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WE NEED YOU – FORESTRY COMMISSION LAUNCHES ONLINE FRISTON FOREST DISCUSSION FORUM FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING

The Forestry Commission is seeking the views of regular users and local communities on improvements for its mountain bike trails across Friston Forest in East Sussex.

As one of the most popular destinations for mountain biking on the south coast, the Forestry Commission wants to understand how its trails and access can be improved.

While Friston Forest already offers more than seven miles of cycle paths and trails for mixed-use mountain biking, a number of unofficial trails exist across the forest. These can have an impact on other forest users, so the Forestry Commission wants to know what can be done to improve the experience of mountain bikers on Forestry Commission managed trails and minimise the impact of unofficial trails on other visitors.

Running until 18 October 2013, a new discussion web forum will allow users to have their say on mountain biking in the forest. In particular, the Forestry Commission is keen to hear how regular users – cyclists and walkers alike – feel about safety, access, the number and type of trails, and whether they have any other comments.

Ian Bromley, Weald Beat Forester for the Forestry Commission, said:

“Friston Forest is superb for mountain bikers and continues to be popular for tourists and the local community alike. In recent years there’s been an increase in the number of unofficial trails, so we’re keen to understand whether there’s anything more we could be doing to improve the Forestry Commission trails already in place to reduce the impact of cycling on other trails and on other users and the forest in general.

“The web forum is designed to encourage discussion over what we could do to improve user experience. We’re delighted to have such an enthusiastic group of regular mountain bikers, walkers and other users, so it’s important we’re

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listening to what people want. This is about what else we could be doing to make sure people continue to visit Friston Forest.

“Whether you’re a mountain biker or not, we’d encourage you to take part. We don’t have any firm plans at this stage, so your views really will count.”

The Forestry Commission’s online forum can be found at <https://dialogue.forestry.gov.uk/vf1lcjmqpl> and gives users the opportunity to contribute to discussions, share ideas and rate and comment on the ideas of others.

If you would prefer to comment by post, please write to: **Mr I Bromley, Weald Beat Forester, Forestry Commission, Bedgebury Office, Park Lane, Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 2SL.**

Please note that submissions made by post will not be added to the online discussion and will therefore not be able to receive support from other forest users.

This initial discussion will continue until the 18th October 2013 and once the Forestry Commission has considered comments aims to publish findings and proposals by 31st October 2013 on www.forestry.gov.uk/fristonforest

Ends

Note to Editors.

1. Friston Forest is owned by South East Water and managed by the Forestry Commission on a 200 year lease. The forest covers more than 800 hectares of land within the South Downs National Park. Predominately a beech plantation, planted in the 1950s the Forest is increasingly popular for a variety of pastimes including dog walking, horse riding, mountain biking as well as a range of organised events. Further important management aims are to provide a source of timber and maintain important woodland habitat.
2. To achieve a balance of management objectives the Forestry Commission works with several different partners in Friston Forest including Sussex Wildlife Trust, South Downs National Park, Seven Sisters Country Park and Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust (TROT) among others. You can find more information at:
 - www.forestry.gov.uk/fristonforest
 - www.forestry.gov.uk/england
 - www.tollrides.org.uk
 - www.sevensisters.org.uk

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