

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group Epping Forest & Commons	4 December 2015 25 January 2016
Subject:	Public
Epping Forest 4 th Grazing Monitoring Audit Report	
Report of:	For Decision
Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 05 /16	

Summary

Cattle grazing took place across the Forest and Buffer Lands this year with an average number of animals in the two herds of 162. The extensive grazing area of Fairmead was not grazed adequately due to problems with the invisible fencing initially and some cattle management issues with the grazier latterly. The smaller grassland and heathland sites were grazed effectively, including two completely new sites. This activity was monitored by both staff and volunteers. The fourth annual assessment by the Independent Grazing Assessor is at **Appendix 2**. The key points of his assessment are that: i) further mechanical intervention needs to be combined and coordinated with grazing pressure on a number of sites to combat the problems of invasive native species such as bracken and Bramble; ii) push-pull stimuli are provided for the cattle to ensure they range across all parts of the larger, more extensive grazing areas; iii) there was a beneficial impact of grazing on the heathland and acid grasslands this year; iv) the monitoring approach is sound. In total, during 2015, the cost of monitoring of grazing impacts by all consultants was £11,300, funded from Local Risk budgets.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- note the observations of this 4th Grazing Assessment;
- approve the commissioning of a shorter 5th report by the Independent Assessor for 2016 focussing on the Fairmead extensive grazing area

Main Report

Background

1. The appointment of an Independent Grazing Assessor was approved in July 2010 (EFCC Report SEF 21/10) to give an objective overview of the impacts of grazing on the Forest habitats, provide additional scientific advice and to review the monitoring programme. The Assessor's previous three reports were received by Committee in November 2012, November 2013 and January 2015 (for the 2014

grazing season). The requirement for this 4th audit report for the 2015 Forest grazing season was approved by Committee in January 2015.

Current Position – grazing audit report (see Appendix 2)

2. This report summarises the main points from two separate visits between 20th - 22nd July and 19th - 20th October by the Independent Assessor, Dr Peter Dennis, Reader at Aberystwyth University and Secretary of *The Royal Society UK Biodiversity Science Committee* (UK BSC). His full assessment report can be found at **Appendix 2**.
3. **Cattle:** the number of cattle in the two herds (Red Poll and English Longhorn) combined averaged 162 animals during 2015. All Buffer Land grassland sites requiring grazing were grazed. At the Forest sites there were: 8 Longhorns on Chingford Plain for 10 weeks; 4 Longhorns on Warren Wood Slope for 8 weeks; 4 Longhorns at Big View; 4 Longhorns at Deershelter Plain; 7 Red Polls at Sunshine Plain (north); 12 Red Polls at Long Running; 7 Red Polls at Fernhills. Warren Wood Slope and Big View were new grazing sites.
4. The lack of grazing at Fairmead and in Bury Wood was noted during both visits by the Assessor. However, later during October to November, 15 Red Polls grazed Fairmead.
5. The report then focussed on a few key issues. These included the control of invasive native species like Bracken and bramble and the use of push-pull stimuli to encourage the movement of cattle between areas. On monitoring work, the Assessor recommended the continuation of the effective scarce species mapping work.
6. The success of this year's grazing at the heathland and acid grassland sites of Big View, Long Running, Deershelter Plain and Sunshine Plain was noted in the report.

Current Position – other grazing-related operations

7. **Other impacts:** during the grazing season the free-ranging cattle did escape the confines of the invisible fencing areas on several occasions. In two cases, cows escaped from Chingford Plain invisible fencing and travelled into Bury Wood, remaining grazing on the Forest. A few related incidents occurred in early November when Red Poll cattle crossed one of the invisible fence cables that had been temporarily switched off at Church Rd., Fairmead. As this was the end of the Forest grazing season the cattle were removed the same week to a wintering site on the Buffer Lands Estate.
8. There has been one escape from a fenced wintering site on the Buffer Lands during the year. This took place in November at North Farm as a result of a stock-fence failure. This last escape resulted in two complaints both of which have been responded to and dealt with by the Senior Forest Keeper (Central).
9. **Monitoring and Volunteering Projects:** these amounted to over 150 hours of staff time. In addition, a further 130 hours of combined volunteer and staff time was spent carrying out the more general background monitoring.

