



Statement in support of PSPO

Gillie Molland, Lead Ranger, New Forest National Park Authority

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 I have been Lead Ranger for the New Forest National Park Authority for last 12 years. The ranger team works across the whole National Park and its surrounding areas providing a strong visible presence on the ground and a first point of contact for local people and visitors. The New Forest is one of the most visited National Parks in the UK, receiving some 15 million day visitors each year.
- 1.2 Our work focuses on proactive engagement with the public. We ensure a presence at locations with high numbers of people to reduce negative impacts from recreation and promote key 'Caring for the Forest' messages such as the New Forest Code.

Follow the New Forest code

The New Forest is a unique place with rare wildlife and free-roaming livestock. Thank you for helping us care for this special place by following the simple New Forest code:

Be Forest Friendly!

| | | |
|---|--|--|
|  Keep your distance from the animals – don't feed or touch them |  Keep dogs under control. Don't let dogs approach or chase any animals |  Stick to the permitted cycle tracks |
|  Take home litter and dog waste |  Park only in car parks |  Drive with care – animals on the road! |
|  No fires or barbecues |  No wild camping |  Help wildlife by keeping to the main tracks |

Forestry England
NEW FOREST COMMONERS
NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK
Hampshire County Council
New Forest DISTRICT COUNCIL
go new forest
National Trust
wildlife TRUSTS Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
love the forest

1.3 Whilst the majority of people visiting the Forest behave responsibly, over recent years and particularly in the last two years, we have witnessed an increasing incidence of antisocial and damaging behaviour across the New Forest, with BBQ's, stoves & fires, pony petting & feeding and dog behaviour issues being the most frequent.

2.0 Issues associated with livestock feeding and petting

2.1 In the last two years, all three Area Rangers have reported having to speak to people about livestock feeding and petting on a daily basis across all areas of the New Forest. Some additional hotspots such as Bolton's Bench are known to have persistent issues, despite new and prominent signage around the site. A one hour visit to Bolton's Bench during the 2020 Easter holidays saw 37 petting incidents on the site including one lady being bitten whilst trying to feed a pony crisps. My team have all had times when members of the public have been asked to keep their distance from the livestock but their requests have been ignored and people have persisted or waited until they believed rangers were out of sight and continued.

2.2 People putting out food and discarding vegetables is also an ongoing issue which is harmful to the ponies, attracting them to the roadsides and putting them at risk from being struck by cars, as well as stopping them from seeking their own natural food. The discarded scraps also provide food for ground nesting bird predators such as corvids and foxes, whose increasing populations threaten the internationally designated habitats and wildlife that so many people value and come to enjoy.

2.3 The risk is not just to the ponies and the fabric of the Forest, it is a serious risk for car drivers if their vehicle is involved in a road traffic accident (RTA) involving ponies and other grazing animals.



Photograph of RTA with grazing livestock: Sept 2013



New Forest National Park Authority

25 Jan 2021 · 🌐

Please do not feed the livestock.

What you think is kindness may in f... See more



Real New Forest - CDA · Follow

24 Jan 2021 · 🌐

!! This pony was found choking 🦴 !!
on the side of the road from carrots that had been cut into chunks and left by the road for... See more



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22 Jun 2021 · 🌐

HIT AND RUN. REWARD UP TO £5000 OFFERED. Do you know the driver of, possibly a Volvo, that has left Bracken, without her foal.... See more



Various media posts from 2021 and a New Forest pony mourning the loss of a foal in a 'hit and run' incident

- 2.4 Furthermore, this constant feeding and petting of ponies is already leading ponies to adopt some 'learned behaviours' by closely associating visitors with food. It is increasingly common to see ponies congregating around parked cars, harassing and 'begging' the car's occupants for food. Not only is this bad for the ponies and the future of commoning in the New Forest, it spoils people's enjoyment of the area and in a few cases, people can feel quite intimidated. A snapshot of the 119 'feeding and petting' incidents recorded by the NPA Ranger Team over a six month period in 2021 is attached as Annex 1.



