to a request from the Verderers to meet grazing requirements (under/over grazing). Where stock is moved in response to a requirement for additional grazing on an area which is assessed as undergrazed, the Agisters will assist in monitoring the condition and welfare of those animals on behalf of the owner and provide the owner with any necessary reasonable assistance with their management. But please note that responsibility for the health and welfare of stock depastured on the Forest remains with the animals’ owners at all times.

6. **Animal Welfare.**

6.1 Scheme members must meet the Verderers standards for animal welfare, for all their animals, not just those which are entered in the Scheme, at all times.

6.2 Poor, injured, lame or sick animals must be removed from the open Forest as soon as their removal is requested by an Agister. Such animals must be held in suitable accommodation, or moved to back-up land at the member’s expense.

6.3 If directed to remove an animal from the Forest by the Verderers or their agents, this must be done immediately. Any animal which is removed under these circumstances, must not be returned to the Open Forest without the express consent of the Verderers.

6.4 Members who do not remove animals within 10 days of a request to do so by an Agister, will have their payment reduced by at least an equivalent amount to the payment due for that number of animals. (This is without prejudice to any other action the Verderers may see fit to take under the scheme rules or the byelaws.)

6.5 It is not the duty of the Agisters to remove stock for commoners, although they will provide assistance subject to availability and other commitments. Commoners who are able to assist but who simply rely on the Agisters to catch their animals and do not assist when asked to do so, may have their payments reduced at the discretion of the Verderers, depending on the circumstances.

6.6 Members must inform an Agister immediately if an animal which has been removed from the Forest subsequently escapes. Owners of animals which are found back on the Forest, which they have not reported to an Agister, will have their payments reduced and may be excluded from the Scheme for one or more years.

7. **Holding/Back-up Grazing.**

7.1 Scheme members must provide details of their land and any buildings used to support their commoning activity including providing a map of his or her back up grazing. Where land is shared, acreage may only be counted once i.e. the same land may not be used to support more than one application, so members sharing back-up grazing land should apportion their back up grazing between themselves in their applications.

7.2 Scheme members must maintain their interest in their holding, as described in their Scheme application, for at least the period of time that their animals are required to remain depastured on the Forest. They must inform the Scheme manager of any changes to who owns or occupies their holding, or any part of their holding, in writing, within 14 days of the change.

7.3 The number of animals qualifying for payment will be limited to those with the availability of ¼ acre of back up grazing per animal (excluding pigs). This requirement is without prejudice to the Verderer's longstanding policy of permitting the depasturing of a greater number of animals than specified in this clause.

8. **Supplementary Feeding.**

8.1 Scheme members must not provide their animals with supplementary feed on the open Forest, other than in emergency conditions, except where authorised and approved by the Verderers. The location of feeding areas may be adjusted to address over/under grazing issues, in consultation with the commoners using those areas.

9. **Farm Opportunities Record.**

9.1 Scheme members are required to complete a Farm Opportunities Record during the lifetime of the Scheme (assistance with this will be provided free of charge, if requested). Such records will be confidential and will not be disclosed to any third party.

10. **Worming.**

10.1 Wormers containing Ivermectin must not be used on the Forest. Animals treated with Ivermectin off the Forest must be kept off for at least two weeks to allow the active ingredients to become inert before the livestock is turned out. Commoners wishing to use wormers on the Forest should seek advice from the vet on alternative products.

11. **General.**

11.1 Entrants to the scheme must have paid their own marking fees. Payments of marking fees on behalf of a scheme member will not be accepted.

11.2 An individual Cap of £6,000 will apply to all payments under the Scheme.

11.3 Entrants to the scheme must have their own bank account in their own name – all payments will be by bank transfer to the scheme entrant.

11.4 Owners agree to allow the Scheme Manager to conduct a cross check of passport numbers via NFPB&CS/passport issuing authority to confirm ownership.

11.5 Any abuse of the scheme such as trying to circumvent the rules or spirit of the scheme in any way will result in payment being withheld.

11.6 A stock density of 0.25 LU/ha will be used to regulate animal numbers. An increase in the number of animals turned out, either by an individual scheme member, or in the overall total, may result in the Verderers reducing payments to members.

11.7 Payments will be based on the relative Livestock values assigned to depastured stock as follows:

Cattle – 1 Livestock Unit

Registered pure bred New Forest Ponies, excluding geldings – 0.8 Livestock Unit

All other equines – Cost of marking fee⁴.

Pigs – 0.3 Livestock Unit

11.8 There is to be no cross subsidy for animals turned out on the adjacent commons. The Scheme must not pay out more to commoners depasturing stock on those adjacent commons than is received from those adjacent common land owners with HLS agreements.

11.9 Information about commoners and their animals on the adjacent commons and details of payments made to those commoners will be provided to those commons' HLS holders.

11.10 Providing animals have been depastured for the minimum qualifying periods, monies due to deceased members will be paid to the executors of their estate.

11.11 Members who pay for some or all of their depastured animals at the commons rate must agree to allow information relating to their commoning activity to be shared with the owners of those commons to assist them in their management.

11.12 Under the terms of the HLS agreement with Natural England, payments may not be made to anyone who is found to be in breach of cross compliance requirements. In order to ensure compliance with this condition, members who enter the scheme agree to allow information relating to their commoning activity to be shared with the RPA and Natural England and also agree to allow the RPA and Natural England to share information about them with the scheme management.

11.13 Members are required to allow information on animal health matters affecting their animals, which may be held by the Animal Health & Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) or other government agencies, to be shared with the Verderers in order to assist with the management of animal diseases on the Forest/Commons. To assist with this, members are to provide their CPH holding number when completing their annual membership application¹.

11.14 Members must comply with instructions from the Verderers on implementation of contingency plans for the control and management of animal diseases².

12. **Changes.**

12.1 Changes may be introduced from time to time, and scheme members will be notified in writing. Scheme members must comply with any changes. Changes introduced during a scheme year will not normally take effect until the following scheme year, except when one of the following is applicable:

12.1.1 application forms have not yet gone out;

12.1.2 imposed as a result of the requirements of EU or national legislation

12.1.3 a SSSI parcel is notified as, or is in danger of becoming, damaged or overgrazed.

13. **Non Compliance.**

13.1 Failure to comply with these rules will result in automatic disqualification from the Scheme, or a lesser penalty at the discretion of the Verderers' Grazing Scheme Management Committee. A member who is disqualified will not receive any payment for a year, but may be allowed to rejoin the Scheme the following year depending on the reason and nature of their disqualification, provided that they are able to satisfy the Verderers of their intention to comply with the rules. A lesser penalty will normally involve the withholding of part of any payment due under the Scheme. Commoners who allow 2 year old colts to run on the Forest after 1 February, will have £400. deducted from their VGS payment that year (or payment withheld if less than that amount)³.

¹ Revised at VGS Management Committee meeting held on 19 February 2014

² Revised at VGS Management Committee meeting held on 19 February 2014

³ Revised at VGS Management Committee meeting held on 10 July 2013

⁴ Revised at Verderers Court held on 17 December 2014