

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Forestry Commission's Disability Equality Scheme 2006 – 2009 outlines the Commission's commitment to both the general and specific Disability Equality Duties.
- 1.2 The Scheme also outlines details how the Commission will:
- address the requirements of the Disability Equality Employment Duties;
  - provide services and initiatives that will embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity; and
  - meet both the general and specific duties of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to detail progress made against the targets detailed under 1.2 above, and to highlight some examples of good practice through various initiatives undertaken during 2007.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 places both general and specific duties on named public organisations of which the Forestry Commission is part. These duties call for public bodies such as the Forestry Commission to undertake that in carrying out their functions they will have due regard for the need to:
- promote equality of opportunity between disabled and other people;
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination defined within the Disability Discrimination Act;
  - eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability;
  - promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
  - encourage participation by disabled people in public life;
  - take steps to meet the needs of people with disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably.
- 2.2 Specific duties detailed in the Act calls for public bodies to:
- assess all existing and future functions and policies through use of a Disability Equality Impact Assessment tool to ensure that as far as reasonably possible no such function or policy of the Commission will adversely affect any client, member of the public, employee or other stakeholder irrespective of their race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, or religion/belief;
  - ensure that right from the beginning of a project consultation of disabled stakeholders is proactively carried out, such consultations including all

reasonable steps to include those disabled people in hard to reach communities;

- create effective and robust monitoring and evaluation procedures as well as improved methods of information gathering and analysis thereof;
- detail how disabled people have been involved in developing the Scheme and Action Plan; and
- publish the results of its Disability Equality Impact Assessments, annual Disability Equality Monitoring Reports, and review of the Disability Equality Scheme every three-year period.

2.3 As required by law this is the Forestry Commission's 2007 Annual Monitoring report which will be published on the Commission's web-site as well as the intranet. Hard copies will be displayed in all our area offices and a copy submitted by registered mail to the Equality & Human Rights Commission in Glasgow, Birmingham and Cardiff.

2.4 Any enquiries about this report should be directed to the Commission's new dedicated lead Diversity Manager at Silvan House, Edinburgh.

### 3.1 Staff in Post

As at 31 March 2007	Number	Male	Female
Total	3,322	2,279	1,043
Disabled	71	51	20

### 3.2 External Recruitment

1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007	Applicants	Interviewed	Employed
Total	3,438	510	132
<b>Breakdown</b>			
Male	2217	486	119
Male Disabled	37	11	1
Female	1221	255	68
Female Disabled	17	5	0

### 3.3 Applicants and Staff receiving Internal Training

01 April 2006 – 31 March 2007	Total Applicants*	Total Trained
Total		1,716
<b>Breakdown</b>		
Male		1236
Male Disabled		26
Female		480
Female Disabled		4

\* Records not retained in a format that can provide this information retrospectively. This will be resolved.

### 3.4 Internal Promotion

1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007			
	Applicants	Interviewed	Successful
Total	214	167	101
<b>Breakdown</b>			
Male	145	54	23
Male Disabled			
Female	69	22	10
Female Disabled			

### 3.5 Performance Assessment Procedures

1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007						
	<b>Male</b>			<b>Female</b>		
	Top Performer	Good Performer	Not Fully Effective	Top Performer	Good Performer	Not Fully Effective
Total	529	1,479	15	245	622	5
<b>Breakdown</b>						
Disabled	8	42	1	2	18	0

Please note, of our staff count of 3,279, those who are on Short Term Temporary Appointments (157), who are still on their 8 month probationary period (200) and the Chairman and Forestry Commissioners (7) do not receive a grading under the Performance Management System (“PMS”)

### 3.6 Members of staff involved in grievance procedures and subject to disciplinary procedures.

01 April 2006 – 31 March 2007		
	<b>Disciplinary Procedures</b>	
	Number of Grievances	Number subject to disciplinary procedures
Total	8	14
<b>Breakdown</b>		
Male	4	13
Male Disabled	0	1
Female	4	1
Female Disabled	0	0

### 3.7 Members of Staff who leave

1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007			
	Numbers who cease employment	Number of male leavers	Number of female leavers
<b>Total</b>	711	469	242
<b>Breakdown</b>			
Disabled	12	6	6

### 3.8 Disability & Gender Staff Split by Grade

As at 31 March 2007											
	Chairman & Commissioners	Senior Staff Group	Pay Band 1	Pay Band 2	Pay Band 3	Pay Band 4	Pay Band 5	Pay Band 6	Pay Band 7 incl week pay	Contractors	Total
Male	5	15	25	95	144	248	506	1,129	113	4	<b>2284</b>
Male (disabled)					3	3	11	34			<b>51</b>
Female	2	2	1	16	34	86	210	591	101	2	<b>1045</b>
Female (disabled)					1	1	8	10			<b>20</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>1720</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3329</b>

## 4.0 Education Initiatives

- 4.1 Throughout GB, the Forestry Commission (FC) offers a wide range of exciting learning activities. Not only does the FC work with young people both in and outside of school; it also seeks to develop lifelong learning programmes, especially through recreation and health. Led by experienced staff, our education programme is designed to encourage exploration of woods and the life within them through safe, hands-on activities.
- 4.2 In addition, for many years the FC has worked with schools, helping to make links to woods and forests. Current education strategies have been developed in line with the priorities of the administrations in Scotland, England and Wales. The strategies guide our work with young people, in primary and secondary schools, outside school and provide a cornerstone for the Forestry Commission to develop lifelong learning programmes.
- 4.3 Our approach to using woods for learning is based on the several key principles, and a key priority for the organisation in recent years has been to reach-out and improve engagement with diverse communities.
- 4.4 This has been an immense challenge, but also incredibly rewarding. Our educational strategies and programmes in Scotland, England and Wales have engaged on many different levels, and some key projects are highlighted below.

### Case Study 1 – England

The Birmingham FEI cluster have been working with Brays Special School with pupils who have multiple and profound physical and learning difficulties. A pilot group ran for 7 weeks (one afternoon a week, for 8, year two children, in a copse of a public park – Sheldon Country Park) and is just starting with another group (2 groups of 6, from year three).

