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# your dog

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# Your dog walks und

**R**ecent government moves towards selling off Forestry Commission land in England could mean dog owners being banned from their favourite walks, having to pay hefty fees to park, or buy permits to let their dogs off the lead. Dog owners in Scotland and Wales could suffer similarly.

At a time when the need for healthier lifestyles means that access to the countryside is more important than ever, the government wants the freedom to sell off 450,000 acres of England's woodlands, restarting what the previous Conservative government commenced 20 years ago.

The current government's desire to be able to sell off FC land for "any purpose or unconditionally" was described as "chilling" by Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, in a recent House of Lords debate on the Public Bodies Bill. She added: "It's hard to conceive why ministers want such draconian powers, unless it is the government's intention to dispose of much or all of the Forestry Commission's land."

Kate Ashbrook, general secretary of the Open Spaces Society and former board member of the previous government's Countryside Agency, said: "We fear that the effect will be the wholesale loss of public access and enjoyment. This could have a damaging effect on people's lives. We hope the government will rethink these devastating proposals."



**FOR SALE**  
Woodland

**Current government plans could see forest and woodland sold off.**

## 10 REASONS WHY YOUR WALKS COULD BE AT RISK

Despite government claims to the contrary, and the fact that dogs are taken on 48 per cent of all countryside walks (as stated in a recent survey by Natural England, Defra, and the Forestry Commission), your access to land currently owned by the FC in England isn't protected because:

- 1 Current limited access rights to FC land are heavily dependent on goodwill. If a new private landowner wants to use the land for another purpose, such as a leisure complex or golf course, the access rights can be terminated.
- 2 This already vulnerable right of access is conditional on

keeping dogs on leads everywhere between March 1 and July 31 each year; the FC generally doesn't enforce this, but new owners are free to do so.

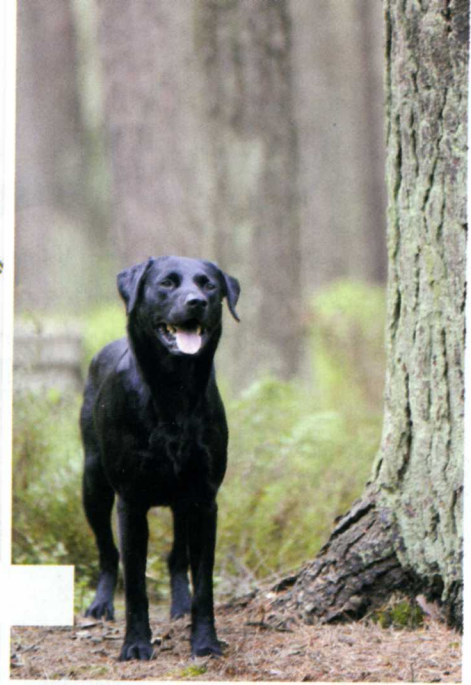
- 3 Local councils can't impose their Dog Control Orders on FC land. If sold, councils would be free to limit the number of dogs people can walk, and impose on-lead restrictions 365 days a year.
- 4 Car parking isn't protected, so the new landowners could make it illegal to drive into the forest or charge whatever they wished for off-road parking.
- 5 Even if FC land is sold to charities, history shows that dog owners are still likely to face new restrictions.
- 6 There is no requirement on new landowners to continue to allow dog sports such as sled racing and cani-cross.

- 7 Even the most responsible professional dog walker could be banned or forced to pay huge access fees, which would then be passed on to pet owners.
- 8 When restrictions are needed to protect wildlife, the FC keeps these to a minimum; private landowners need not stick to this principle.
- 9 FC rangers are there to help the public have a safe and enjoyable visit, rather than promote the forest as a commercial enterprise for private shareholders.
- 10 No other private or public sector landowner has ever provided as much dog-friendly access as the FC.

If you go down to the woods in the future, you could be in for a big surprise. Access adviser Stephen Jenkinson explains.

# Under threat

Are your woodland walks at risk?



## Dog-friendly treaty in doubt

As a public declaration of its commitment to being dog friendly and imposing the minimum of restrictions, the Forestry Commission signed a 20-point concordat with the Kennel Club at Crufts in 2005, stating that it would, for example:

- Develop new ways to improve how dogs and their owners use forests.
- Introduce positive measures to make dog owners feel welcome, such as water bowls

and information points.

- Only seek restrictions on dogs in specific circumstances, such as around children's play areas or at particularly sensitive times for resident wildlife.

Under current government proposals, there is no guarantee any of the FC's dog-friendly policies will continue.

You can read the full at-risk concordat on the website [www.forestry.gov.uk/](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/)

## Sell-off could spell disaster for sled dogs

A major sell-off of FC land could wipe out sled dog racing in the UK, spelling disaster for thousands of dogs such as Huskies and Alaskan Malamutes, who depend on FC tracks for their daily exercise and mental well-being.

The FC currently gives access for sled dog racing and training where it can, but this isn't legally protected. If the woodlands are sold off, new landowners could ban sled dogs from the outset, or charge exorbitant fees.

Speaking for the British Siberian Husky Racing Association, regular competitor Caroline Kisko said: "The sport is heavily dependent on FC land. Its cooperation ensures we can keep the dogs fit and healthy by running them in harness three or four times a week. If we lose this access it will be nigh on impossible to find suitable land."

Many Husky and Malamute owners rely on FC land to do their sled dog training.



## Going, going, gone?

Here are some areas of FC land, featured in Your Dog Magazine in the past, that could be under threat from a government sell-off:

- Coatham Wood, Teesside.
- Jeskyns Wood, Kent.
- Keilder Forest, Northumberland.
- Grizedale Forest, Cumbria.
- Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire.
- Pembrey Forest, Carmarthenshire.

## What you can do

More than ever, this is the time for dog owners to make their voices heard. MPs from every part of the UK will have a vote on what happens to FC land in England, so you can make a difference by urging them to oppose any sell-off, or if a sell-off is inevitable, ensure the government works with the KC and other access organisations to guarantee the real value of public access is protected in every case.

Readers in Scotland and Wales are also urged to write to their representatives in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, as they are up for re-election in 2011 and could attempt a similar sell-off. Find out who your MP and other elected representatives are at [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)