

Inside the Cull Zones

Introduction

The pilot badger culls in England are considered highly controversial for a number of reasons including their effectiveness, cost, impacts on local communities, animal rights concerns and politicised nature. In order to effectively oppose the cull it is necessary to understand the organisations, individuals, motivations and politics driving the cull and those inside the cull zones. As part of this project, Ethical Consumer sought to discover what detail was available on the two pilot zones in Gloucestershire and Somerset.

An article in the Western Gazette published in November 2013 referenced a Freedom of Information request which claimed that '43% of the land involved in Gloucestershire was on cattle and dairy farms [and that] in West Somerset, only 60% of the participating farms have cattle.'¹

This appeared to challenge the popular narrative that the badger culls are driven primarily by cattle farmers and are being conducted solely to prevent the spread of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) in cattle.

The rules for setting up cull zones

To apply for a licence from Natural England, cull companies must meet certain criteria. Requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Applications must cover an area of at least 150km squared;
- At least 70% of the proposed land area must be accessible for culling;
- Inaccessible land within the proposed cull zone should be minimised, with at least 90% of land within the cull area being accessible or within 200m of accessible land;
- Farmers must financially commit to the cull for a four year period and must conduct an effective cull every year for a four year period.

DEFRA has produced guidance for Natural England on license requirements.²

Two companies were established specifically for managing the two trial badger culls. They were made up of farmers and landowner 'members' who financially contribute to the costs of running a badger cull in specified areas over a four year period.

¹ <http://www.westerngazette.co.uk/Shock-figures-land-badger-cull/story-20112377-detail/story.html>

² Available from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69464/pb13692-bovinetb-guidance-ne.pdf

Known unknowns

It became apparent, through conducting desk based research and interviews with anti-cull campaign groups, that little 'official' information is known about the cull zones and syndicate farms and land owners (those supporting the cull through finances and access to land). What is known, has been gathered from Freedom of Information requests, publicly available documents, and by anti-cull activists through phone calls and badger patrols within the Badger Cull zones. 'Stop the Cull'³ have used this information to produce approximate maps of the Gloucestershire and Somerset cull zones. In 2014 Jay Tiernan, media spokesman from 'Stop the Cull', confirmed that these maps were 'larger than the area in which the cull occurred [in 2013] and that no traps or shooters were found outside the cull zone map area.'

Stop the Cull's maps, in addition to site visits to the cull zones, started to highlight the variety of land-use types within the cull zones and, coupled with licence requirements for badger culling⁴, questioned whether dairy and beef farmers were the primary stakeholders driving the cull within the Gloucestershire and Somerset cull zones.

The article in the Western Gazette mentioned above supported these claims.⁵ Furthermore, interviews with anti-cull campaigners suggested additional issues associated with tenancy farming, whereby some farmers within the cull zones were obliged to participate in the badger cull (despite their opinion on the culls), due to landlords signing up to the cull.

In April 2015, Ethical Consumer sought to explore the extent to which GIS mapping (Geographic Information System mapping of the type commonly found in universities) could be used to increase an understanding of land use type and ownership within the cull zones. Jonathan Gatward from InTouch GIS Services Ltd was contracted to conduct an initial scoping mapping exercise of the cull zones based on Stop the Cull's maps and publicly available information.

Clearly a more effective review could take place if the actual zone boundaries were publicly disclosed, but in the absence of this information, this was all we were able to use.

³ <http://badger-killers.co.uk/where/>

⁴ Applications were required to cover an area of at least 150km squared, of which at least 70% had to be made accessible for culling. Inaccessible land within the proposed cull zones had to be minimised, with at least 90% of land within the cull areas being made accessible or within 200m of accessible land.

⁵ <http://www.westerngazette.co.uk/Shock-figures-land-badger-cull/story-20112377-detail/story.html>

Mapping the cull zones

(a) Gloucestershire land use

Land use types showed a fragmented pattern in Gloucestershire (see figure 1), with slightly higher levels of grazing observed around the flood plains of the River Severn. In total 81.35% of the cull zone area was used for agriculture but only 47.81% of this land was used for grazing. Based on the Freedom of Information request referenced above, 43% of the land involved in Gloucestershire's cull was on cattle and dairy farms. In addition to grazing, 1.87% of land in Gloucestershire was cropped for hay, 29.70% of land was cropped (for other crops), 0.31% was used for horticulture and 1.67% for orchards.

