



CASE STUDY 4: Dog pit stops – effective engagement

Summary

Dog 'pits stops' are a simple, effective and low cost way to engage with dog owners to increase rapport, understanding and management effectiveness.

Good practice

- A very cost-effective way to build positive dialogue with owners and better understand behaviours and conflicts.
- Dog owners can be readily targeted to visit such sessions through "freebies" for their dogs.
- Can easily be undertaken by site staff, requiring no specialist or expensive materials.
- Helps dog walkers to become unofficial wardens, taking pride in the site and supporting staff.
- Suppliers of pet food and accessories will often provide freebies for such use.
- Dog food samples came from quality suppliers that did not raise any undesired ethical concerns.



Description

Forestry Commission managers of the South Yorkshire Community Woodlands wanted to better engage with dog walkers as a major site user. They used a 'pit stop' approach, consisting of a ranger, van and a table with questionnaires and free dog food samples, supplied free by manufacturers.

The 14 pit stops were held at 5 strategic locations in 2006-7, between 8-10am and 3-6pm. Posters (on-site and locally distributed) invited people to stop off, have their say about the woodland and get free dog food and water. Some dog walkers changed their walk times specifically to attend pit stops. A pet food supplier subsequently sponsored a 'Walkies in the Woods' leaflet to be handed out to all dog walkers and veterinary surgeries, advertising good, local places to walk your dog.



Staff were very pleased with this approach: "It's an amazingly cheap and effective way of talking to those who really do regularly use and rely on our sites. It works so well, as the dog walkers feel they are partly responsible for sites, and feel really valued that we appreciate their eyes and ears on the ground. They can now text the site ranger with comments and to report problems, which is great as we can't be on site 24/7."

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