



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Consultation on Proposals to Prohibit Trail Hunting in England and Wales

26 March 2026

We are responsible for improving and protecting the environment. We aim to grow a green economy and sustain thriving rural communities. We also support our world-leading food, farming and fishing industries.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at TrailHuntingConsultation@defra.gov.uk

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Introduction

About this consultation

In line with the commitment in the 2024 Labour Party Manifesto, the government intends to ban trail hunting in England and Wales.

Trail hunting is an activity which has grown in popularity following the enactment of the Hunting Act in 2004 as an alternative to hunting wild mammals. It entails laying an animal-based scent trail for dogs to follow. This carries an inherent risk of the dogs picking up the scent of a live wild mammal and then pursuing it, instead of keeping to the laid trail. In addition, concerns persist that trail hunting can be used as a “smokescreen” to facilitate illegal hunting as it helps to obscure any intention to hunt wild mammals with dogs.

In view of these concerns, the government intends to bring in a ban on trail hunting in England and Wales. The government does not intend this ban to extend to other forms of activity such as drag hunting or ‘clean boot hunting’ which would therefore remain lawful.

We consider that an effective ban on trail hunting would require primary legislation. This consultation invites views on our proposed approach to legislating, and any on community, social, business, economic or environmental impacts potentially associated with a ban and how it is brought into effect. We welcome views from the public, landowners, conservation organisations, animal welfare groups, hunt organisers, local authorities, businesses and their representatives and any other interested parties.

The government will use the feedback provided by this consultation to inform the subsequent development of the necessary legislation.

This consultation is being conducted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

A summary of the responses to this consultation will be published in due course.

Territorial extent and application

The UK government considers that the proposed legislation would relate to reserved matters set out in Schedule 7A to the Government of Wales Act 2006, including the reserved matter of ‘Hunting with dogs’. We are therefore consulting on proposals to ban trail hunting in Wales, as well as in England.

Background to the consultation

The Hunting Act 2004 made it an offence to hunt wild mammals with dogs in England and Wales, subject to some exemptions. Following the introduction of that Act, trail hunting grew in popularity as an alternative to hunting wild mammals with dogs. Trail hunting aims to mimic a traditional hunt by laying an animal scent trail which simulates the natural movement of wild mammals through hedgerows, woods, and ditches for hounds and hunts to follow. The trail hunting season starts in the autumn and continues throughout the winter, with most hunts finishing during March.

Trail hunting has become a focus of concern because, by its very nature, it is difficult to ensure that wild mammals such as foxes are not placed in danger. It involves the laying of a trail using an animal-based scent for the dogs to follow. The trail is not always laid constantly but may be lifted for a distance and dropped again to allow the hounds to search for the scent. Huntsmen and followers often do not know where trails have been laid. This can result in the scent of a live wild animal being picked up. Once picked up by the hounds, the hounds may start to pursue the wild mammal rather than follow the intended trail, with the hunt in fact pursuing the wild mammal. If the hounds are successful in their pursuit, this will inevitably lead to the death of, or injury to, the wild mammal.

The government therefore proposes to introduce legislation to ban trail hunting in England and Wales to ensure that wild mammals are not pursued and placed in danger as a result of trail hunting, to prevent trail hunting being used to avoid criminal liability for hunting with dogs and to support effective enforcement of the law against hunting with dogs.

Our proposals

This consultation seeks views on how an effective ban on trail hunting might best be accomplished, including with regard to:

- How trail hunting should be defined for the purposes of a ban
- How to ensure that the ban on trail hunting will not inadvertently affect other activities which we intend should remain lawful such as drag hunting or 'clean boot' hunting
- Whether it should remain lawful to use animal-based scent trails when training dogs for specific purposes
- Considerations relevant to the timing of introducing the ban
- The potential community, social, business, economic and environmental impacts of the proposed approach to banning trail hunting

The specific questions in Part 2 provide the opportunity to comment on these issues and shape the proposed approach to legislation.

Responding to the consultation

This is a public consultation, and we welcome all views. We are particularly keen to seek the views of all those who might potentially be affected by the proposed legislation including from:

- members of the public
- landowners and land managers
- conservation organisations
- animal welfare groups
- hunt organisers and participants
- local authorities

How to respond

The easiest way to respond is through the Citizen Space platform:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/defra/trail-hunting-consultation>

If you are unable to use Citizen Space, you can download the consultation documents and return your response via email to TrailHuntingConsultation@defra.gov.uk

A paper copy can be returned to us by sending it to:

Trail Hunting Team,
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,
2 Marsham Street,
First Floor,
Seacole Building,
London,
SW1P 4DF

If responding by email or post, please state:

- your name
- your email address
- your organisation
- the consultation title

This consultation will run for 12 weeks. This consultation opens on 26 March 2026 and closes at 11.59 pm on 18 June 2026.

