

Guidance: Managing Visitors with Dogs in Woodlands (England)

20 March 2025
Alison Hallas

Forestry Commission

Policy &
Advice
Team

Forest Services

- Supports and regulates forestry in England
- Government's forestry and woodland expert

Forestry England
Manages the Nation's
Forests for carbon
capture, flood
prevention, health and
wellbeing and
biodiversity.

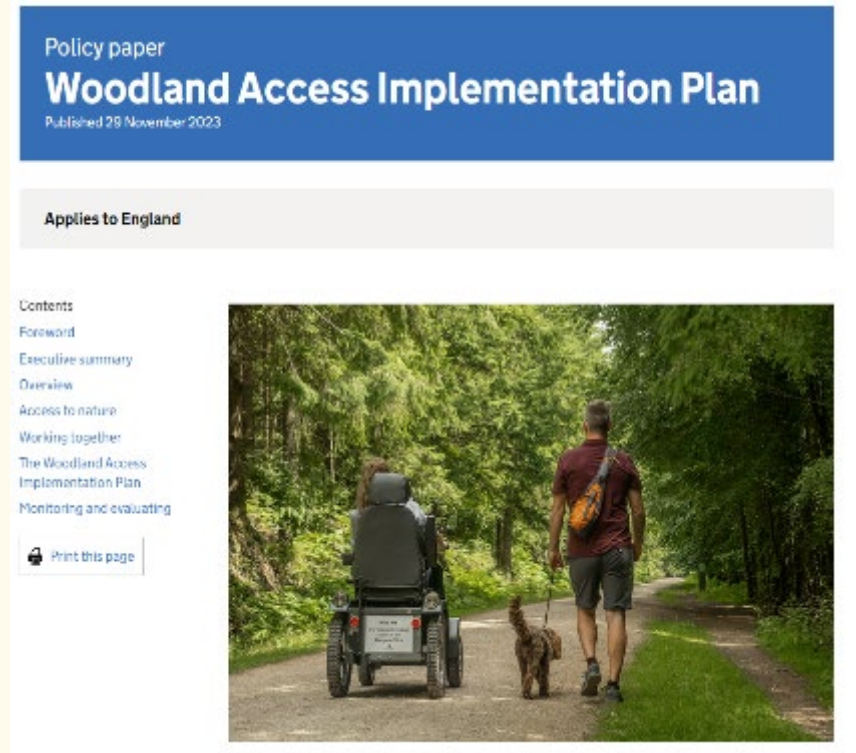
Forest Research
Great Britain's
principal
organisation for
forestry and tree
related research

Woodland Access Implementation Plan

Quantity: what types and location. For targeting, monitoring and letting the public know

Quality: better quality infrastructure, accessible, facilitated and people engaged

Permanency: protecting and facilitating existing rights; enhancing and creating new long-term access and rights, where possible



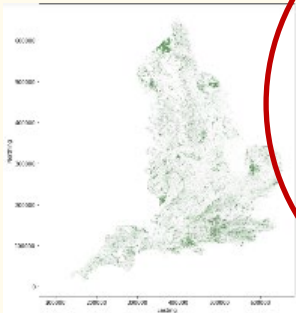
Within wider gov policy on access grant offers, legislation and policy including EIP (15 min commitment and ETAP)

WAIP work areas

Objectives:

- Provision of safe and appropriate public access is a feature of as many woodlands as possible (ETAP)
- Improve the quantity, quality and permanency of access to woodlands (WAIP)

Data, evidence,
research



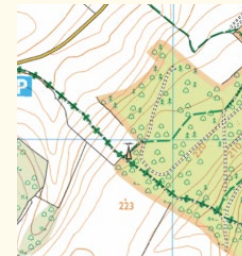
Landowner
support



Public
information and
engagement



Facilitating Access
rights



Connection and
partnership



Exemplars and best practice

Landowner/manager support

Access guidance

- For landowners managing statutory access
- For landowners encouraging visits to their woodlands (grant uptake)
- Freely available
- Suitable for different experience levels/budgets
- Positive, confidence building