Short taster programmes (4-6 weeks) with Secondary pupils (year 10 and sixth form) at Wilson Stuart Special School based around life skills have been held, with a view to starting again in the spring.

The FC is also involved in working in a special secondary school for autistic spectrum disorders, Baskerville School in Harborne, Birmingham. Delivering forest schools with an outreach ranger through resistant materials - key stage 3 - and as an accredited OCN entry level course at key stage 4. Aspects of forest schools have also been incorporated through courses at post 16. They have access to large grounds which include a woodland trail so all is delivered in house or they have occasionally accessed woodland at Woodgate Valley Country Park. The courses were run last academic year - the entry level qualification is offered every 2 years. The key stage 3 option should be offered spring term 2008.

## Case Study 2 – Scotland

The children at St Crispin's School have significant learning difficulties. They are experiential learners – they need lots of experience and the regular, frequent nature of Forest School enables the children to learn about the forest environment in different weathers and seasons. These children need plenty of opportunity and plenty of repetition for meaningful learning to take place.

Typically St Crispin's Forest School sessions are structured in a very similar way to their normal in school sessions: Bus from school, Walk, Circle, Snack, Activity Free-choice time, Activity, Closing circle, Walk, Bus back to school.

Activities include: Fitness trails, Collecting things, Making a home for an animal, Making shelters, Find the golden apples (Christmas decorations hung up on the trees)). Listening lotto, Follow my leader, hide and seek, following wool trails. Looking for particular things (e.g. a big leaf, some beech buds), looking after the forest – clearing litter, whittling wood, picnics.

The tasks are carefully chosen and broken down into small steps to enable the children to experience success. This boosts their self-esteem. The children:

- learn to work and play together.
- to develop their communication and socialisation skills.
- learn to transfer learning from school to the forest and back again.
- learn to enjoy themselves.
- learn to observe environmental change and thus learn about the forest environment.

Many of the children's families find it difficult to access this type of environment and play with their children therefore the school feels it is important to enable the children to experience the outdoors, with all the benefits that come for being outside. Safety is paramount and risk assessments are carried out that assess the risks of the usual range of potential risk (eg environment) but also the ones pertinent to the children's conditions (eg dyspraxia, escaping, epilepsy etc)

### Case Study 3 – Wales

Fforest Fawr is an area of Assembly Woodland managed by FCW on the outskirts of Cardiff. A new sculpture trail was launched at Fforest Fawr on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2007, by our minister, Elin Jones AM.

The initial idea for a sculpture trail came from Ty Gwyn Special School, whose pupils use Fforest Fawr on a regular basis. They wanted to extend the existing path and install sculptures to make it both more appealing to the children and also to increase the learning potential of the site. The trail now has a wheelchair friendly log circle situated right inside the woodland - and has features appealing to all the senses – smell, touch, feel, sight and sound so pupils of all abilities can make best use of it.

To ensure that the trail would be relevant, linked to the national curriculum, and truly inclusive, a group of teachers from different backgrounds (nursery, primary, special needs at different key stages etc) were brought together to work as a group. They were involved from the outset, working together as a team with FCW Education Officer Sheena O’Leary:- deciding on the theme, assessing other sites to pick out areas of best practice whilst avoiding pitfalls, devising the trail to suit curriculum and pupil needs, working with their pupils on design ideas and liaising with the artist Cassy Healey and the sculptor John Hobbs and planning out how the trail should be constructed.

The sculptures are based on a Giant theme – with a huge wrist watch in the woods (the children make the hands out of sticks they find in the forest), a large oak chair – and even a dragon! It successfully allows Fforest Fawr to be accessed for the teaching of Literacy, Design Technology, Art and Science, as well as encouraging all children to visit the woods to have a positive and exciting experience in the outdoors.

The new trail also fits extremely well with the new Foundation Phase in Wales, which places considerable emphasis on children learning outdoors and through the natural environment.

Education packs that link with the trail have been developed and are specific to the different Key Stages making it easy for teachers to use the trail to its full potential.

In addition to continuing to visit visiting Fforest Fawr and the sculpture trail, pupils at Ty Gwyn have had the opportunity to work with project artist Cassy Healy to recreate part of the forest within school – with a whole corridor transformed into a forest using material trees!

4.5 In addition to the case studies noted above the following table demonstrates progress in other general initiatives.

5.0 Progress in General Initiatives

Project	Aims	Status of work
New Pathways to health and well-being in Scotland	Action research to understand and overcome barriers to accessing woodlands focusing on people who are underrepresented woodland users. The work highlights the complex social and cultural factors that can limit people's opportunity of accessing woodlands.	Undertaken by an independent consultant.
Project to collate and disseminate information and promote good practice on disabled accessibility of woodland recreation	<p>This project involved research with woodland managers to understand their attitudes, knowledge and experience of disability issues as they relate to recreation management; it also produced a summary of DDA legislation including a synopsis of its implications for woodland recreation management, collated toolkits, guidance and good practice on disabled access provision for recreation and a digest of contacts for disability organisations in Scotland. New case studies of good/bad practice in disabled recreation provisions were also developed.</p> <p>This is being used to provide clear and informative information for woodland managers on how to promote accessibility of woodland recreation for disabled people and to inform the development of a training course on the subject. The intention is for materials to be made available to the land management sphere through the Paths For All website. Its important that FC and FR use the outputs from this project to assess where there gaps are in toolkits, guidance and good practice and research opportunities that arise from these. There are also operational issues to do with dissemination of information and ensuring synergy amongst the land use sector and disability community in providing training on recreation provisions for disabled people.</p>	<p>Work completed by Openspace Research Centre on behalf of FC Scotland.</p> <p>Course piloted September 2007. Materials developed for the course have been forwarded to FC Development and Learning to feed into course on diversity for FC England, and future course on disability/diversity for FC Scotland. FC Scotland have forwarded the materials to SNH and with FR are contributing to a good practice workshop SNH run for land managers on disability.</p>

