

Duke of Westminster given millions in public cash for grouse moor – investigation

RT rt.com/uk/364569-grouse-moor-public-subsidy/



English grouse moors, including one owned by royalty, have been shored up with millions of pounds in public money despite the climate of austerity.

Thirty of the estates where the birds are raised and shot received £4 million (US\$4.85 million) in public cash in 2014, including one owned by the Duke of Westminster.

The duke is the richest landowner in the UK and is worth an estimated £9 billion.

The investigation carried out by Friends of the Earth supports an argument by campaigners who say that grouse farming is damaging to the environment and uses far too much space.

MPs are due to debate the issue on Monday after 120,000 people signed a petition to ban the most common form of grouse shooting.

“These shocking new figures reveal the true, horrifying scale of grouse moors in England and the madness of the current farm payments system that subsidizes them,” Guy Shrubsole of Friends of the Earth told the Guardian Friday.

“Instead of handing out taxpayers’ money to billionaires and offshore firms to indulge in an elite sport, the government must reform farm payments so public money is spent on public goods – like tree-planting, restoring wildlife habitats, farming sustainably and preventing flooding downstream,” he added.



Other claims include that grouse farming can lead to the illegal killing of birds of prey and legally decimate the populations of stoats and foxes, all of which prey on grouse.

The campaign is not without its critics.

"Almost two-thirds of England's upland sites of special scientific interest [SSSI] are managed grouse moors," Amanda Anderson, director of the Moorland Association, told the Guardian.

"Management has helped conserve this unique landscape, whereas elsewhere in Britain it has been lost to afforestation, wind farms or overgrazing."

A spokesperson for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) told the Guardian that the views of all sides had to be considered.

"We continue to work with conservation groups and landowners to ensure sustainable grouse shooting balances both environmental and economic needs," the spokesperson said.