

# Public participation Forests – conserve, protect, enjoy

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**Abstract** — The PROGRESS Project is a joint EU funded project between France (Office National des Forêts and Comité Départemental du Tourisme de Seine et Marne), England (Forestry Commission and Natural England) and the Netherlands (Alterra Research Institute). It aims at improving recreation management in the New Forest (120 km south of London) and Fontainebleau Forest (60 km south of Paris), both protected areas. The main objective was to use a range of tools for a better understanding of forest biodiversity and recreation to help reconcile the needs of conservation and recreation. The strategy was to work closely with stakeholder groups and the general public using a participatory approach to help plan the environment for local people and tourists whilst optimising the benefit for the wildlife. This involved very detailed recreation surveys and information about ecological issues being discussed with the stakeholders, to allow changes about channelling the public and alternative facilities off Natura 2000 to be proposed. This was followed by consultation with the public to get acceptance and ownership of these proposals. This led to a variety of actions being implemented including totally new facilities, signage and access control. It also involved a communication program, sustainability program, and other initiatives such as computer-based lessons for schools, promotion of health walks and best practice guides. All of this was done in differing ways in France and England, and the presentation will document the clear success this had in legitimising management changes required for a sustainable balance, and also some insight to lessons learnt. This is being followed up by a five year program of recreation and wildlife monitoring to give long term results.

**Index Terms** — Public participation, forest, wildlife monitoring



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