

Cross Compliance and Pigs in Woodlands

Extracts from nibblers online discussion group

We have received an enquiry to the GAP office regarding running pigs in woodlands and any possible implications for Cross Compliance i.e. does this contravene some of the statutory regulations? Does anyone have any experience/inside knowledge of this?

I had a brief look at Forestry Commission guidelines for woodland 'best practise' but there is not much mention of grazing or livestock (although I couldn't download the last 25 pages for some reason so something may be in there?).

many thanks, Adam Cormack

We run pigs in woodlands with grant support from Forestry Commission. SEERAD refuse to let us put pigs in an ESA woodland, and are sniffy about using pigs on moorland which is under an RSS Moorland Management Plan. They have so far had no comment to make about pigs in other areas.

I imagine that you could be challenged under "over-grazing" if you let pigs reduce an area to the condition of a battlefield, but the defence could be that it was ground preparation for re-seeding or planting, or bracken control.

On balance, you have a strong argument for saying that you are using your pigs as a land management tool and that the woodland will benefit from scarification. It is possible to achieve a balance where a number of pigs can live in woodland on a sustainable basis, but getting to the right level needs careful monitoring - and somewhere to evacuate the pigs to if they are showing signs of over-doing it.

There are concerns over using pigs in sensitive, formerly undisturbed habitat, but this is more likely to be moorland and downland than woodland. Pigs are, after all, the natural occupants of wooded areas.

Although SEERAD seldom seem to recognise pigs as "livestock" in their deliberations, I think it would be difficult to say there was a difficulty with cross-compliance if one was mindful of the need to avoid over-pressurising the land - as with all livestock.

Chloe

From my own interpretation of the Single Payment cross-compliance rules Adam, woodland doesn't count for single payment unless it is grazed. You would probably have to demonstrate that the pigs are there to graze rather than root. In grassland situations the decision on poaching is based on whether the sward will recover within the growing season, at least here in England. So you may get away with significant damage during the winter if it is subsequently able to produce a continuous cover of vegetation. One way of ensuring this is of course to harrow it down when the animals come off and sow seed

Bill Gryson

There's a new SEERAD briefing note out which says that under 50 trees per hectare and historically grazed IS eligible for SFP, but over that, it is not. We are part of the Section 9 livestock-in-woodland pilot (at least, so far we are), and this is a matter of great debate. We are

very perplexed with the scheme, because we are trying to use livestock to effect a dynamic change in an area with mixed compartments of mature conifer; mature hardwoods; regenerating scrub; moorland, grassland, wetland and just about everything else. We cannot find a way to get into the scheme the fact that we think grazing can be used to manage the whole area to stop it being dominated by scrub; to open up some of the dense woodland to allow a bit more daylight in, and to reduce the bracken coverage to allow more grazing and/or regeneration. All the "scheme rules" seem designed to label areas as one thing or the other for evermore, and not to recognise that we have a complex and fascinating evolutionary process going on.

But back to the main story: the less densely covered bits will apparently still be SFP eligible, notwithstanding they are in an SFGS. If that concept is extended to its logical conclusion, presumably any qualifying "open space" in existing schemes can also be eligible. I also understand that the Great Glen Cattle In Woodland project achieved SFPEs for an area of felled conifer in which they were running Highland cattle to aid regeneration.

Chloe

Bill

I had some vague idea that cross-compliance applied to all land parcels in a holding, whether that particular parcel is included in the claim or not. Am I wrong on this?

Cathy

think Cathy's understanding applies in Wales and as the SFP is a Europe wide scheme the theory is that she is right for England as well. Of course it now seems that England does not exist which should confuse the Russian spies who are not yet dead and certainly great grounds for confusing inspectors.

Just north of the M4 in Glos or Wilts there is a concrete trough with a concrete apron and then a big step down on the downhill side of the apron and so it seems just to have moved the problem.

Given the livestock returns as indicated on this site where does the money come from for concrete aprons anyway?

Richard Micklethwait

Having just checked the Handbook I can confirm you're right Cathy but a distinction is made between agricultural and non-agricultural land. The Cross Compliance GAECs only apply to the agricultural land which would obviously include pig grazing in woodland. One key caveat is when the impact being created can be justified in terms of other environmental objectives, particularly if it is on an SSSI or within an agri-environment scheme.

Bill Grayson

I have often wondered about the word agriculture which I understand to mean cultivation of land. It should therefore cover land used for growing trees or land used to promote the "crop" of wildlife. If that was the case leaving ant tumps, standing dead trees, or thick under growth of regenerating woodland which benefits say dormice and nightingales are all agriculture, so watch this space for getting the Ministry into another bugger's muddle.

Richard M