Land manager feedback



<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/13976/pdsa-paw-report-2023.pdf>

Dogs chasing wildlife

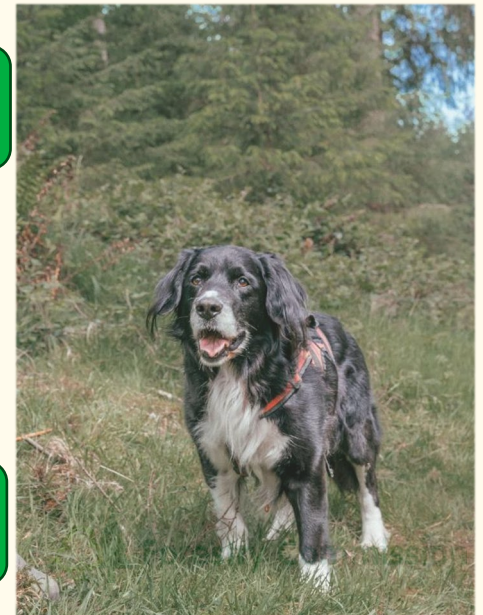
Dogs chasing other dogs

Dogs and forestry ops

Dog fouling (social, nutrient)

Desire lines

Flea and tick treatments in water



Expert input

Stephen Jenkinson
Access and Countryside
Management



Fiona Groves
The Natural Route



Land Manager survey



- Confirm key issues/assumptions
- Gather information
- 228 responses (before Christmas!)

Table 2: issues experienced by respondents in woodlands they own/manage

Issue	Number	Share (%)
Fouling of paths and other areas	170	88%
Disturbing or chasing wildlife, including ground-nesting birds	158	81%
Problematic interactions with other visitors, land managers or landowners	134	69%
Pressure of use by commercial dog walkers	102	53%
Problematic interactions with livestock	100	52%
Car parking problems arising from visitors with dogs	90	46%
Difficulties in relation to forestry operations and safety	72	37%
Health and safety or liability concerns for people and / or dogs arising from natural or man-made features or structures	58	30%
Tree health/damage concerns arising from visitors with dogs	33	17%
None	1	1%
Other	1	1%

Just over 44% said that these issues were very likely or somewhat likely to lead them to consider withdrawing some or all of the public access in their woodlands.

Over 62% said that the issues were very likely or somewhat likely to stop them granting more access.

Land Manager survey

Positive management

35% of respondents said they had found ways that visitors with dogs can help support positive woodland and visitor management. These included:

- extra eyes and ears on the ground to report and deter anti-social behaviour
- extra eyes and ears on the ground to report fallen trees/branches/ windthrow, damage to infrastructure and fire
- reporting any injured wildlife or livestock
- positive engagement that enhances dog walkers' knowledge and experience of woodland management, ensuring they are included in discussions and informed about any upcoming management, such as thinning
- dog walkers' participation in volunteering activities, such as litter picking or assisting with woodland management tasks

Guidance webpages

GOV.UK

Home > Environment > Rural and countryside > Forests and woodland > Managing visitors with dogs in your woodland

Forestry Commission

Guidance
Woodland management, infrastructure and signage: visitors with dogs
Published 16 January 2025

Applies to England

Contents

- Managing hazards
- Providing dog activities
- Community engagement and advocacy
- Legal resources and further guidance
- Funding and support for woodland access

Woodlands are popular places for dog walkers as they provide natural landscapes away from livestock and arable crops. Many dog walkers see woodlands as a responsible place to visit, particularly if there are dog restrictions in other areas, such as beaches or urban parks.

Dog walking is the main recreational activity for 21% of all woodland visitors. However, many more are likely to have dogs accompanying them for their walk or ride and, in some woodlands, over 80% of visitors have dogs. Studies show that a typical dog walk is around 2.7km and lasts for an hour.

