

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons	7 July 2014
Subject: Volunteering in Epping Forest 2013/14	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 14/14	For Information

Summary

This report informs your Committee of progress with the implementation of the Epping Forest Volunteer Strategy, which was adopted on 8 March 2010.

A total of 21,186 hours of volunteer activity were donated during financial year 2013/2014, which includes 10,884 hours from volunteers managed by the City of London; 5,595 hours by the Epping Forest Centenary Trust and 4,707 hours by the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers. This represents a 2.56% decrease in total volunteer hours on 2012/13.

At the end of March 2014, 227 people were volunteering for Epping Forest. 14 of our volunteers fulfil more than one of the 17 available roles. A further 311 people have participated in mass volunteering days. 26 new volunteers were recruited during the year.

The annual Volunteer Party in February 2014 staged at Butler's Retreat was again a great celebration. The Chairman awarded the following medals: Nine Gold (600 hours), seven Silver (300 hours) and seven Bronze medals (150 hours); £14,317 was spent on volunteer materials, equipment, travel and expenses in 2013/14, excluding training course fees.

The budget of £14,317 covered equipment, travel and expenses. City of London volunteers have contributed time equivalent to more than Six full time staff and provide vital match funding for the Heritage Lottery funded Branching Out Project.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- note the content of this report and improvements planned for 2014.

Main Report

Background

1. Many people seek to support their local open space through volunteering, whether by performing specific roles, running activities, or enhancing the natural and heritage conservation value of the Forest or as a way of contributing to the community in which they live. These tasks and related training provide volunteers with new experiences and skills.
2. Volunteering contributes significantly to the management of Epping Forest.

The expansion of volunteering is a key element of your Committee's Volunteer Policy and the five year Heritage Lottery funded Branching Out project, which acts as a catalyst for increasing the number of volunteers engaged across Epping Forest, and integrating them in a more coordinated way, using a dedicated Volunteer Development Officer (VDO) and staff in host teams to manage the process.

Current Position

3. There were 227 volunteers directly managed by the City of London at Epping Forest at the end of 2013.
4. During 2013/14 we recruited 26 new volunteers, exceeding the recruitment target of 14 for the Branching out Project.
5. Working with Visitor Services, two Visitor Services Volunteer Roles were combined and a new role, the Visitor Centres Volunteer, was created. New volunteer role descriptions for Volunteer Administrative Assistant and a Fund Raising volunteer were also created and are now online.
6. Epping Forest's first volunteer administration assistant has been working with the VDO and the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) and has started a research project with the Forest Centres Officers. Two other volunteer Admin Assistants have been recruited to help both the Technical Officer and the Forest Operations Manager.
7. Work has also been undertaken with the City of London's web officers to improve the Volunteer webpage. All volunteer tasks for the year are promoted on the web and posters are placed near to the task location two weeks in advance, to advertise the event. Volunteers contribute to the Volunteer website by submitting a Case Study on why they volunteer.
www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/volunteering/Pages/default.aspx
8. Working with the Forest Centre Officers, a volunteer recruitment event took place in March specifically aimed at Visitor Services Volunteers.
9. With the Friends of Epping Forest helping the City of London to run the Visitor Centre at High Beech, support has been extended with the design of appropriate paperwork, badges and uniforms.
10. Epping Forest is represented as a member of the Waltham Forest Volunteer Action group and the Open Spaces Volunteer Improvement Group to help improve the ongoing volunteer profile.
11. There are 34 volunteer Risk Assessments and 15 Safe Systems of Work which are updated every year. The updates were completed at the end of January.
12. Epping Forest has been working with all the Volunteer Groups in obtaining relevant insurance cover for the groups as part of a revised Service Level Agreement (SLA). Epping Forest will be supporting the groups with a small grant of up to £500 to help them pay for insurance.

