

Report on The PROGRESS Conference: Enjoy and Protect our Forests:

Fontainebleau Oct 17th-18th

The conference had two objectives:

Firstly to celebrate the growing awareness across Europe that multifunctional forestry providing biodiversity, public enjoyment and benefits to the rural economy had a central role in achieving a more sustainable world.

Secondly to review and share good practice in use of a range of tools for better understanding and improving management of forest biodiversity and recreation.

The conference was attended by senior staff of both the partner Forestry Services and forestry colleagues from across Europe. Consultants and academics working in the fields of recreation and biodiversity management were also in attendance.

The pleasure and enjoyment the public get in the New Forest and Fontainebleau was brought directly to the conference by the presentation of a series of video interviews undertaken by **Rick Taylor** and **Victoria Edwards**. The combination of the visitors' words and images left no doubt about the importance of forests to the public.

We have much to be proud of

Leaders of both Services re-emphasised their commitment to a sustainable forestry strategy.

Bernard Gamblin (ONF Chief Executive: Ile de France) celebrated the long history of public enjoyment of Fontainebleau. This ranged from Philippe V! in 1346 with the creation of quality forests to the present day and ONF linking into the EU Forest Plan. ONF is engaged in managing multi-functional forests to provide economic, environmental, social and cultural advantages. This firstly has to respect the environment and play an important role in the economic development and prosperity of Europe, in particular for the rural areas. In doing so the forests contribute to a better quality of life, an agreeable environment, leisure possibilities and advantages for health. ONF has four main actions – improve the competitiveness in the long term, improve and protect the environment, contribute to a better quality of life and to favour co-ordination and communication.

This has led to 'Le projet Forêt-Patrimoine' a project encompassing these aims of which Fontainebleau is one of the first three forest nationwide to participate.

Lord Clark (Chairman of the Forestry Commission) emphasised the common understanding of how much trees and woodlands can contribute to the quality of life of a nation. He suggested **few other land uses could provide such a wide range of benefits**. He emphasised the centrality of the PROGRESS Project in taking forward The EU Forest Plan by setting a common vision for forests across Europe, as forests for society, delivering long-term multifunctional benefits for present and future generations.

He was also excited that the project had generated a shared responsibility, amongst managers and stakeholders, to manage these special places and by the strong

relationship that had developed between the Forestry Commission and the Office National des Forêts.

He concluded “we have much to be proud of, and I hope you will share my pride in what we are achieving through partnership and co-operation”.

Good practice

The joint leaders of the project, **Daniel Delory** (ONF Director Fontainebleau) and **Bruce Rothnie** (FC Project Manager) provided a practical overview of the biodiversity issues in their two forests and the impact of recreation and how the Project had sought to address this. There has been a somewhat different emphasis on the approach to the public but the project had emphasised the value of engagement with the public for both Services. **Sue Williams** (CCW) who had directed a research review of public policy for forest and countryside recreation in several European countries, highlighted the range of approaches but also the general move towards greater public involvement.

Daisy Copeaux and **Peter Thaxter** joint co-ordinators of the Project presented details of specific project initiatives with Project staff **Helen Chalk** and **Florent Pipino**. This covered the scope of the project, programmes to resolve ecological issues, communication programme and sustainability programme. It showed the process of consultation with the public, actions on the ground and other initiatives such as computer-based lessons for schools.

The second day of the conference focussed on the tools that had been developed to aid management decision. These presentations showed the effectiveness of collecting GPS data on site use by visitors, and then applying this data in the **Masoor** model to show likely changes in use when points of access were changed by management decision, to direct the public away from sensitive habitat areas

Rene Henkens (from Alterra the authors of the model) and **Sarah Colas** (PROGRESS Consultant) showed the potential strength of the model calibrated by GPS data and emphasised the need for its use and replication in a range of sites to increase its value in practical application. **Julia Branson** (Geodata Institute and Consultant) explored more directly the value of GPS data for understanding site use and responding to this. She argued the case for further work on developing both the data, and through it, the sensitivity of the modelling tool.

The value of the data and modelling exercises were highlighted by **Simon Smith**(FC GIS Planner) who showed the way in which this data had been presented to stakeholder groups, and documented the clear success this had achieved in increasing public understanding of site use and the justification for change.

In conclusion to the presentations **Florence Deronce** (Athlane Consultant) and **Martin Fitton** (consultant to the FC) re-emphasised the benefits of engagement with the public in legitimising management changes required for a sustainable balance, and also in the way it provided public opportunity to test new management proposals and identify the limits of acceptable change. The clear evidence that forest recreation

provides for physical and mental health was also emphasised. In addition the possible benefits of forest engagement to helping public understanding of the wider sustainable agenda was emphasised. It was argued that greater public involvement in management decisions could increase the public's social capacity and social capital at a time of climate change crisis, when an effective partnership between civil society and government was crucial if sustainable agendas were to be achieved.

It was noted that the EU proposed a European Forestry Week in 2008 to engage the public's commitment to forestry and it was felt that the experience of the PROGRESS Project could help inform the promotional strategies for this week.

The conference ended with a series of open space discussions involving all in attendance, and which identified priority actions and refocused the issues to provide a number of practical steps that could be taken forward by forestry services and interests across Europe.