<p>Project to develop an evaluation methodology for assessing recreation strands of woodland/land management grant schemes in relation to disability.</p>	<p>This project is developing an evaluation methodology for land/forestry grants in relation to disability. The methodology is based on ‘And your evidence is?’, a framework and toolkit for the evaluation of projects aiming at increasing access of currently under-represented people to the outdoors (Countryside Agency 2005). It is intended for use by those implementing and assessing the new Land Management Grant scheme in Scotland. It may also be useful to those administering other grants for disabled recreation provision.</p>	<p>Commissioned by FC Scotland and being completed also by Openspace Research Centre. The methodology is currently being piloted.</p>
<p>Research on disabled peoples’ attitudes, perceptions and experiences of woodlands and how they affect use of woodland recreation goods, facilities and services.</p>	<p>This GB-wide research uses participatory research (focus groups and site visits) to explore disabled peoples’ physical, information and emotional needs and expectations in relation to woodland, and make recommendations on the ways in which woodland recreation goods, facilities and services can be made more accessible to disabled people. It explores processes of communication and engagement with disabled people and make recommendations about how they can be applied to the planning and provision of woodland recreation.</p>	<p>Research is being completed by Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research. Work funded by FC and FCS and due for completion in March 2008.</p>

## **6.0 Progress against Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan**

- 6.1 Progress against actions outlined within the 3-year Disability Equality Action Plan has been variable. This has been due in no small part to the absence of a dedicated Diversity Manager, a position that has now been addressed.
- 6.2 However, as can be seen from the attached appendix, a great deal of has been achieved, particularly with regard to social research, identifying stakeholders, local initiatives and so forth.
- 6.2 Within the first three-six months of appointment the Diversity Manager intends to revise the actions outlined in the existing action plan, and to introduce a robust Equality Impact Assessment process along with mandatory Equality Impact Assessment staff awareness raising and training programme.
- 6.3 This will support and drive the organisation forward in the equality and diversity agenda and will allow for a reviewed 'SMART'- based Disability Equality Action Plan to compliment the reviewed Race Equality Scheme.
- 6.4 Following full consultation process, evaluation and review procedures the reviewed Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan for the period 2009 – 2012 will be published no later than 04 December 2009.

## **7.0 Summary**

- 7.1 This report detailing employment monitoring data and progress in meeting the Disability Equality Duty both general and specific supports the Forestry Commission's aim of supporting and encouraging equality of opportunity and diversity of workforce and business planning and delivery.
- 7.2 This report meets the Commission's statutory duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and other relevant equality and diversity legislation to publish an annual monitoring report that includes employment monitoring data.

## **8.0 Contact Details**

- 8.1 Questions relating to the content of this report should be directed to:

Lesley N Crozier  
Diversity Manager  
The Forestry Commission  
Silvan House  
231 Corstorphine Road  
EDINBURGH  
EH12 7AT

Tel: 0131 314 6151  
E-mail: [lesley.crozier@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lesley.crozier@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

## **EXAMPLES OF EDUCATION AND OTHER INITIATIVES**

### Alice Holt

Education staff at Alice Holt work regularly with a group of Year ten students from a local special school with learning difficulties ranging from moderate learning disability to ASDs and behavioural problems. They spend 2 hours most weeks in the woods on the same site and take part in a range of activities. It's a very worthwhile project and the young people gain self confidence and an appreciation of the outdoors in addition to some specific skills. It is particularly valuable for the development of their social skills.

Education staff also work with a whole range of people from all kinds of backgrounds: deaf children in mainstream education; visually impaired children in mainstream education; small group visits from special schools e.g. Teloar school for physically disabled pupils; and very ethnically mixed school groups e.g. from Woking and Farnbough (Asian, Black, Eastern European etc.)

### Westonbirt Arboretum

In 2007 staff have worked on site with 16 special educational schools - who they cater for in a variety of ways - from sending out special virtual tours to enable autistic students to feel more comfortable coming to Westonbirt by fitting it into their routine, to providing private space for feeding students via tubes to working with teachers advising on where to visit and activities

### Haldon Forest Park

Rangers have led 25 special school visits to Haldon last year and 102 visits were carried out independently.

### The Forest Education Initiative

This is a GB partnership, which promotes the formation of local education cluster groups to deliver a range of practical learning activities for children and young people based around woodland, wood and wood products. A partnership grant allows applications to fund small projects undertaken by the local cluster group.

There are a few examples of cluster group projects that have activity engaged with children from these groups, most notably through Forest School activity. We have been supporting Forest School development in England through FEI cluster groups and partnership funding as well as developing specific Forest School Woodland Improvement Grants in East of England and West Midlands. Many of these Forest Schools will in some way work with children and young people with behavioural disorders or mental health problems. Some may face physical disabilities too. Examples of Forest School working with target groups are outlined below.

### Yeovil and Dorset CHICS Forest School

This FEI cluster group are currently working with Nature Groups in Swanmead Community School. The children from this group include those with Aspergers Syndrome, behavioural difficulties, and children who are electively mute. Anna Elliott, FS Leader and Cluster Group member, is running these sessions. The Groups are running from now until the end of the academic year (07/08).

### East of England – Forest School Woodland Improvement Grant(WIG)

Seevic Sixth Form College, Benfleet, Essex. Seevic College, is the largest Sixth form college in the UK, located in the densely populated Thames Gateway. The Essential Skills section of the college have been successful in obtaining Forest School WIG Challenge funding to develop Forest School sessions for it's pupils.

The Essential Skills section works with students between 16 and 21 years old with special educational needs (SEN) and moderate learning difficulties many of whom have autism.

WIG funding has enabled a member of the teaching staff to gain his Level 3 Practitioners Award and has provided equipment for the students to take part in Forest School sessions.

Peterborough City Council in partnership with the Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Forest School East have been working for the past year to set a vision for 5 Forest School sites throughout Peterborough City. According to the Government Office for the East of England, Peterborough is one of the most deprived areas in the East of England. Peterborough has a significant Black Minority Ethnic (BME) population and has a network of refugees and asylum seekers.