If 70% of the available area inside each zone must be signed up to permit culling to take place, this would seem to suggest that at least one third of cull zone land signed up to the cull in Gloucestershire is not grazing land and therefore not farmed for dairy cattle.

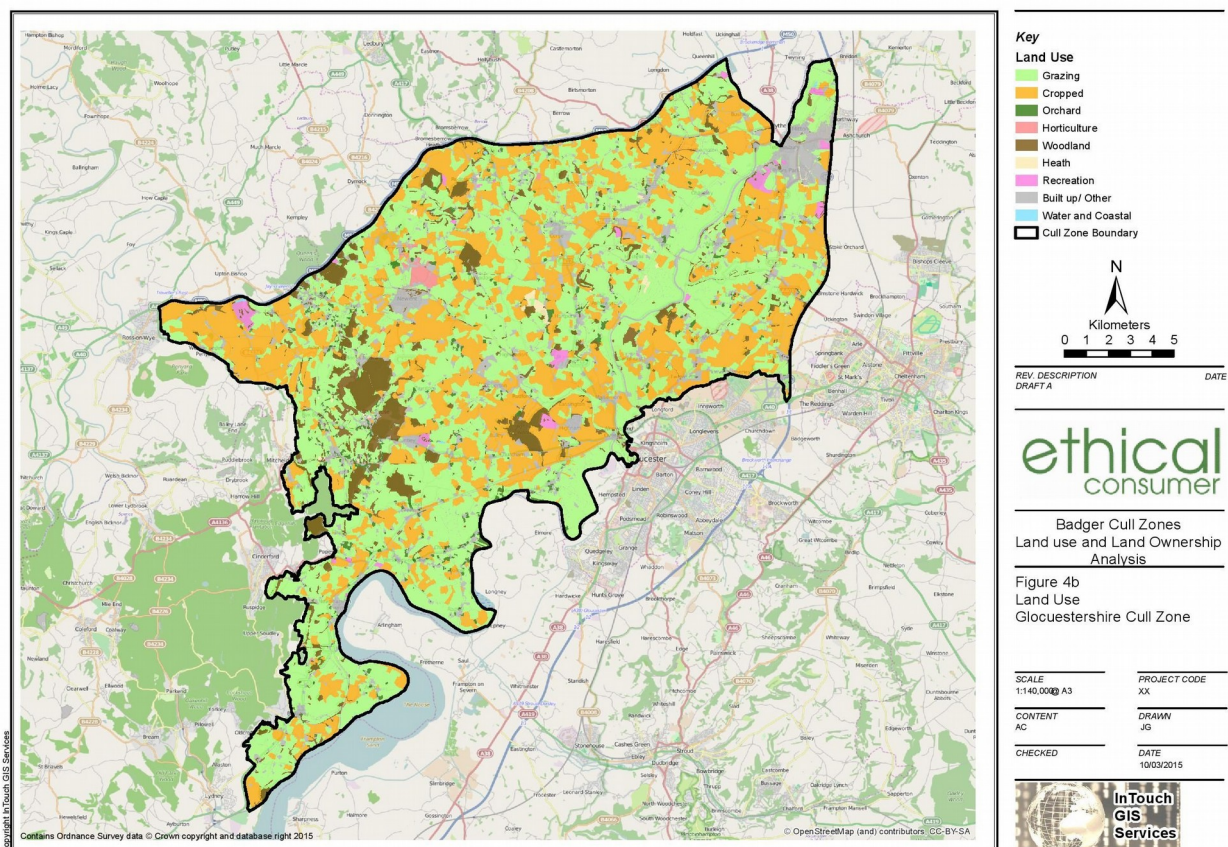


Figure 1: Land use within Gloucestershire cull zone

(b) Somerset land use

In Somerset 76.31% of the land was used for agriculture, which showed a clear 'break line' between grazed land in the south and west and cropped land in the north and east (see figure 2). In total 56.37% of the land was used for grazing, not all of which may be cattle. According to the Western Gazette, in West Somerset, only 60% of the participating farms have cattle.

1.72% of land in the Somerset cull zone was cropped for hay, 17.94% of land was cropped (for other crops), 0.20% was used for horticulture and 0.09% for orchards.

This would also lead us to conclude that, as in Gloucestershire, substantial support from non diary farming landowners in the Somerset Zone must be necessary to meet the '70% of available land' targets.