Responses received after the consultation closing date and time will not be analysed.

Question 29 explains how to send us separately any additional material which cannot be accommodated in the space for answers in this form.

This consultation is also available in Welsh through the Citizen Space platform.

Confidentiality and data protection

A summary of responses to this consultation will be published on the Government website at: www.gov.uk/defra. An annex to the consultation summary will list all organisations that responded but will not include personal names, addresses or other contact details.

There may be occasions when Defra will share the information you provide in response to the consultation, including any personal data, with external analysts. This is for the purposes of consultation response analysis and provision of a report of the summary of responses only. Please find our latest privacy notice uploaded as a related document alongside our consultation documents. If you have any comments or complaints about the consultation process, please address them to: consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk

Q1 in the consultation questions below asks whether you would like your response to be confidential. The answer you give will help us respond to any access for information request in relation to this consultation. If you respond 'Yes' in response to the question, you are asked to state clearly what information you would like to be kept confidential and explain your reasons for confidentiality. The reason for this is that information in responses to this consultation may be subject to release to the public or other parties in accordance with the access to information law (these are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)). We have obligations, mainly under the EIRs, FOIA and DPA, to disclose information

to particular recipients or to the public in certain circumstances. In view of this, your explanation of your reasons for requesting confidentiality would help us balance these obligations for disclosure against any obligation of confidentiality. If we receive a request for the information that you have provided in your response to this consultation, we will take full account of your reasons for requesting confidentiality of your response, but we cannot guarantee that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

If you respond 'No' in response to the question asking if you would like anything in your response to be kept confidential, we will be able to release the content of your response to the public, but we won't make your personal name and private contact details publicly available.

Other Information

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Cabinet Office "Consultation Principles" which can be found at: [Microsoft Word - Consultation Principles \(1\).docx \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Next steps

A summary of responses to this consultation will be published on the UK government website on the Defra homepage.

Following careful consideration of all responses to this consultation, we plan to develop legislation to deliver a ban on trail hunting in England and Wales, to be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

Policy proposals and consultation questions

About you

These questions allow us to understand who is responding to this consultation and carry out data analysis. Please note that answers to some questions are required – in those cases, this will be clearly stated. If you do not answer all questions marked 'required' your responses to this consultation will not be considered.

How we use your personal data is set out in the consultation and call for evidence exercise privacy notice which can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defras-consultations-and-call-for-evidence-exercises-privacy-notice>

Question 1: Would you like your response to this consultation to be confidential in the event of an access to information request (see confidentiality and data protection above)? (required)

Please select one option only

- Yes
- No

If you answered 'Yes' please give your reason(s).

Question 2: Provide your full name (required)

If you are representing an organisation or group, you will be asked its name later (see Question 5)

Question 3: Provide your email address or, alternatively, your full postal address (required)

If you do not have an email address, please provide a full postal address including postcode

Question 4: In what capacity are you completing this consultation? (required)

- as an individual
- as a landowner or land manager
- as a farmer
- as a business
- as a representative of a hunt or as a hunt organiser or participant
- as a representative of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or other non-profit public interest group
- as a representative of a local community
- as a representative of an interest group which is not classified as an NGO or other non-profit public interest group
- as an elected representative
- as the representative of a public body (eg local authority; National Park Authority)
- as an academic or researcher
- other (please specify):

Question 5: If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, what is the name of that organisation? (required)

Question 6: This consultation is for proposals that would apply only in England and Wales. Where are you, or the organisation you are representing, located? (required)

- England
- Wales
- Other

If you answered 'other', please specify in the box below

Proposed Legislative Approach

The questions in this section ask for your views on our proposed approach to legislating to ban trail hunting in England and Wales and any potential impacts which would need to be taken into consideration. You are free to choose whether to answer each question except where it is clearly stated that an answer is required.

For the purposes of the legislation, we propose to use the following definition of “trail hunting”:

“Trail hunting” is the activity in which a dog is directed to find and follow an animal-based scent which has been laid for that purpose. “Animal-based scent” means: a scent which is derived from a wild mammal, or a scent which mimics, replicates or resembles the scent of a wild mammal (or which is designed to do so), whether or not that scent is derived wholly or in part from artificial ingredients.

Question 7: Do you agree with this proposed definition of “trail hunting”?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain your reasons including, if applicable, your preferred definition of “trail hunting”.

Our proposed ban on trail hunting would mean that it would be an offence to engage or participate in trail hunting. We also intend to include offences for conduct which would assist unlawful trail hunting to take place.