FC funding has enabled the partnership to identify 5 Forest School sites, each site links into a number of schools and pre-schools in Peterborough City. It is estimated that 22 schools will benefit from Forest School sessions. All schools have a significant number of BME pupils.

WIG funding has provided money for equipment such as waterproof coats and trousers, First Aid kits, water carriers and tarpaulins. WIG funding will also enable 3 primary schools teachers gain their Level 3 Forest School Practitioners Award.

Norfolk County Council. WIG funding has enabled fair and local access to high quality Forest Schools opportunities and include both Forest School for early years and for children with special educational needs (SEN) and emotional/ behavioural difficulties. This project focuses on four key areas including a SEN and inclusion pilot. WIG funding has enabled a 10 week Forest School programme for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), providing practitioners who work with SEN children a high quality model for child-centred approach through outdoor learning.

WIG Challenge funding has enabled this county to achieve the following outcomes:

- Number of schools that are impacted by the grant = 42 (10% of this county's

primary schools)

- Number of trained practitioners at Level 3 = 16
- A pilot study focusing on SEN and inclusion
- Successful borrow box scheme that will support 30 school/establishments

Cambridge City Council. The Children and Young People's Participation Service (ChYpPS) applied for WIG funding to develop a Forest School programme aimed at supporting those at risk of anti-social behaviour and children and young people with special needs and disabilities.

The project will encourage children and young people living in Cambridge City to use and respect local nature reserves, local parks and open spaces.

John Bunyan and John Ray Infant School are urban schools situated in the town of Braintree, Essex. For the past 6 months both schools have been working with Daws Hall Environmental Centre (last year successful WIG applicant with qualified Level 3 practitioners) who have been delivering Forest School sessions to pupils at both schools.

The Children at both schools have now attended 13 sessions run by Daws Hall at a local woodland. The teachers noted changes in the children's attitude toward learning, confidence and motivation.

The schools have been encouraged by the parents' support for Forest Schools as historically the school has had great problems engaging parents' in their children's learning. The school is in a area of social deprivation; it has a high percentage of free school meals and of children with special educational needs. In March the school invited parents and carers to a Forest School session. All of the carers of all but two children attended Forest School.

The schools have seen the benefits of providing Forest School sessions and have been successful in obtaining WIG funding to allow 2 teachers to be Level 3 trained and 2 teaching assistants to gain their Level 1 qualification. The schools have also been successful in obtaining funding for items such as wet weather gear, bow saws, first aid kits, tarpaulins and ropes.

Formal and Informal Education / Community Engagement with people suffering from disabilities in Sherwood FD				
Who	What	where	when	ranger
Special Needs Schools	Nature walks, artwork	Sherwood Pines, Notts & Chamber's Farm Wood, Lincs	Several each year	Lindsey Brown Mary Porter
Red Cross "Walk in the Woods" 6 minibus loads of young adults, all had severe learning and physical difficulties and were on 1:1 ratio.	Pond dipping from wheelchairs	Chamber's Farm Wood, Lincs	July 2006	Mary Porter
The Countryside Skills Group - referrals from Derbyshire NHS mental health trust	- Practical conservation tasks - habitat surveys	Shirebrook Wood, Notts	weekly	Vince Lennox
People suffering from depression, individually referred by Notts NHS mental health trust	-practical conservation tasks -site maintenance e.g. painting signs, litterpicking	Teversal Trails, Notts	weekly	Vince Lennox
Hucknall Special Needs Group	-practical conservation tasks	Oak tree Heath, Notts	weekly	John Wood
Lincs NHS partnership resource centre - mental health referrals	- practical conservation tasks	Chamber's Farm Wood, Lincs	Weekly	Mary Porter
wheelchair user	Orienteering GCSE course using maps indicating accessibility of paths	Sherwood Pines	Summer 2007	Lindsey Brown
Disabled teenagers group	Audit of education activities	Sherwood Pines	Summer 2007	Karina Thornton (who has left, so contact is Lindsey Brown)
Over 50's group with limited mobility	Walk & talk	Sherwood Pines	Summer 2007	Lindsey Brown

Other info

Several of the district ranger staff have basic training in Macaton signs and symbols, one ranger in Paget-Gorman (for language disorders) and one ranger currently training in British Sign Language.

Sherwood Pines- most kids activities are now accessible for students with limited mobility e.g. through route choice, provision of litterpickers to collect natural materials for art activities.

### Oaklands Special School

This is a special school for children with profound and complex learning difficulties. For all the groups getting outside regularly with Forest School was very relaxing for them. The children worked on appropriate social behaviour and had tactile experiences, for example touching the bark of the trees, feeling stones, branches etc smelling flowers and herbs, and other sensory activities such as experiencing the weather, the seasons and seeing the animals, birds and the grounds. They also worked on appropriate behaviour in and around the grounds of Lauriston Castle such as not pulling branches off trees etc. The children learned turn taking, co-operation with peers and how to interact with one another.

Getting out was very motivational for them. Another group focussed on developing their communication skills in this new environment. They used eye-communication frames to eye-point to the things they saw on their trip and wrote diaries with symbols on their return. Everyone involved really enjoyed their Forest School experiences.

The school is now working to secure a wild area to the back of the school to enable safe and easier access for the children. Oaklands are also hoping to do some interschool collaborative work with St Crispin's School.

### FC Wales

Forestry Commission Wales has an Education Strategy and dedicated team delivering Learning throughout Wales; set up in 2004. The team consists of nineteen staff.

The team works with young people throughout Wales, from a wide variety of social backgrounds, from a broad ethnic mix in some areas in Wales, and with children with special needs – either by ensuring that we can offer activities for all individuals within a mixed ability class or by working specifically with Special Schools.

FC Wales provides financial support for buses for schools who fall within Communities First Areas (identified by Welsh Assembly Government as the most deprived areas in Wales) so that they are able to access woodlands close to them if finances are an issue. We also undertake outreach work and encourage use of local woodlands/wooded areas close to school.