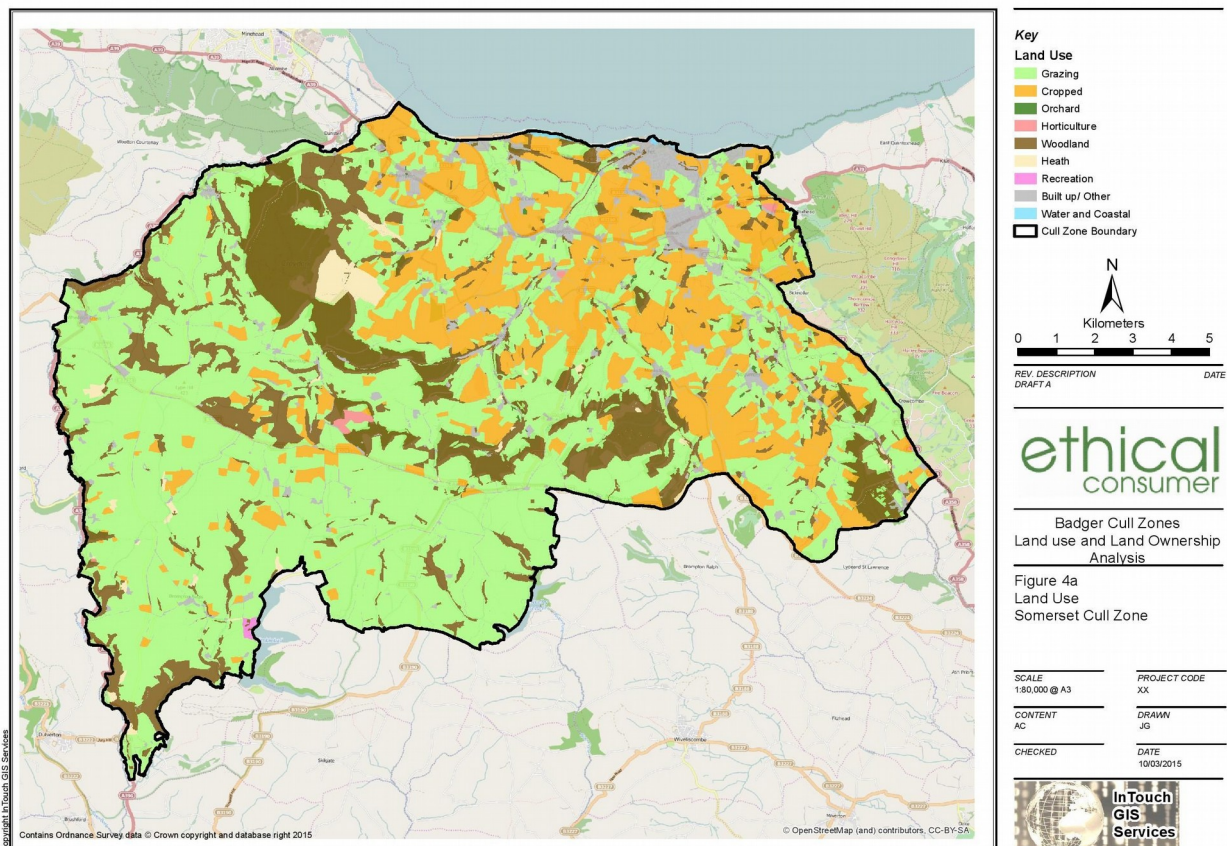


Figure 2: Land use within Somerset cull zone

(c) Non-grazing land within the cull zones

The second biggest land use type within both cull zones is woodland. In Somerset 17.25% of the cull zone land area was woodland and was primarily owned by the Forestry

Commission and National Trust (See figure 3). In Gloucestershire 7.3% of the land area is woodland. The Forestry Commission, National Trust and the RSPB own part of this, with the remainder being privately owned (with ownership information being held by the Land Registry) (See figure 4). It should be noted that the National Trust is the biggest land owner in the UK and has 'not ruled out culling on its land⁶' as it sees it being part of an integrated approach to stopping the spread of Bovine tuberculosis in cattle - along with badger vaccinations. It has stated though that the pilot culls have not occurred on its land.

