

Position Statement



Upland Livestock farming in National Parks

National Parks contain some of the most beautiful and remote landscapes to be found in England. Most of these diverse areas spanning both uplands and lowlands include unimproved grassland, moorland, heath and bog that depend on livestock grazing for long-term conservation management. A decline in sympathetic livestock grazing will directly affect the future of landscape quality and biodiversity throughout the National Parks, the farming communities that it supports, and the cultural and historical heritage that it forms part of and helps to preserve. National Park Authorities therefore recognise that in order to maintain and enhance the special qualities of the National Parks for all to enjoy the financial viability of key livestock farming systems must be secured and awareness must be raised of the valuable contribution that is made by cattle, sheep and pony grazing. This statement considers the essential contribution made by livestock farming in England's upland National Parks.

England's National Parks

Our National Parks are a truly national treasure. They are also living landscapes peopled by farmers, others who manage the land and people living in rural communities. Each of the nine National Parks in England has a National Park Authority. These are independent bodies funded by central Government and have the following two purposes:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of National Parks; and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public.

In carrying out these purposes, they also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

Livestock Farming

Much of the land in National Parks falls within Less Favoured Areas (LFA) that are not naturally highly productive for agriculture. In these hard environments farming has evolved over the centuries based on extensive systems that are not dependant upon large

amounts of artificial inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides, low levels of mechanisation and relatively high labour input (in terms of hours worked).

Output per hectare is generally low when compared to more productive land and, particularly when compared to intensive farming systems. By working with natural processes and within the productive capacity of the land, extensive farming methods can help to maintain and improve environmental qualities.

The importance of extensive livestock farming to National Parks in England

Livestock farming can play a valuable role within National Parks by delivering a range of highly desirable public benefits and environmental services.

Livestock farming in upland National Parks:

- ***shapes these distinctive landscapes*** and has done so over thousands of years. Many of these iconic landscapes depend on managed grazing to retain their valued characteristics especially given that most large wild grazing animals have long since disappeared. Numerous historical and archaeological features are preserved through farming practices, such as avoiding change caused by ploughing or tree growth. Free roaming livestock are also an intrinsic part of the landscape in some National Parks, and cherished by people.
- ***is essential for nature conservation*** through helping to create and being essential for the maintenance of semi-natural habitats, delicate ecosystems and biodiversity.
- ***assists access*** - the vast majority of accessible countryside in the National Parks has been created by livestock grazing. By managing vegetation, grazing helps to maintain the land in a condition that makes it more readily accessible. Improved access routes encourage people to experience some of the most beautiful landscapes in England.
- ***supports rural economies*** by providing the basis of rural economies for many areas in the National Parks based on high quality, naturally produced goods such as lamb and beef, and responds to the increasingly widespread demand for distinctive food that is produced locally and farmed sustainably.
- ***maintains rural skills/heritage*** by sustaining methods and systems of farming across generations, including a range of traditional skills that are widely recognised as important to preserve. Extensive livestock farming forms a key part of the cultural landscape of the National Parks.
- ***helps connect habitats*** through the expansion of semi-natural vegetation that buffers, extends and links habitats, increasing connectivity at a landscape scale. Connectivity is increasingly seen as key to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and as a means of strengthening the resilience of habitats, particularly in the face of climate change.
- ***contributes to maintaining carbon stores*** by maintaining the natural carbon stores through the sustainable management of carbon-rich soils, peatland systems and woodland, so playing an important role in ensuring carbon emissions are controlled.
- ***forms an essential backdrop to tourism*** in some National Parks, tourism generates vast revenue in comparison with agriculture. Tourism, however, is largely dependent upon a landscape maintained and enhanced by livestock farming. Farming enterprises, that themselves can become attractions, can complement responsible

tourism and support rural incomes. It also helps strengthen links between producer and consumer for local produce.

- ***reduces pollution*** - the low or non-existent levels of nutrient input to extensive livestock systems minimise the amount of diffuse pollution produced from these areas. Public costs for dealing with diffuse pollution may therefore be reduced.

