

# PROGRESS

Promotion And Guidance For Recreation On Ecologically Sensitive Sites



**PROGRESS (PROMotion and Guidance for Recreation on Ecologically Sensitive Sites) is an ambitious £2.6m European co-funded project which seeks to balance the pressures of countryside recreation and wildlife conservation work on sensitive sites in the New Forest and Forêt de Fontainebleau in France. PROGRESS aims to deliver sustainable recreation, which reduces the impact of recreation by channelling people to more robust sites, raising awareness of conservation work and encouraging responsible use of the forest.**

## objectives

- To promote a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the New Forest and Forêt de Fontainebleau among visitors and residents.
- To raise awareness of vulnerable wildlife habitats and foster a better understanding of forest conservation among visitors.
- To collect up-to-date information on which areas suffer greatest user impact.
- To redirect visitors away from ecologically sensitive areas to more robust sites and change the way people use the sites through guided recreation and education.
- To forge closer links with organisations and users to deliver sustainable recreation.
- To provide recreational opportunities with a minimal impact on sensitive habitats.

## actions

- **Visitor Surveys:** In 2004-05 surveys were conducted to discover where people go and what they do. 3,500 people were interviewed at over 70 sites; many with GPS units to track their routes through the forest. 2,100 telephone interviews were conducted with residents within a ten-mile radius. Dog and Horse Surveys were also carried out involving local groups and 6,000 households across the National Park area. During summer 2006 almost 1,000 cyclists completed questionnaires, off-network observations and GPS surveys.
- **Computer Modelling:** Computer models provided the basis for analysing visitor pressure on site ecology, with data on resident bird species programmed into the ecology model, LARCH. Using the visitor survey information the model can predict the effects of altering site infrastructure, such as moving a car park, or building new tracks, helping to highlight the consequences before any work is carried out.
- **Communication and education strategy:** Project information is disseminated to visitors through a regular newsletter, information packs and via the website. 'Codes of conduct' leaflets and guided recreational events have been produced to promote responsible walking, dog-walking, cycling and horse riding.

## achievements

- Monitoring and evaluation has enabled the team to understand the views of key user groups and identify sensitive sites which are subject to recreational pressure.
- Car park revisions are planned to encourage people to more robust sites, and car park closures in key sites to help wading birds during the breeding season.
- Ride improvements for horse riders.
- 'Parkwise' initiative has been developed to reduce verge-side parking.
- 'Bag It and Bin it' launched to encourage dog walkers to clean up after their pets.
- Information pack produced for holidaymakers.
- Seasonal signage about ground nesting birds and their habitats.

## background

The New Forest and Forêt de Fontainebleau, to the south east of Paris, are beautiful and popular places situated close to large populations and attract millions of visitors every year. Both forests are nature conservation sites protected under EU Directives and support a huge variety of wildlife including some internationally rare species. The two sites were selected as they have much in common. Both have a strong cultural heritage (former royal forests) and are famous for their wild and natural character, wide-open spaces and breathtaking scenery. Both sites are part of the Natura 2000 network - primary European sites for nature conservation. But increasing pressure from visitors has resulted in conflict with resident wildlife and their habitats.

Created by William the Conqueror in 1079, the New Forest is over 57,000 hectares. Centuries of grazing and forest management have shaped a mosaic of heathland, ancient woodland, wetlands and grass plains. Walking, horseriding, through traffic, car parking and camping have contributed towards the decline of ecologically fragile sites within the forest. At 17,117 hectares Forêt de Fontainebleau is the second largest national forest in France, with a population of ten million within 40 miles. Managed by ONF (Office National des Forêts), it has a diverse landscape including acid oak groves, heathland, grasslands and 100-year-old beech groves. In consultation with scientists and partners, ONF formulated a 20-year action plan (1996-2015) aimed at conserving the ecology of the forests, providing recreation and education for visitors, and using technological advances in timber harvesting. With many issues in common, the two forest teams joined forces to embark on a four-year (2003-2007) EU and ODPM-funded project to analyse site usage and lessen the impact from recreation by offering alternative routes and guiding activities.

Other internationally important sites will benefit from PROGRESS through the dissemination of web-based information to land managers across North West Europe.

## quotes

*"PROGRESS is an excellent example of bringing stakeholders together and getting projects working through good communication."* Paul Fulford, New Forest District Council.

*"Selflessness will save the New Forest, along with good science."* Chris Packham, television presenter.

## partners

Alterra Research Institute (Netherlands)  
Comité Départemental du Tourisme  
Forestry Commission  
Natural England  
ONF (Office National des Forêts)

## funding

<b>Total:</b>	<b>£2.6m</b>
EU Interreg IIIB ERDF	50%
ODPM (DCLG)	16%

## lessons learnt

- At the project planning stage establish the partnership early: keep numbers manageable; understand their culture and motivation; ensure face-to-face communication; find common financial controls; investigate funding regulations.
- At the implementation stage strengthen personal relationships; maintain commitment to the project goals; monitor progress regularly.
- Solutions to common issues were developed through a wider base of experience. The project has resulted in a new network and basis for future partnership working.