Measuring volunteering

13. At the end of March 2014, 227 people were volunteering for Epping Forest. 14 of our volunteers fulfil more than one of the 17 available roles. A further 311 people have participated in mass volunteering days.
14. There are 6 volunteer conservation groups working in Epping Forest – Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT), Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV), Lakehouse Lake Project (LLP), Wren Conservation Group, Friends of Swaines Green (FOSG), and Bush Wood Conservation Volunteers (BWCV).
15. Epping Forest Volunteers have completed 10,884 volunteer hours in 2013/14, a 19.09% increase on 2012/13. The Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT) completed 5,595 volunteer hours, a 44.8% decrease on 2012/13 and the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) 4,707 hours, a 4.9% increase on 2012/13 giving a grand total of 21,186 hours for 2013/14. This is a 2.56% decrease on 2012/13, which had a total of 21,730 volunteer hours.
16. The decrease in hours for the EFCT is due to the weather and changes to staffing levels.

Volunteers' contribution to conservation work

17. 2013 has seen Volunteer Fishing Bailiffs carry out the Fish Surveys for the first time alongside the Fisheries Contractor. This has assisted Forest Keepers and allowed them to concentrate on other aspects of their role.
18. The Wren Conservation Group organises a bird count every year on the southern part of the Forest mainly Wanstead Flats and Park. Every year they produce a booklet called The Birds of Wanstead.
19. The Scout Project 2013 was organised by the VDO and the Head of Operations, in conjunction with EFCT. The Scouts undertook a total of four projects consisting of:
 - two conservation tasks clearing Silver Birch, Holly and Gorse;
 - one pond task clearing reeds from Bulrush Pond; and
 - the construction task in Gifford Woods.
20. The task at Gifford Wood involved working with Epping Forest staff to build three culverts, creating public access to the wood. They also installed the posts for the guided walk route and four benches, as well as a French drain to help remove the water from the horse ride. Further public tree planting events also took place totalling 60 volunteer hours.
21. Working in partnership with the Lake House Lake Project saw the installation of pre-established coir rolls and coir pallets around the islands on Jubilee Pond and fencing of the newly planted areas.
22. The Waltham Forest Youth Reparation Services, (WFYRS) has been coming out onto the Forest every other Saturday and running litter picks.

23. The CLO ran a Conservation Task over two days with The Challenge Network. 110 young people volunteered over the two days. He also ran small conservation tasks for several schools.
24. Central Forest Keepers have been running volunteer tasks to clear the ponds at Knighton Wood and Lord's Bushes.
25. Southern Forest Keepers have been working with volunteers in Bush Wood and have helped form a new volunteer group called the Bush Wood Conservation Volunteers. At the moment they are being led by Forest Keepers, but it is hoped that some of them will attend the Volunteer Task Leader Training and take on this responsibility themselves.

Volunteers' contribution to education and events

26. The Lifelong Learning volunteers have been helping the Lifelong Learning Officer organise and run more than 150 learning events.
27. The Junior Anglings, which are run between July and September, have been supported by the Volunteer Fishing Bailiffs. They are events that have always been well attended by the public and normally oversubscribed. In 2013 the fishing Bailiffs helped us organise and run three Junior Angling days.

Ensuring the quality of volunteers' experience

28. The Volunteer Awards Party in February 2014 in Butler's Retreat celebrated further achievements by volunteers. Nine gold (for 600 hours), seven silver (300 hours) and seven bronze medals (150 hours) were awarded. The following volunteers had a special mention at the Volunteer Party;
 - A special thank you from the Chairman went to two of the Happy Loppers group who worked with EFCT. They were both awarded a Gold medal as a thank you for the time they have given to volunteering on the Forest over the years.
 - The Chairman gave a special thank you for the many years of services given by three Animal Rescue Volunteers. They are called upon by Forest Keepers and the Public on many occasions any time of day or night to rescue stricken and injured animals on the Forest.
29. The training of Volunteers and staff has continued, with both staff and volunteers receiving joint training in Brushcutters, Visitor Surveys, Leading Health Walks and Web Editor Training and First Aid.
30. The VDO led 11 Volunteer conservation tasks in 2013; he also ran two, volunteer task leader training days and two task leader assessment days, training 10 volunteers.

