

Red Squirrel Strongholds Consultation Response Form

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Consultation title: RED SQUIRREL STRONGHOLDS

1. Are you responding as: (please tick one, or delete those that don't apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of a group or organisation (go to 2c)
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2c. ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

Your name and address as respondees will be made available to the public (in the Forestry Commission library and/or on Forestry Commission website). Are you content for your response to be made available also?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
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3. SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

We will share your response internally. Are you content for the Forestry Commission to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
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4. CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the **rationale and justification** for strongholds? If not, why not?

Advocates for Animals agrees with the rationale and justification for strongholds.

Advocates opposes the killing ('controlling') of grey squirrels in an attempt to help conserve red squirrels. Thus we support the general idea of strongholds but we do not agree with grey squirrels being killed in or around them.

If it is confirmed that, as expected, the strongholds can maintain populations of red squirrels in the presence of grey squirrels, in the absence of the

squirrelpox virus, there can be no claimed justification for killing grey squirrels in or around the strongholds.

2. Do you think that the **management approach** for strongholds is appropriate to achieve their objectives? If not, why not?

Advocates for Animals believes that the management approach for strongholds is generally appropriate to achieve their objectives. However, one aspect which we do not believe appropriate is: "Identifying priority areas for grey squirrel control around the site, and within the site should this prove necessary."

Culling of grey squirrels is acknowledged to be a short-term approach to the conservation of red squirrels, and we believe that it provides a distraction from the search for a longer-term solution to the decline in the red population. We believe that instead of spending money on killing grey squirrels, all resources should be directed to non-lethal solutions such as red squirrel strongholds, research into immunocontraception of grey squirrels and research into a vaccine against squirrelpox.

It is essential that all management activities are thoroughly monitored and their effectiveness assessed.

3. Do you have comments on the **suitability of any particular site or sites** to act as a stronghold? Please state which site(s).

No comment.

4. Do you think that the **boundary** of any particular site or sites should be changed? Please state which site(s), how the boundary should be changed, and why.

No comment.

5. Do you think that the **proposed support for management** will be sufficient to achieve stronghold objectives? If not, what support is needed?

Advocates for Animals welcomes the availability of grant aid for red squirrel-friendly habitat management through the Scotland Rural Development Plan: Rural Development Contracts. However, we do not believe that public money should be used to fund "grey squirrel control" i.e. killing of grey squirrels.

A national opinion surveyⁱ commissioned in 2009 showed that a clear majority of people in Scotland did not support a cull of grey squirrels. 54% of people did not believe that grey squirrels should be killed in Scotland in an attempt to conserve red squirrels, and only 34% of people were in favour of killing. We do not believe that public money should be used to fund an activity opposed by such a large proportion of the public.

However, if public money is used to kill grey squirrels any such killing must be undertaken in the most humane manner possible. Grants must be dependent on all killing being undertaken according to a Standard Operating Procedure produced by Scottish Natural Heritage, to include

- clear guidance on humane killing
- a mechanism for assessing and verifying that killing is done humanely
- assessment of the maximum number required to be killed in order to achieve the desired population level
- a commitment not to exceed this number
- prohibition on killing lactating females, so that dependent young are not left to starve to death
- recording of the numbers of animals killed
- monitoring by a welfare agency such as the Scottish SPCA.

The final date for receipt of responses is Friday 26 June 2009.

ⁱ A survey was carried out by TNS System Three for Advocates for Animals, between 28th January to 3rd February 2009, in which 1004 people from across Scotland were asked: *Grey squirrels were introduced to the UK over a hundred years ago and are now well established.*

Grey squirrels are blamed by some as one of the causes for declining red squirrel populations as they can out-compete them in many habitats and can carry the squirrel pox virus which can be lethal for red squirrels.

Government agencies and conservation organisations now intend to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds killing thousands of grey squirrels over the next few years, in an attempt to conserve red squirrel populations. Most of the squirrels will be trapped and either shot or struck on the head with a blunt instrument. Some animal welfare groups argue that this is unethical and unlikely to be effective in the long term. Alternative proposed solutions include habitat management and the development of a vaccine against squirrel pox.

Do you believe that grey squirrels should be killed in Scotland or not in an attempt to conserve red squirrels?

Yes [34%] No [54%] Don't know [11%]