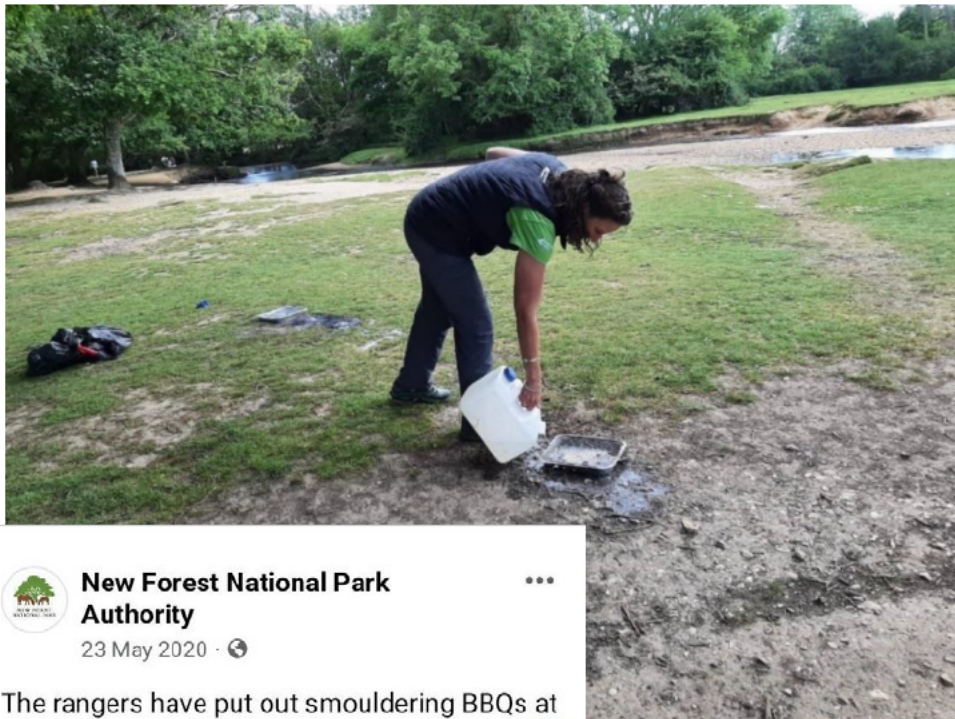
Pony petting at Hatchet Pond on 24 August 2022




A pony becomes aggressive having got trapped between two cars after taking food from the driver of the grey coloured car - Cadnam Cricket pitch

3.0 Issues associated with BBQ's campfires and gas stoves

3.1 Despite a series of campaigns and a ban on bbq's and fires on the Crown Lands we still have to speak to a considerable number of people and educate them on the threat of fire and ask them to extinguish bbq's, campfires and gas stoves. On one day alone in the summer of 2020 rangers and New Forest staff on patrol had to deal with some 50 bbq and campfire incidents on the open Forest.




May 2020: NPA lead ranger Gillie Molland puts out a smouldering BBQ in the open countryside

 **New Forest National Park Authority** ...
23 May 2020 · 🌐

The rangers have put out smouldering BBQs at Brockenhurst, Linford and Anderwood today. 😞

The New Forest is on high alert for wildfires so BBQs and fires of any kind are NOT allowed. ❌
🔥 🙏



👍👎🙏 2.7k 965 comments • 5.6k shares

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3.2 One of the impacts of climate change on the New Forest is hotter, drier summers - as experienced this year with successive heatwaves and an extraordinarily dry spell. The risk of a wild fire is at an all time high and just one discarded bbq or abandoned campfire could have devastating impacts, putting people and their livelihoods at risk.



Photograph of Forest fire: August 2022



Photograph of Forest fire: April 2020

- 3.3 [REDACTED], our North area ranger comments, “I would say during the summer months I speak to members of the public at various sites across the National Park about fire issues each time I am out - and I am out 4 or 5 times a week. I come across discarded BBQ's in bushes, motorhomes/campervans with stoves out the back of their vehicles or families pitching up with disposable BBQ's. I am also aware of the problems caused by the feeding and petting of commoners' animals – I recall a recent story told to me by a member of the public (on 25 August 2022) in which they said they were

witness to a donkey kicking out at a member of the public at Bolton's Bench after being very persistent in trying to get to the member of the public's food. Luckily no injury was sustained on that occasion."

- 3.4 [REDACTED], our South area ranger adds "with the ban on bbqs, camping stoves are becoming more prolific this year and people think they are exempt".



An increasingly common sight in the New Forest

- 3.5 All the NPA rangers, including myself have come across sites where disposable bbqs or camp fires have been used and abandoned posing huge fire risks and a danger to livestock and the public as reported in this BBC One Show episode featuring myself in the New Forest and a boy, aged 10 burnt by a discarded beach BBQ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00183mv#>.

- 3.6 The NPA has undertaken much work to promote the bbq ban to a wide audience. The PowerPoint attached as Annex 2 was used for talks to community groups, Parish Councils and other local organisations in 2021.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 For the foreseeable future, further recreational demands are likely to be placed on the National Park due to a combination of people taking more 'staycation' holidays and more people living close by (some 130,000 new houses are planned to be built within 25km of the boundary of the National Park).
- 4.2 It is no longer enough to simply rely on educational and awareness raising campaigns to tackle the threat of wild fires and inappropriate human interactions with Forest livestock. We need greater sanctions to tackle these persistent antisocial behaviours on the open Forest and that is why the National Park Authority supports the New Forest District Council in making a Public Space Protection Order.