10. **Student projects:** interest in the Epping Forest grazing project and wood-pasture restoration work continues to be high. Under the guidance of the Conservators' conservation staff there have been four student projects started this year, two of which are nearing completion and one of which is part of a wider PhD research study. The students this year have been from Aberystwyth, Cranfield and Leicester Universities.
11. **Invisible Fencing project:** There have also been many requests for invisible fence site visits and demonstration days, following the Head of Conservation's presentation to the 8th National Heathland Conference in March. Two demonstration days have been held in September and November. Attendees have included officers from The National Trust, RSPB, The Open Spaces Society, The Woodland Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Options

12. The fieldwork in the monitoring programme continues to be reviewed annually.
13. As in the last few years, additional assistance will be required from specialist consultants, although any work will be reviewed in the light of current budget reductions. The costs for this will be reviewed with the aim of keeping budget within a £10,000 total and thereby achieving a greater than 10% reduction in spending compared with this year (see Financial Implications section below). To do this the scope of the monitoring work would be reduced.
14. If the 5th independent assessment of grazing is approved the option would be to reduce the number of days for the site visit and to request a shorter report.
15. Options for recording GPS positions of cattle are being reviewed in the light of the future withdrawal of the current service in 2016. Future costs for this separate work will also be reviewed.

Proposals

16. Working within the resources outlined above, within a reduced grazing monitoring budget of £10,000, it is proposed to continue with the existing quadrats, eight vegetation transects and the invertebrate monitoring. Recording by fixed-point photography by staff and volunteers will be increased.
17. It is further proposed that the Assessor is invited back in 2016 to conduct a 1-day field visit only, concentrating on Fairmead wood-pasture and a reduced number of other sites. He would then provide a short assessment report.

Implications

18. **Corporate & Strategic Implications:** the options and proposals in this report meet the *City Together Strategy* by contributing to "*a world class City that promotes and enhances our environment*". In relation to the Open Spaces Department's Business Plan Improvement Objectives this report fulfills the objective to "*promote sustainability, biodiversity and heritage*".

19. **Legal Implications:** there are no legal implications.
20. **Property implications:** there are no property implications.
21. **Financial Implications:** this year's (2015's) vegetation monitoring work and independent grazing assessment costs amounted in total to £11,300, not including staff costs/time. This monitoring work is important for assessing the Favourable Condition of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) habitats.
22. The work included £3,590 for the assessment visits and report and £5,910 for vegetation transect surveys with a detailed 3-year report on these data. In addition, the continuation of the Heath Spotted Orchid census and analysis cost £1,800. Other work was carried out by staff and volunteers.
23. The future costs of any monitoring work and the grazing assessor's time would continue to be funded from local risk budgets. Next year's audit and monitoring would be kept within a budget of £10,000 or less.
24. **HR Implications:** Any monitoring volunteers are recruited through the volunteer scheme by the Volunteers Development Officer

Conclusions

25. The Forest grazing period on the larger, more extensive sites was very limited this year due to problems with the invisible fencing system and the grazier's cattle management. The Independent Assessor noted these problems and their impacts on the swards. Alongside this, the success of grazing management on the smaller grasslands and heathlands was recorded. In response to both, he anticipated future combined mechanical and grazing work in his recommendations and discussed push-pull stimuli to ensure movement of animals across extensive grazing areas. He recommended that current monitoring should continue. The costs for all this work in 2016 would be at least 10% lower than in 2015, in the light of reduced Forest budgets.

Appendices

- Appendices 1a & b – *Maps of the Forest grazing areas.*
- Appendix 2 – *Grazing Assessor's report on status of cattle grazing and associated habitat monitoring across Epping Forest* by Dr Peter Dennis, University of Aberystwyth, 29th November 2015.

Background Papers:

- *Epping Forest Grazing Strategy 2006 (updated for Branching Out Project in 2008)*
- *SEF 25/07 EF&C Committee report on: the 2nd Public Consultation on Grazing*
- *SEF 21/10 EF&C Committee report on: Ecological Monitoring Programme for Grazing*
- *SEF 35/12 EF&C Committee report of 5th November 2012: Epping Forest Grazing Monitoring Audit 2012*
- *SEF 33/13 EF&C Committee report of 13th November 2013: Epping Forest Grazing Monitoring Audit 2013*
- *SEF 05/15 EF&C Committee report of 9th January 2015: Epping Forest Grazing Monitoring Audit 2014*

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