

Consultative Panel - Forestry England October update

Tackling litter

During the Great British Spring Clean, Forestry England set-up rubbish collection points, where local litter pickers could safely dispose of waste they had collected. Forestry England and NFDC worked together throughout May and June to carry out litter picking along 100 kilometres of our New Forest roadside verges.

Our staff have seen first-hand the escalating problem of litter on the Forest and the danger it poses to wildlife. Over the last year they have collected everything from smouldering disposable BBQs, to abandoned kayaks, clothing and many tonnes of plastic waste. The continued support from the local community in tackling litter has been simply incredible.



Planning and working together

Since restrictions eased, it's been an important time for local businesses and communities as they reopen and recover from such a challenging time. The New Forest action plan took steps to help manage visits during the summer in a way that supported recovery, while also caring for the Forest itself.

The plan was developed jointly by Forestry England, the New Forest National Park Authority, New Forest District Council, and tourism body Go New Forest with support from The Verderers, Hampshire and IOW Fire and Rescue Service, and Hampshire Constabulary. We are currently reviewing the key measures and impact of the action plan this summer and will soon be able to share what we aim to continue doing on these issues.

We've had greater numbers of staff across all organisations - including increased numbers of Forestry England's rangers, New Forest National Park Authority rangers and apprentice rangers - patrolling at key locations and visitor hotspots. This highly visible and coordinated approach has made the best use of finite resources by focusing on managing demand and distribution of visitors at key pressure points.



This also included prominent signage and targeted communications to all those spending time in the Forest. These have been visible in car parks and at key gateways to the New Forest and remain in place until the end of October half-term.

Signage at all Forestry England's car parks and thresholds were updated to clearly mark the Crown lands boundary, which is a Special Site of Scientific Interest.

High fire risk

The New Forest has been on high alert for the risk of wildfires again this summer. To help protect the area from the potential devastation of fires, earlier this year BBQs and fires of any kind were banned across the New Forest, including in our car parks. The ban covers land managed by Forestry England, National Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Hampshire County Council's Lymington and Keyhaven Marshes Local Nature Reserve and Lepe Country Park. All BBQ facilities at Forestry England sites were removed and prominent no BBQ signs installed at Forest car parks and information points.

Throughout August Volunteers from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service (HIWFRS) joined forces with Rangers from Forestry England and the New Forest National Park Authority to help encourage everyone visiting the New Forest to be fire safety aware. In joint patrols the combined teams talked to visitors to remind them that the New Forest is a strictly no BBQ and fire zone and shared tips on how everyone can help prevent wildfires in the countryside.



Growing the future

In July, Forestry England launched our five-year plan, [Growing the future: 2021-26](#), which sets out where we will focus our work so that we can achieve our objectives and purpose. Our plan gets to the heart of three of society's most pressing issues - the biodiversity crisis; the climate emergency and the lack of human connection with nature. These are issues of huge meaning for us as an organisation, for society and individuals.

Across the next five years we can make a big contribution towards changing things for the better.

Growing the future: 2021-26 is deliberately aspirational and ambitious, both for the nation's forests and Forestry England. It gives us clear priorities to guide our work over so that we can meet our long-term objectives and purpose for people, wildlife and the economy.

Permitted events and activities

The special qualities of the New Forest mean that by law any events or group activities planned to take place on the land we manage in the New Forest requires formal permission from Forestry England before taking place. We are legally required to assess each activity using a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) to ensure that the proposed activity will not cause any significant harm or impact on the protected habitats and wildlife.

This July a new framework for the HRA was agreed with Natural England, the government body responsible for checking compliance with the law in this area and is now in place. The assessment criteria have been strengthened to reflect increased protection of critical wildlife and landscapes.

We continue to work closely with organisers to discuss the nature of their proposed event and any possible impact. This has involved re-locating some activities and events, many of which have historically taken place in the same spot in the New Forest for many years. In total over the last 12 months, we've permitted around 1,200 events and organised activities.



Open habitat restoration and thinning operations
Over many decades, some of the Forest's open habitats have been planted with conifer trees to provide timber for the nation. In some areas we are now removing the conifer trees and returning it back to former open habitat, or native woodland. Examples of this include the work that took place recently at Dunces Arch, located between Ashurst and Lyndhurst. Also, we've just finished removing trees at Fletchers Thorns Inclosure, just off Rhinefield Ornamental Drive and we continue to fell some of the trees in Kings Copse Inclosure, near Holbury.

The HLS Team are carrying out more habitat restoration work over the coming months at Turf Hill, Kings Gutter Garn and Long Beech.

It's important for us to readdress the balance by slowly restoring more native species and create more open habitats, such as heathlands, to ensure we have a rich mix of wildlife and biodiversity, in line with the latest Forest Plan for the Inclosures.

Minister's visit

In August, we hosted a visit by the minister responsible for forestry, Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith and new CEO of the Forestry Commission, Richard Stanford. They were joined in the New Forest by some of the local team and staff from Defra. We had the opportunity to showcase the work delivered under the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme to revert wetlands back to being carbon sinks and there were wider discussions on delivering biodiversity and wildlife reintroductions. Leanne Sargeant, Senior Ecologist for South Forest District, explained more about our role in the White-



tailed Eagle reintroductions on the Isle of Wight and the fascinating study of pine martens that we're involved with in the New Forest. A key part of the visit was to demonstrate how we are restoring native woodlands and how the long-term vision for the landscape will make it more resilient.

Boost for UK's rarest lizard

Sand lizards bred at Forestry England's New Forest Reptile Centre, were released into the wild as part of a partnership project led by Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) to return these species from near extinction.

The young sand lizards were reintroduced on Forestry England land in Dorset and follow on from a group of 200 released in the same spot last year. Once widespread in England, sand lizards have declined considerably owing to loss of suitable habitats and are now only found in a few isolated areas of southern England and Merseyside. Projects like this require commitment over the long-term and whilst there is still much more work to be done, it's really encouraging to see the positive progress being made by the sand lizards released over the last few years.