Question 8: What types of conduct should be covered by ‘engagement’ or ‘participation’ in trail hunting?

Question 9: In relation to offences or conduct which would assist unlawful trail hunting to take place, we intend that it should be an offence for the owner or occupier of land to knowingly cause or permit another person to engage or participate in trail hunting on that land. Do you agree?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer

Question 10: In relation to offences or conduct which would assist unlawful trail hunting to take place, we intend that it should be an offence for the owner or person responsible for a dog to knowingly cause or permit another person to use the dog for trail hunting. Do you agree?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer

Question 11: Are there any other forms of conduct which should be considered as possible offences in relation to offences or conduct which would assist unlawful trail hunting to take place?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer

Question 12: Do you consider that any other legislative changes are necessary to ensure that a ban on trail hunting is effective?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer

We are aware that animal based scents, or scents which mimic animal based scents, are sometimes used to train dogs for specific purposes, other than trail hunting, such as pest control. We are keen to understand whether there might be a need for exemptions to cover such cases.

Question 13: Do you think that it is possible for dogs to be appropriately trained for specific purposes other than trail hunting without the use of either animal based scents or artificial scents which mimic an animal based scent?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer and, if applicable, explain the circumstances where you think it necessary to continue to permit the use of such scents in training dogs.

Question 14: Do you think that it should remain lawful, in certain circumstances, for animal based scents, or scents which mimic animal based scents, to be used in training dogs for certain purposes?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer and, if applicable, what training purposes should be permitted.

We want to ensure that the legislation to ban trail hunting should not inadvertently affect other activities such as drag hunting or 'clean boot hunting' where they do not present the same risk to wild mammals as trail hunting.

Question 15: We understand that drag hunting is an equestrian sport where an artificial non-animal based scent trail, which does not mimic an animal based scent, is laid along a pre-determined route for hounds to follow. **Do you agree that this is an accurate description of drag hunting?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer and, if you wish, propose a different description.

Question 16: Do you think that there is a risk that dogs engaged in drag hunting will deviate from the pre-laid trail by the scent of a wild mammal and then pursue the wild mammal?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Question 17: We understand 'clean boot' hunting is an activity where hounds hunt human runners who neither wear nor drag any form of artificial scent enhancement. **Do you agree that this is an accurate description of 'clean boot' hunting?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer and, if you wish, propose an alternative description:

Question 18: Do you think there is a risk that dogs engaged in clean boot hunting will deviate from their pursuit of human runners to the pursuit of wild mammals?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Question 19: Do you think that a new law to ban trail hunting would need to include any additional provisions in relation to drag hunting or clean boot hunting?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Question 20: Are there any equestrian activities other than drag hunting, for example point to pointing, which you think are at risk from being affected by the proposed ban on trail hunting?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Question 21: How do you think the introduction of a ban on trail hunting will affect dogs used for trail hunting? For example, will they be able to be re-directed to other activities?

Question 22: Do you think that there should be a transition period following the introduction of a ban on trail hunting and if so, how long should that period be?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Community and Social Impacts

This section invites your views on how the proposed legislation might affect people and communities.

Question 23: Do you think that the proposed legislation to ban trail hunting in England and Wales will affect people and/or communities more widely?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer including, if applicable, which groups of people/communities could be affected and in what way.

Business and economic impacts

Your answers to the following questions will help us to understand the possible business and economic impacts of introducing a ban on trail hunting.

Question 24: How do you think the proposed ban on trail hunting might affect the income and activities of the hunts currently involved in this activity?

Question 25: How do you think the proposed ban on trail hunting might affect the income and activities of businesses directly linked with hunts which currently engage in trail hunting?

Question 26: Do you think that the proposed ban on trail hunting in England and Wales might affect other businesses not directly linked with hunts?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer including, if appropriate, which types of businesses you think might be affected and how.

Environmental impacts

Question 27: How do you think that the proposed ban on trail hunting could affect the environment or wildlife?

Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Further Considerations

Question 28: Are there any other matters, including possible alternatives to primary legislation, which you feel should be taken into account in developing the legislation to ban trail hunting?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Question 29: Is there any other evidence you would like us to consider?

If you wish to submit reports or other material which cannot be accommodated in the space for answers in this form you can send them to us separately either by email to TrailHuntingConsultation@defra.gov.uk or by post to Trail Hunting Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2 Marsham Street, First Floor, Seacole Building, London, SW1P 4DF to be received by no later than 11.59 pm on 18 June 2026. Please use the box below to tell us briefly what you are going to send and why.

Thank you for responding to this consultation.