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Home > Environment > Rural and countryside > Forests and woodland > Managing visitors with dogs in your woodland

Forestry Commission

Guidance
Dogs in woodland: wildlife, livestock and forestry operations
Published 16 January 2025

Applies to England

Contents

- Reducing hazards to wildlife, habitats and livestock
- Managing visitors and dogs in new and established woodlands
- Monitoring and maintenance
- Legal resources and further guidance

Dogs in woodland can sometimes have a negative impact on sensitive wildlife, such as unattended infant deer or ground-nesting birds being flushed from their nests. Dogs can also affect rare reptiles and plants, wildlife and livestock.

These impacts are not always obvious to an individual dog walker, who may not realise the harm their dog could cause to wildlife when out of sight. They may also be unaware of ongoing forestry operations or that other visitors might not want dogs to approach them.

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Home > Environment > Rural and countryside > Forests and woodland > Managing visitors with dogs in your woodland

Forestry Commission

Guidance
Managing dog fouling in your woodland
Published 16 January 2025

Applies to England

Contents

- Management options for dog fouling
- Ongoing management options
- Monitoring and maintenance
- The law on dog fouling
- Further resources on dogs in woodland

Dog fouling is a problem for both woodland owners and visitors, including those with dogs. Good management and clear explanations are essential for addressing the issue.

Management options for dog fouling

Managing dog fouling can improve woodlands and create safe, welcoming

GOV.UK

Home > Environment > Rural and countryside > Forests and woodland > Managing visitors with dogs in your woodland

Forestry Commission

Guidance
Commercial dog walking in your woodland
Published 16 January 2025

Applies to England

Contents

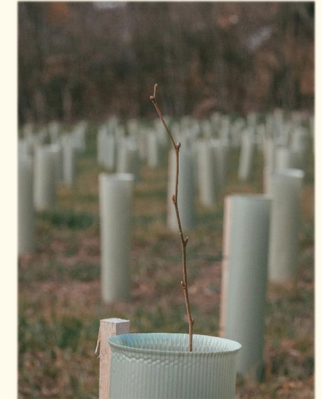
- Management options for commercial dog walking
- Local authority support
- Regulations and access rights
- Monitoring and maintenance

Commercial dog walkers provide a much-needed service for owners who are unable to walk their own dogs, whether that is due to ill-health, work or family commitments. Woodlands are popular places for these walkers as they prefer landscapes away from livestock, arable crops and high numbers of private dog walkers.

Commercial dog walkers do not always have the same access rights as people walking their own dogs, including on publicly owned land. They can lawfully use public rights of

Key topics

- Designing new access
- Addressing established behaviours
- Key facts
- Why it happens
- Actions and management options
- Legal options and considerations
- Income opportunities
- Good practice examples



Understanding visitors' motivations

Woodlands are popular places for dog walkers as they provide natural landscapes away from livestock and arable crops. Many dog walkers see woodlands as a responsible place to visit, particularly if there are dog restrictions in other areas, such as beaches or urban parks.

Most visitors with dogs are looking for a positive and enjoyable walk. If they're given clear, consistent information at the right time, they'll make choices that avoid conflict.

Ensure off-site and online information about your woodland is clear about wildlife and livestock sensitivities. This can influence a visitor's plans before they arrive.

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Lower-cost management approaches

Visitors can help protect wildlife and livestock, and avoid conflicts with other visitors or forestry operations, when they have clear information and advice. This could include:

- using short leads
- using a different route
- using busier routes, where deer are less prevalent, and avoiding off-lead exercise in quiet areas during dawn and dusk (to avoid dogs chasing deer)
- keeping 'paws on paths' - throwing balls and toys along paths and tracks, instead of into vegetation
- only allowing their dogs to swim in ponds designated for dog access



Example sign showing 'no dogs in pond' and that a dog dip area is provided 50 metres away. Copyright Steve Jenkinson.



An example handwritten a-board sign showing 'doggy do's and doggy don'ts'. Copyright Steve Jenkinson.

What's next

- Videos
- Refreshing guidance on public safety and forestry operations
- Case studies welcomed!

Stephen also running workshops in Dorset (not FC)

Visit: [Managing people and public access in your woodland - GOV.UK](#)

Contact: alison.hallas@forestrycommission.gov.uk

Woodland access newsletter:
woodlandaccess@forestrycommission.gov.uk



Thank you