(d) Land ownership within the zones

Information about the sizes of farms, whether the land is managed by tenant farmers, and the majority of land ownership information was outside the scope of this study with a potential cost of tens of thousands of pounds from the Land Registry. Ownership information for this study was gathered from publicly available sources only, such as the National Trust Website, Country Parks, Local Nature Reserves, Parks and Gardens, Forestry Commission Estate boundaries, Woodland Trust Sites, RSPB Nature Reserves and Common Land. Furthermore, different types of livestock that may be grazed in the areas (e.g. Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs, Horses) could not be identified. This information could be gained through site visits and interviews with people 'on site.'

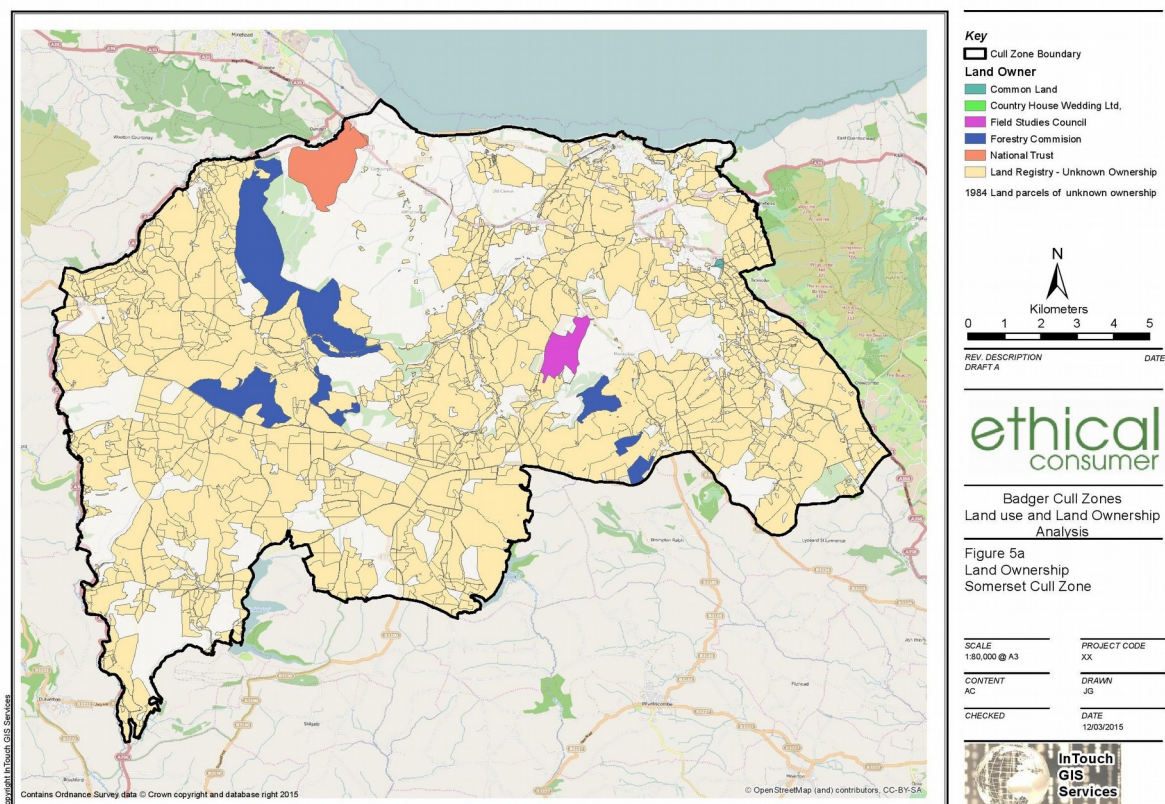


Figure 3: Land ownership, Somerset cull zone

6 <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/document-1355801843453/>