The threats leading to a decline in livestock numbers and extensive farming in National Parks

Farming is, to a large extent at the mercy of economic factors affecting the market for farm and related products and European Union and Government policy. The BSE crisis in the 1980s and Foot and Mouth disease outbreaks in 2001 and 2007 hit the livestock sector in National Parks extremely hard. International exchange rates and relatively cheap imports continue to depress the prices for some farm commodities so that prices received for UK products can be lower than the cost of production.

In addition, public funding for agriculture is shifting as the changes arising from the review of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) take effect. Public funding support is being 'decoupled' from production and in England this has led to the introduction of the Single Payment Scheme that will lead to a reduction in overall funding for farming in National Parks as the value of the payments decreases. Other areas, some of which are much more productive in agricultural terms, are receiving big increases in funding, for example, areas devoted to horticulture.

The review of special hill farming support is also likely to mean a reduction in income from this source. The decision to limit Hill Farm Allowance (HFA) payments (and future upland support) to only 'Severely Disadvantaged Area' land will mean a reduction of income from this source for some, since the money from the Disadvantaged Area was removed from the pot.

Many farms in National Parks have benefited in the past from agri-environment schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and these schemes have provided important income linked to environmental management by farmers and commoners. The move to the new Environmental Stewardship schemes (Entry Level and Higher Level Schemes) is likely to benefit many farms in National Parks, but there is real concern that the national measures may not address the reality of land management in some National Parks.

How livestock farming is changing

The response to the cumulative impact of the pressures outlined above is leading to significant changes in farming in our National Parks. As farm support based on production continues to decline, farmers in National Parks are being faced with stark decisions about their future business strategy. Increasing stock numbers, cutting the cost of inputs and relinquishing the more marginal land is an option for some livestock producers seeking to compete with world commodity prices.

This strategy will have important implications for the maintenance of the character and special features of National Park landscapes. There is already a trend away from keeping stock that are well adapted to grazing the less-productive semi-natural areas in favour of

stock better suited to more productive land. Reduced grazing is in places leading to the spread of gorse, bracken or conifers replacing heather. We are witnessing a change in breed of cattle, from hill breeds, to less hardy breeds that generally fare better than traditional breeds in winter housing, and a demand for larger sheds to enable finishing of stock using more intensive systems and imported feed.

The pressure on those involved in agriculture “to get bigger, get different or get out” is leading to major changes including:

- a reduction in livestock numbers, particularly cattle, leading to less grazing of moorland, heathland and other semi-natural habitats with a consequent increase in scrub and the loss of important species and of the open character of landscapes;
- pressure for non agricultural development impacting on the character of the National Park as farms develop other sources of income to survive;
- pressure to move to new farm products, such as biomass and energy crops, which impact on landscape and ecology;
- an increase in the development of commercial recreation, such as equestrian and motor sports, and inappropriate game shooting affecting the sense of tranquility in some of our least spoiled landscapes;
- a loss of middle sized farms leading to a smaller number of large farms covering larger areas and requiring new farm buildings and other infrastructure;
- some farms becoming more intensive with effects on the farmed landscape including, for example, more large agricultural buildings; and
- loss of employment in farming and subsequent loss of rural skills and reduced maintenance of landscape feature such as hedgebanks.

ENPAA’s Position

National Park Authorities regard traditional approaches to livestock farming as essential for the management and conservation of landscapes, habitats and cultural heritage that make the National Parks special.

National Park Authorities wish to work with other agencies and organisations to:

- support and strengthen the economic activity of appropriate livestock farming in National Parks;
- support the social systems on which traditional farming depends, including the use of spatial planning to avoid incompatible land use or management changes;
- raise awareness, both nationally and locally, of the environmental and public benefits gained through traditional livestock farming within National Parks and its contribution in responding to public concerns over the quality and locality of food, in maintaining local distinctiveness, the preservation of rural skills, and the threats facing rural communities through the loss of essential services;
- seek increased financial support for traditional livestock farming as essential and fully justified, given the public benefits that accrue;
- work in partnership with farmers, commoners, land owners, local communities and other organisations to promote traditional livestock farming and share technical expertise and knowledge;

- support public and private projects throughout the National Parks that promote traditional livestock farming. Several National Park Authorities, for example, are involved in restoration projects to preserve moorlands, including the ‘Exmoor Conservation and Restoration Plan’, the ‘Moors Futures Plan’ in Dartmoor and the ‘Moors for the Future’ project in the Peak District;
- assist farmers to enter into agri-environment agreements and provide ongoing support to these agreement holders to ensure they can deliver maximum public benefits, as well as obtaining valuable farm income from the schemes;
- assist farmers to tap into additional income streams so that they can afford to farm extensively. Examples include developing higher value products, utilising the opportunities offered by the proximity of markets, and encouraging involvement in nature-based tourism; and
- work to ensure wider public awareness by providing opportunities for visitors to learn about extensive farming and the benefits it delivers.

