

British Horse Society



Scotland

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
Registered Charity Nos 210504 and SCO38516

Background

The British Horse Society Scotland is pleased to respond to the “Climate Change and the National Forest Estate” section of the Scottish Climate Change Bill and trusts that the interests of the equestrian industry will be observed.

The BHSS is the country’s largest equestrian charity with nearly 5,000 members, which exists for the good of horses, and in the interests of all riders, carriage drivers and keepers of horses, donkeys, mules, etc. It is active in the fields of welfare, access, road safety and training. The British Horse Society (BHS) is the UK’s largest equestrian charity with nearly 70,000 members.

As an independent charity the BHSS supports every rider, carriage driver, horse owner and anyone with any equine connection. BHSS directly represents over 8,500 individuals who pay a membership fee to the BHS and to BHS affiliated riding clubs in Scotland. We are therefore Scotland’s largest direct equestrian membership organisation.

The equestrian industry in Scotland is growing rapidly. There is in the region of 100,000 horses in Scotland. These horses on average generate over £1,700 per horse into their local rural economy, therefore are an active contributor to the Scottish rural economy.

The membership of our Society has grown an average of 6% annually for the last five years, reflecting a growth in the numbers of people taking up horse riding as a healthy life choice.

The Scottish Government has instigated legislation, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 that encourages non-motorised users (NMUs) to get out and take healthy access. BHSS welcomes this positive intervention as well as the government efforts towards a greener Scotland.

The BHS has campaigned for years to reverse the trend, that on average there are 8 recorded horse related incidents on British roads each day ranging in severity from near misses to accidents that are fatal to people, both vehicle drivers, riders and leaders of horses. By giving the ability to ride off road in the safe national forests across Scotland, the capacity for enhancing and saving lives for all concerned is within reach.

Overview

The British Horse Society Scotland (BHSS) strongly supports green energy and any move towards the reduction of carbon emissions.

Rural equestrian business currently plays a huge role in the rural economy across the whole of Scotland, including the urban fringes as well as in rural areas. Recreational access is a very important factor in this, however to get to safe off road hacking many riders and carriage drivers must negotiate roads which are getting much busier and more dangerous to the vulnerable user.

The Scottish Government has spent a lot of time debating access legislation that has produced many safe riding and carriage driving routes within the national forests. The BHSS has concerns that this consultation does not take into account the issues that have arisen with private forestry enterprises since 2005, namely the culture of obstructing routes and being unhelpful when approached. Any form of agreement must be clear on all forms of access rights, and maintenance of those rights.

The BHSS cannot understand why the Scottish Government feels the need to remove control of the national forest and give to private enterprise. The forests belong to the people; we need to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy them. The FCS has the expertise, the knowledge, the people and the acumen – why change what isn't broken!

With the single outcome agreement having the potential to cause financial problems in some sectors, it is worrying that funds generated by any of the proposals do not seem to be ring fenced. If funds are not re-invested into recreation, communities, education, etc the national forest will not be able to fulfil its obligations to the people of Scotland.

Question 1

Joint ventures with renewable energy programmes have already been a success with FCS in the driving seat. FCS has the expertise and skills.

Question 2

The BHSS is concerned that access rights and maintenance of trails would not be promoted or sustained for NMUs if the forests are leased to private companies, as happens already in some areas.

Question 3

The BHSS feels that FCS is in a better position, than a "not for profit trust" with its expertise and relationship with the Scottish Government

Question 4

Summary

The BHSS appreciates the reasons behind this review of public forests, but overall the current system is, in our experience working well and we would therefore question the need to "fix things", especially as some of the proposals seek to re-create a management model very similar to the one currently in place.

[The British Horse Society Scotland](#)
Pat Somerville (Access Officer)