In line with the Education Strategy, the Woodlands for Learning team has three objectives or ways of working:

- **Direct Delivery** using woodlands for learning with learners through woodland visits or programmes such as Forest School
- **Facilitating** - helping others use woodlands for learning through support of FEI (Forest Education Initiative), running a Forest School Leader training programme (four courses per year), running teacher training days and offering support and

advice to teachers and others who want to use trees and woodlands as a learning resource

- **Influencing** others as to the value of using woodlands for learning – including general publicity, articles in specialist press, and close working with teachers, Local Education Authorities and DCELLS (Dept. Education, Children, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government)

Currently the team works mainly with the formal education sector and with young people up to the age of 25. We work on both the FC estate (which we manage on behalf of Welsh Assembly Government) and woodlands owned by others in both the public and private sectors.

Achievements during 2006/07 include:

- Woodland visits for over 18,000 children
- 7 Forestry Commission led Forest School programmes with support for more than 18 other Forest School programmes
- 4 training courses training more than 50 new Forest School Leaders, plus development of the Leaders' training course itself
- 20 FEI Cluster Groups supported in Wales (there are now 22 FEI groups)
- £40k partnership funding provided for FEI Cluster Group educational projects
- 35 In Service Training Days for teachers (in the past we have also provided training for Estyn (school inspectorate in Wales) for the Foundation Phase (for ages 3-7))
- Annual conference which attracted 150 adult delegates in 06/07 (Conferences alternate between a child and adult audience each year)

**Forest School** is an approach where, as part of a planned programme, learners regularly visit the same area of woodland with the same qualified Forest School Leader. Forest School can help develop self esteem, encourage learning of key skills and help young people learn National Curriculum subjects in a new way, although the approach can be used with any learner.

**FEI** (Forest Education Initiative) involves 8 partners in Wales representing both the environment and the forestry industry. Local Cluster Groups bring together those who are keen to use woodlands for learning and develop projects that offer first hand learning experiences for young people in a woodland setting. Grant funding is available to help develop these projects.

## Ty Meirion

11 – 17 year old special needs children working in Coed y Brenin, an Assembly woodland managed by FCW near Dolgellau, Gwynedd.

Lyn Williams, FCW Education Officer, organised a Forest School programme for Ty Meirion, a local special school, catering for 11-17 year old special needs children. All the children involved had specific, individual learning needs and working with Ty Meirion staff, Lyn put together a programme of activities which were very ‘hands on’ and designed so that pupils could complete each task independently. Often this was a craft based activity which could then be taken back to school. Through coming to the same woodland each week, working with the same Forest School leader and by setting achievable tasks, the pupils’ developed a sense of belonging, had a real sense of achievement and as a result, raised self esteem.

Shan Lea, a teacher from Ty Meirion, has given her views on the project:

‘Having visited Forest School at Coed y Brenin over a number of weeks, the pupils had the opportunity to experience things that they would not have otherwise had. The log circle shelter, which was erected to welcome us, created an ideal atmosphere to learn in an outdoor environment whatever the weather. Each week a different activity was organised, such as finding materials to make a nest, a nature walk following clues along the way or making up a bird box and putting it up in the right place in the woodland. The experiences were very worthwhile for the pupils of Ty Meirion because they have special needs. The site that was chosen by Lyn and her co-workers was suitable for a wheelchair. The activities were suitable for their age and capability and were created to fit in with the term’s theme’

The project was considered to be a great success and is featured as an example of our work in our Education Strategy document produced in February 2007.

## Current Research into Disability

The aim of this project is to provide information and tools to improve the understanding and delivery of the requirements and expectations of the forest sector in respect to recreation goods, facilities and service provisions under the 1995 and 2005 Disability Discrimination Acts and wider government policy. Specific objectives are to:

- Assess the duties placed on the forest sector to provide equal access for disabled people by the 1995 and 2005 Disability Discrimination Acts and relevant government policies.
- Record current knowledge and skills of forest recreation staff for promoting disabled accessibility. Identify the need for any training or other activities which would raise awareness and capabilities of forest recreation managers to promote equal accessibility to recreation goods, facilities and services.
- Collate management guidance, tools and case studies of best practice in disabled provisions especially in the forest/countryside recreation sector. Develop new case studies of good practice, particularly in the forest sector.

Provide recommendations for the development of new guidance, tools and case studies.

- Identify and describe existing digests of contacts of groups of disabled people and groups/organisations representing disabled people.
- Using the findings from the above tasks, develop training materials and, in collaboration with Forestry Commission Training Services, pilot one or two disabled accessibility training events for forest managers.

The work should seek to maximise opportunities for continuity and shared learning across the forestry sector. In particular there should be an emphasis on making the work useful for forest managers in the public, private, community and NGO spheres.

The contractors conducting this research will need to bear in mind how the work might link with future requirements to promote diversity and equality in the recreational use of Scottish woodlands (e.g. requirements under the Equality Act 2006).

### Forestry Grants and Disability

The aim of this project is to develop and pilot a methodology which can be used to assess the contribution of forestry grant schemes to equal access to recreational goods, facilities and services for disabled people in woodlands in Great Britain.

Particular objectives are to:

- Critically assess evaluation methodologies so as to scope a specific methodology for assessing the contribution of forestry grant schemes to equal access for disabled people to woodland recreation goods, facilities and services.
- Develop a methodology that the Commission can apply to other grant funding mechanisms.
- Reflect on the findings of the pilot to generate understanding of the extent to which forestry grants have encouraged, and might encourage, equal access for disabled people.
- Advise the Commission on the design of future forestry grant schemes to promote equal access for disabled people to recreational goods, facilities and services in woodlands.

### Bedgebury Pinetum and Forest Park

BTCV are bringing groups of young Asylum seekers under the Young Roots Program funded by Lottery to Bedgebury Pinetum in Kent. They will be doing some basic conservation and maintenance work in the Pinetum and also offer led walks for each group explaining more about the work we do. Seven young men have attended so far, all under 18, who arrived in this country unaccompanied. Countries represented were Iraq (1), Eritrea (3), Sudan (2) and Sri Lanka (1).