We support:

- wider application of traditional livestock farming so that more land in the National Parks can be managed within its natural capacity as semi-natural habitats;
- branding and marketing of high-quality produce that promotes traditional livestock farming in National Parks;
- work that assists farms to reduce their environmental footprint, including through direct practical help, research, and funding; and
- initiatives to encourage consumers to champion traditional livestock farming through the purchase of high-quality produce and through support for local farmers markets that re-establish the link between producer and consumer.

Supporting action

National Park Authorities are committed to doing their bit, but we must be supported in the task. It is imperative that those who have the opportunity to make a difference - and sometimes greater resources - do likewise.

We look to Government to:

- acknowledge the importance of traditional livestock farming in conserving the species-rich habitats and landscapes of England’s National Parks and the valuable work that has already been carried out by NPAs and their partners;
- recognise the significant environmental, social and economic threats posed to National Parks, rural communities, and to the wider public through the potential loss of traditional livestock farming;
- increase the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme budget, if necessary by shifting resources from modulated payments, and alter the Entry Level Scheme so that it achieves more environmental benefits. This will help to ensure that the environmental and public goods delivered by livestock farming in National Parks and other protected areas can be retained;
- introduce the ‘Upland Rewards Scheme’ in a way that builds on the environmental benefits of the Entry Level Scheme, recognises the value of National Parks, and includes a simple Capital Grants Scheme. This would serve as recognition of the difficulties faced by farmers in these remote, and often inhospitable, landscapes;

- influence the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to provide funding to retain appropriate grazing where it is uneconomic but necessary for environmental management; moving funding from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 of the CAP; and developing a business case for public intervention and appropriately funded schemes; and
- reward farmers and land managers for their valuable management of carbon sinks.

We also look to:

- **Natural England** to continue to provide the technical expertise and support that will help NPAs to retain appropriate farming systems in the National Parks, including promoting the public benefits accrued through appropriate livestock farming and encouraging wider public understanding of these farming methods;
- **The Environment Agency** to continue to work with NPAs to encourage farming practices that are sensitive to the ecological health of the water environment through the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and Defra's Catchment-Sensitive Farming programme;
- **Regional Development Agencies** to provide a targeted support framework to reinforce work by NPAs in promoting extensive farming and its contribution to the local economy. We encourage RDAs to support NPAs by providing funding for capital expenditure for appropriate farm diversification. We also look to them to promote collaboration, local branding, skills development, and education to encourage environmentally sustainable farming practices;
- **Regional Assemblies (and if the law is changed as proposed, RDAs)** to adopt and implement planning policies at a regional level that seek to reverse the fragmentation of landscapes and reflect the value of extensively farmed environments. There is also a need to ensure that there is sufficient affordable housing within rural areas so that farm workers can afford to live and work in the National Parks;
- **Farming communities** to continue to work with NPAs and their partners to ensure continued high standards of management in the National Parks;
- **English Heritage** to promote the public benefits accrued through traditional livestock farming and encouraging wider public understanding of these farming methods for the historic environment;
- **The tourism sector**, as the largest revenue creator in most National Parks, to engage with NPAs and help raise awareness through free literature of the essential role of traditional livestock farming in maintaining and protecting National Park qualities;
- **Other bodies and local organisations** such as the National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association who work closely with landowners and farming community and other organisations whose work contributes to the implementation of National Park Management Plans to actively support this agenda.

The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) provides a collective voice for the National Parks. This statement sets out their shared position on upland livestock farming. Each Authority works to implement the Management Plan for its area and so each National Park Authority will need to implement this and other policies in ways that are compatible with this plan and appropriate to local circumstance.

ENPAA

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