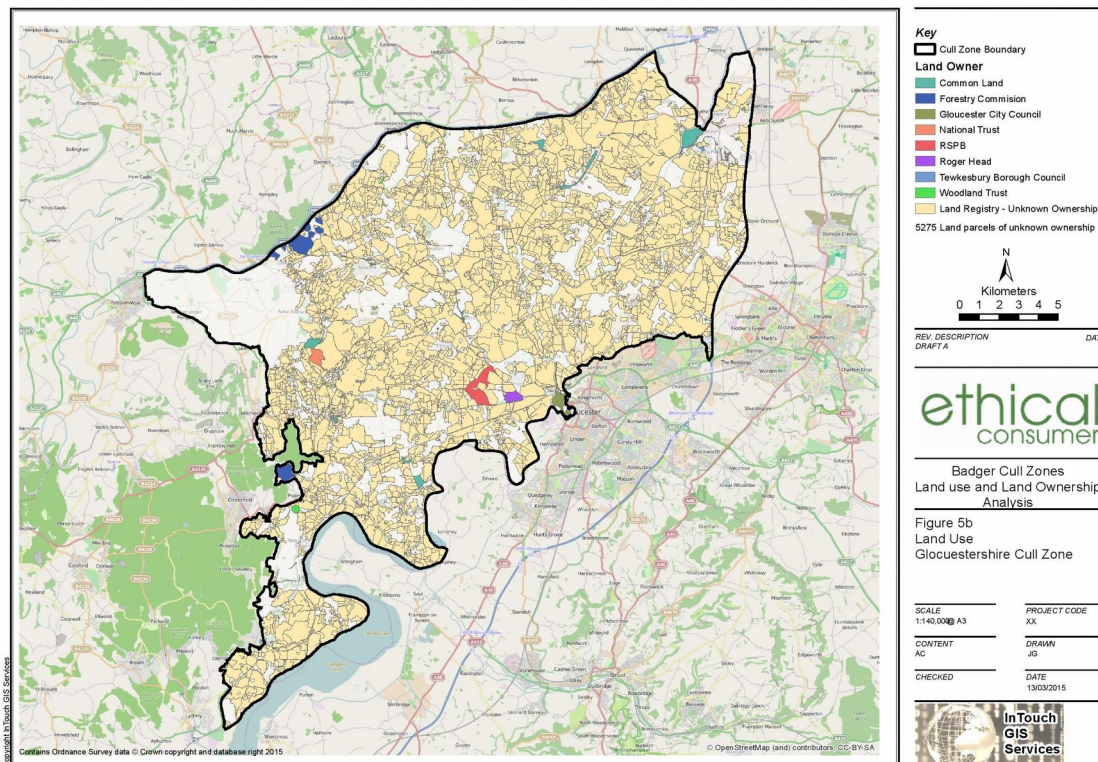


Figure 4: Land ownership, Gloucestershire cull zone

Conclusions

The mapping exercise concluded that although farming is the dominant land use type within both cull zone areas, the cull must have support from non-dairy farmers within these zones for the '70% of available land' requirement to be met.

Face-to-face interviews with Hunt Saboteur Association (HSA) members noted the interaction between game shooting estates and the badger cull. The Forthampton Estate in Gloucestershire was said to cover approximately 4% of the cull zone area alone, and an October 2013 press release on the HSA website stated that “The shoot owners claim that badgers kill young pheasants and make a hefty dent in their profits. They know this profiteering argument will not go down well with the general public so instead claim to be supporting the dairy industry to eradicate bTB [TB in cattle].”⁷

Hunt saboteurs have also noticed that the big shooting estates in the Somerset cull zone: Orchard Wyndham, Coombe Sydenham and Chargot, have all been focal points for culling activities with “shooters and vehicles full of traps seen coming and going around the clock”

There is also anecdotal evidence of social pressures within the cull zones for landowners to support the cull – and of bullying from the NFU and ostracism of non-cull supporters by others. It appears that the cull is receiving support from large hereditary land owners in each zone increasing social pressure in small communities. A project that involves

⁷ www.huntsabs.org.uk,

shooting iconic wildlife rather than watching it or vaccinating it makes no sense to biological scientists looking at eradicating bTB. But to social scientists looking to understand why shooting has been chosen despite the evidence of formal government studies, a partial explanation begins to emerge.

Patrick Barkham, author of *Badgerlands*, writing in the *Guardian* argues that “There’s only one reason for this badger cull – votes”.⁸ He explains: “the government is culling because some farmers would like to remove the badger’s status as a legally protected animal. David Cameron knows that repealing wildlife laws is unpopular and tricky. Nor, more significantly, is he likely to ever obtain a Commons majority to reverse the fox hunting ban. A government-led badger cull is the next best symbolic gesture to persuade resentful rural communities that the increasingly metropolitan Tory party still feels their pain.”

DEFRA is apparently considering a request from the NFU to simplify the cull license conditions “to make it more viable for farmers in new areas”. Revised conditions may impact future mapping work.

Larger file versions of the GIS maps used in this study are available for download on the Badger Action News website.

8 www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/31/badger-cull-votes-bovine-tb-scientific-effective