Bedgebury also offer a Concession Scheme that enables key 'target' audiences to access Bedgebury at little or no cost. To be eligible for the scheme people need to either receive a disability benefit, live in a deprived area or be applying on behalf of a

disability group / care home / special school. The concession scheme gives free parking therefore reducing one of the barriers to participation.

Archery sessions are offered to disabled people either via the Kent Outdoor Pursuits Project who initially helped us set this up or via our own independent Archery instructors. A WHI Health Walk is run every Friday at 10am. Walks are open to all of our visitors and disabled people and people with learning difficulties are actively welcome and included. Attendance has been steadily increasing and between 10 and 20 people attend most weeks.

### Fineshade

In Fineshade Wood (Northants FD) two groups of volunteers with special needs come out to do practical stuff (coppicing, ride widening etc), one on a Wednesday and one on a Friday.

Also since the new trails at Fineshade are all ability, about 25% of people coming to this half term's events (07) had learning difficulties or physical disabilities (they joined in with making mud sculptures and dens).

Last term, staff worked with a school group from Wittering, whose pupils didn't speak English as a first language. They did a sensory walk & den building (& the teacher sent a message afterwards saying it was 'the best trip ever!').

The education packages on offer aren't specifically aimed at BME groups, but some schools in the area bring classes with high percentages of children with a BME background. The activities are all pretty hands-on, so in some cases it doesn't matter if the children don't have an in-depth knowledge of the English language.

Staff are also putting on 'operation reindeer' this year. It used to be something the County Council offered at the country parks, but because of staff shortages they are unable to offer it this year. There should be about 30 or so service users from various day centres (plus support staff) and the clients all come out to the woods, we go for a walk & collect leaves & stuff, come back, make Christmas cards, play carols & have mince pies.

### Salcey

Two separate day centres for people with special needs come to do voluntary conservation work in various forests in the south of the Northants district twice a month each.

Work also takes place with a local care home for people with severe head injuries - at the moment one man & his support worker come along to Salcey forest once per week

### Cannock

Route to health project Cannock Chase involved BME and disabled groups on (report on internet under FCE Active Woods). Now over 40 target groups have been involved, including socially deprived, young carers, probation service, adults with special needs, children with learning difficulties, rehabilitation centre, millennium volunteers, retirement groups etc.

Cannock have a developed a Sound project, which is working with sound artists to make tracks and engage inner city ethnically diverse groups with open space and forest.

### Rosliston

Rosliston have also created a high quality forest lodge accommodation for groups with disabilities (very high spec, adjustable kitchen work tops, shower rooms, electric beds, hoists etc).

### South Yorks Coalfields

Green Gym sessions are run every Tuesday at either Bentley, Brodsworth and Thurnscoe Community Woodlands in South Yorkshire. The sessions rotate around the three sites depending on available work. The group take part in basic practical conservation tasks such as vegetation thinning, survey work, painting and bulb planting, whilst also gaining health benefits from gentle exercise and warm ups. The group taking part are from Thorn Adult Learning Centre, Millennium Volunteers, 16-25 years old, all dealing with some form of disability.

### Chopwell

One of the Friends of Chopwell Wood members has recently qualified to teach sign language and is about to embark on further training funded by FoCW. In return, she has identified a number of events where she will attend to provide support to help interpret for deaf participants. In addition, through her contacts with the deaf community, she has encouraged a number of individuals to come along to events. Most notably, a deaf/blind individual able to participate in a green woodworking session as she provided interpretation through deaf/blind manual signing.

### Whinlatter

Staff at Whinlatter Forest have been working with a group from the Sheperd School in Nottingham for the last five years. They come to the Lake District for a week each year and do practical conservation tasks with the FC and other outdoor organisations (such as National Park Authority & National Trust). The students have a range of physical, mental and learning disabilities, but the ethos of the school is to give the students the opportunity to experience outdoor work and gain an appreciation for the environment through participation in manual work. The tasks they have carried out over the years have ranged from building new footpaths and resurfacing existing

ones, to clearing hemlock regeneration on native woodland sites and forest roads. Some of the benefits which the students have demonstrated have been improvements in their self esteem, development of their communications skills and a focus on intra-personal skills.

### Grizedale

Staff have developed (in Partnership with Cumbria Development Education Centre) a sustainability programme for special needs schools (a modification of the KS 2 'Going Global' programme).

They have begun developing a new sculpture with three special needs schools, and delivered a programme of activities that allowed the children to gain a discovery level John Muir Award. The mosaic has been put on hold due to staffing shortage, but it is intended to continue this once this has been resolved.

Staff have also supported Special Needs colleges and schools with practical outdoor activities.

### Alice Holt

In partnership with East Hampshire District Council, CTC and other local partners, FC is involved in a cycling project, aimed initially at people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, but with a longer term aim of enabling anyone who wants to cycle to do so. It is intended to link it with other activity and health initiatives e.g. Walking to Health and to use it as a means to encouraging people of all backgrounds into the forest and out in the open air. The funding has been raised through a Sustrans led bid and is for 4 years, after which the project is to be self sustainable. For the first 2 years the main focus will be on developing the project at Alice Holt but work will need to be done at the same time on developing the wider focus of cycling for all in East Hampshire as a whole through the provision of satellite cycling centres in villages and at Queen Elizabeth Country Park (FC owned, recreation HCC managed) where people will be able to hire cycles, including adapted cycles. The project already has some adapted trikes and a tandem ready for use with a trailer to transport them. Applications for a cycling development officer are currently being considered with interviews imminent and a start date of 1st January expected. The officer will be employed by CTC but will be based at Alice Holt initially, and subsequently at Alice Holt and at EHDC offices in Petersfield. The project Development Officer will therefore be working closely with Woodland park staff and his/her work will need to co-ordinate closely with plans for the Park.