Plans for 2014/15

31. The recruitment target for Branching Out in 2014 is 14 new volunteers.
32. Additional training for volunteers in 2014 will include Task Leader and Safe use of Brush Cutters, Excel and Access Database and First Aid.

33. The VDO and the Head of Operations will liaise with the EFCT and the operations team on four projects for the annual Scout Project.
34. For the first time volunteers that work directly for Epping Forest have been trained as Task Leaders. 2014 will see the new Task Leaders, leading 14 out of the 22 Pond and conservation tasks.
35. For the first time the Fishing Bailiffs will be running the Junior Angling days without Forest Keepers. We have increased the amount of days from three to five.
36. Working with Volunteers, further work will be undertaken to improve the Volunteer Webpage to make them more interactive and easier for users to access the information they want.
37. The Volunteer improvement plan is moving forward with the help of volunteer supervisors working group who have met twice in 2013.
38. Additional tasks will be delivered around Jubilee Pond to install further fencing and planting around the islands.
39. The VDO will be working closely this year with the Friends of Swaines Greens, Bushwood Conservation Volunteers and the Waltham Forest Youth Reparation Service, writing and agreeing a Service Level Agreement with them and also running some tasks for them.
40. Due to the success of the Volunteer Task Leader Training in 2013, two additional Task Leader training days will be provided in 2014 for other Volunteer Groups who work on the Forest.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

41. Volunteering and community involvement are included in the Open Spaces Business Plan 2012 – 2015 Strategic Aims to celebrate a sense of place by involving local communities in the care and management of our sites, with objectives to encourage use of the open spaces by underrepresented groups and developing volunteering opportunities at all sites.
42. By promoting volunteering to a more diverse audience and reaching out to specific communities, we are increasing access to our activities in the Forest. This helps meet the Epping Forest Management Plan 2004-2010 objective to improve accessibility to education and enjoyment. Volunteering contributes to two more Management Plan objectives - to enhance the diversity of wildlife habitats and improve recreational activities.
43. The Epping Forest Volunteer Policy aims to create a culture of volunteering which is inclusive, informative, safe, dynamic and fun, while ensuring every volunteer's contribution is effective, recognised and celebrated. The policy encourages participation by people from all walks of life, abilities and ages. Epping Forest is aiming to develop best practice in recruiting, supporting and managing volunteers to maximise the valuable contribution they make to Epping Forest.

44. The Open Spaces Department Volunteer Strategy aims to develop volunteering opportunities and encourage people to volunteer.

Financial Implications

45. All Epping Forest Volunteers are fully covered by the City of London's Employers Liability Policy.
46. Match funding for the Branching Out project is provided by calculating volunteer hours as the equivalent of cash (£50-£350 per day depending on experience). We have exceeded the HLF target of £203,294.14 by £50,143.89 to the end of March 2014
47. In 2013/14, if volunteer hours were charged at equivalent of minimum wage , volunteering by EF volunteers alone was equivalent to 6 members of full time staff.
48. £14,317 was spent on volunteer materials, equipment, travel and expenses in 2013/14.
49. The total budget for 2014/15 is £16,500 from Local Risk, as anticipated in the Volunteering in Epping Forest report approved by Committee in January 2013 Based on the successful recruitment to date, volunteer numbers are likely to rise considerably over the next year.

Conclusion

50. A total of 26 volunteers were recruited during 2013/14 and City of London volunteers completed 10,884 hours during the year. The City of London volunteers have contributed time equivalent to approximately 6 full time staff.
51. The City of London volunteer's time has provided vital match funding for the HLF funded Branching Out Project.
52. Volunteering provides an excellent opportunity for local communities to participate in the care and management of Epping Forest. The volunteer community groups have contributed 10,302 hours during the year. This time is equivalent to approximately 6 full time staff.

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