### Westonbirt Arboretum

Staff have run a series of walks for visually impaired people with Stroud Valleys Project with the Macular Disease society (2004-06)

## North York Moors

Artners @ Dalby: Artners are one of our tenants at the Dalby Courtyard. ARTners studio provides a specially designed space for children/young people with special needs to create art through community-based workshops. ARTners 4 Special Kids is a not-for-profit programme of art workshops for the special young people of Scarborough and Ryedale. The workshops are deeply beneficial both educationally and therapeutically, but most of all absolute fun! They have no barriers on age or severity of special needs, allowing each individual to express themselves and their inner thoughts, emotions and frustrations in a relaxed, creative environment.

Ryedale Special Families: our staff work closely with this group on their events and activities in Dalby especially their family picnics and BBQs. Ryedale Special Families is an independent charity founded in the early 1990s by a group of parents of disabled children. The work is managed by parent trustees supported by an advisory panel of special needs professionals.

Their objectives are; 'The relief of children and young adults with disabilities and special needs, their families and/or carers, in particular, but not exclusively, by the provision of information, advice and support service.'

They provide this service to families who live in Ryedale, North Yorkshire. Ryedale Special Families believes in the equal rights of disabled families, it works to uphold them and campaigns to strengthen them. They offer ways into local/national planning and make sure that the voices of families, and young people with disabilities, are heard. They arrange a range of events and activities that the whole family can take part in including regular visits to Dalby.

Social Care Therapy: FC provide free access to social workers from Scarborough who are part of North Yorkshire County Council mental health services. They use the forest to bring clients as part of their rehabilitation programme. This often takes the form of a forest walk where the social worker and client can have a consultation session in a neutral and relaxing environment away from the pressures of their normal life. The clients are encouraged to use walking in the forest as part of their therapy.

Celebration of Access: This event was organised jointly with the North York Moors National Park as part of its 50th anniversary celebrations. It was aimed at all groups that use the National Park and the FC estate but specifically targeted who may have difficulty accessing the facilities in the NP and FC. Groups of users started a trail from different points in the NP converging on Dalby Forest. These groups included disabled horse riders, wheelchair users, partially sighted and BME teams. Part of the celebrations in Dalby also included Indian dancing and the catering was provided by an Indian women's group.

All Dalby Forest visitor centre staff have undergone deaf awareness training.

FC has hosted visits from partially sighted groups specifically aimed at letting them experience the new visitor centre and the forest through the mediums of touch, smell and sound.

FC staff have developed a partnership project with two local secondary schools aimed engaging with disaffected pupils using mountain biking as a catalyst. They have to earn the right to participate in the programme through good behaviour. As part of the programme they learn vocational skills such as bike mechanics, leadership training and environmental skills.

During the designing of the new Dalby Forest visitor centre FC staff consulted with a local disablement action group who came up with several useful suggestions which were included in the building.

#### Haldon Forest Park, near Exeter, Devon

Approximately 50 car park season tickets have been issued to special schools, colleges who work specifically with those with profound special needs. Most going to those working with young people.

Three driving/50yard walk visits were arranged for three groups of OAPs with severe walking/ mobility problems. The groups were accessed via the League of Friends and FC funded transport/ ranger/ food. This project was initiated when a ranger gave a talk to these groups and found that many of the older people had not been to Haldon for years.

Free events have been offered to certain groups eg. Halloween story telling was attended by 8 severely disabled young people from Dame Hannah Rogers School in Exeter.

Staff have worked closely with the West of England School for the deaf who now use the forest park each term for confidence and communication development.

Rangers have led 52 'green gym' conservation volunteer sessions for 'Opportunities plus' who try to integrate adults with long term depressive illnesses back into a work environment. This has involved approximately 50 individuals and it has now been expanded to include other volunteers, which helps the core group of clinically depressed.

Rangers have arranged 2 trike cycling visits and two walks for Dame Ellen Tinkham school in Exeter for the severely disabled. The school visits the site independently each week. They have been actively encouraged to have independent use of the site after the initial 'guided' visit. Two more guided visits planned for under 10s.

FC have funded visits for three young carer groups. This group were accessed via another League of Friends. Two visits were for families including their disabled parents.

Action 4 Blind People, who provide holiday respite for blind/partially sighted and their dogs, were used as primary consultees for the Haldon project development and staff have run 3 guided walks for them and they use the sensory trail at Mamhead weekly.

Staff have run 10 junior rangers sessions involving 166 children (some repeats) working with two under 14 males who have a deep fascination in insects/wildlife and are categorised as being within the autism spectrum. They helped with all 10 sessions and staff are still involved in their ongoing education/development.

A 'Pimp yer Bike' mountain bike training scheme was run which was a partnership between FC and Torbay council youth service to provide mountain bike training for children from one of the most deprived areas of Torquay. The children had previously received bikes from the police and had repaired them with help from the local bike shops however had no where to ride them. 6 sessions have been completed with over 20 children passing through the scheme gaining confidence, attaining new skills and completing achievement targets.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust (CFT) have had one fundraising walk for approximately 35 families (including CF sufferers ) and the 'Carols in the Forest' event run successfully last year with over 120 people attending and also to be run in 07 is a fundraising event for CF.

The site hosted two traveller (new and Romany) liaison events and one Shelter (homeless organisation) led training event. FC provided Ranger child care for traveller children and food for the event.

A ladies only mountain bike group has been successfully running over the last year on a weekly basis involving approximately 20 women.

Plymouth Brethren, a local faith group, used Haldon Forest as a venue for their annual community celebration and the children led family and friends around two walking trails. Approximately 450 people attended and after the event ate together in a marquee on site.

Parikia Active for Life, a volunteer group of young adults with moderate learning difficulties, have benefited from a Ranger led weekly visit. Approximately 25 sessions have been run involving six under 25 males. They also attend the site to mountain bike every two weeks.

Probation 'volunteers' attend site once a week to carry out forestry work. Approximately 10 per visit.

#### Wistlandpound, near Barnstaple, Devon

Discover Wistlandpound is a major new countryside heritage attraction that has been built to be fully accessible. Located on the edge of Exmoor National Park it provides two all-ability trails, one of which incorporates the UK's first exercise trail for wheelchair users and a fully accessible Discovery Centre, bird hide and range of interpretation features that stimulate all of the senses.

This is a partnership project between Forestry Commission, The Calvert Trust Exmoor and South West Lakes Trust. The Calvert Trust specialises in providing outdoor experiences for people with disabilities both on a day visitor and residential basis. The Calvert Trust make daily use of the woodland and its facilities.

#### Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme, Somerset & Devon

Long-distance 'Herepath' trails: A network of off-road trails are being developed in the Neroche Forest and across neighbouring land. The key provisions for disabled access in this project are as follows:

- Providing full information to users: Routes are to be graded to take account of path surfaces, gradients and cambers likely to be encountered. Categories identified will reflect the Zone definitions described in the Countryside Agency publication: 'By All Reasonable Means'. This zonal information will be made available on gateway boards at car parks, on leaflets and on the Neroche website.
- Maximising accessibility: The nature of the Blackdown Hills landscape precludes the provision of Zone A ('Easy') access in all areas, due to naturally steep slopes and wet ground conditions. However most public forest sections can achieve Zone B ('moderate') accessibility. As a principle, throughout the trails all human obstacles to access will be avoided or removed (stiles, steps etc).
- Providing all-ability sections: At the main gateway point onto the longest Herepath Trail, a new car park has been constructed, and from this a new all-ability loop trail is to be installed, running to approximately 1 km, and providing access to a spectacular viewpoint over Taunton Deane. This route will be constructed to the highest accessibility standards to conform to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and other 'all ability' access guidance and best practice. The design and construction specifications used will provide everyone, particularly wheelchair users and others with mobility problems, barrier-free access to the countryside.

In developing these provisions the project has worked closely with the Disabled Ramblers. Members of the DR were commissioned to assess the proposed routes of the long distance trails, and to provide on-going advice on trail design and zonation.

Health Walks - The Neroche Scheme in partnership with SASP (Somerset Activity and Sport Partnership) has developed a Healthy Walking programme that encourages people with social and mental health problems to access the countryside. The programme, which runs for the full three years of the Scheme, is working with day centres and GP referrals to make up parties who are taken by minibus out into the forest for short, carefully designed and risk-assessed walks. The response from participants has been highly encouraging and some 25 walks have already been carried out. The leader of the walks programme has also been involved as an advisor in Herepath trail design.

Website - The Neroche Scheme has made a commitment to make the new Neroche website, [www.nerochescheme.org](http://www.nerochescheme.org), fully accessible. The site is working towards conformance to Double-A of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 1.0 (WVAG 1.0), including all Priority 1 and Priority 2 and some Priority 3 checkpoints as defined in the Guidelines.

Forest Schools - The Neroche Scheme is running an ambitious programme with local schools to develop the 'Forest School' approach to outdoor learning. Forest School is recognised as a highly effective technique for use with hard-to-reach audiences, including children and young adults with learning disabilities, and children with behavioural problems which cause them to respond poorly in a conventional classroom environment.

Bushcraft events - The Forestry Commission has begun a programme of 'bushcraft' family events in the forest, designed to bring children and parents into the woods to learn practical skills such as green woodwork, shelter building and fire lighting. These events have succeeded in attracting families from nearby Chard, a town with a high immigrant (Polish and Portugese) population. Recent events have brought families with children of these ethnic origins who currently have little access to the countryside. The effects have been very encouraging: in one case, children who had been highly reluctant to leave their computer games had been persuaded to attend the event by their mother: having spent the day in the woods, the children were enlivened and clearly inspired, and were keen to return on future occasions.

Apprenticeship Scheme - The Neroche Scheme includes an apprenticeship scheme, through which three local young people have been recruited onto an 18 month NVQ-based training programme. The recruitment process for these apprentice positions was designed expressly to reach candidates who wanted to develop a career in countryside management, but who lacked the qualifications or confidence to progress their career unaided.

Castle Neroche - As part of a wide programme to increase access at Castle Neroche Scheduled Ancient Monument, the Forestry Commission will be installing a new all-ability level surfaced track to allow visitors with mobility problems to access the hillfort and the viewpoints it offers.

### Wychwood Lake Restoration

The Forestry Commission is working with the Taunton Anglers Association to restore Wychwood Lake as an angling and wildlife lake. The restoration programme includes the provision of platforms specifically designed for disabled anglers.

### Cookworthy Forest, near Holsworthy, Devon

A link has recently been established with Arliemoor Care Home for residents to carry out conservation work in Cookworthy Forest. rliemoor offer care and rehabilitation for people with mental health difficulties.

### Dartmoor Prisoner Rehabilitation Project

6-8 month skills training and mentoring programme for Dartmoor offenders coming to the end of their prison term, with the option of 3 months employment with FC following release. riginated in 2004 the project has evolved considerably, and is currently funded until 2009. Partners: HM Prison Dartmoor; Dartmoor Sustainable Development Fund; Devon Renaissance (SWRDA).

### Cardinham Woods, near Bodmin

For two years running now the Vitalise Churchtown Centre have organised a sponsored family walk at Cardinham, to raise money for their centre which offers essential breaks for disabled people and their carers. The Centre makes almost weekly use of the fully accessible trail at Cardinham and the disabled toilet facilities.

The cycle hire concession at a number of FC sites offer a range of specially adapted cycles, for example:

Cannock - The cycle centre at Cannock hold specialised equipment including trikes etc. They take out various groups with disabilities, BME groups from inner city areas, pupil referral units etc. The cycling trails have a very diverse visitor profile due to location and picks up groups that other activities do not e.g. male over 45 etc.

### High Lodge All Ability Cycles

High Lodge Forest Centre, Suffolk , have all ability cycles for hire. The Friends of Thetford Forest Park raised funding to purchase some all ability cycles (6 different styles) and Bike Art (Cycle Hire Franchise) maintain and hire out these cycles from the centre. The bikes where bought in 2006, and are available for hire during normal trading hours.

### Bedgebury

FCE have purchased a host of adapted cycles as well as a Trumper (all terrain mobility vehicle). These can be hired from the visitor centre.