Kent Set to Celebrate its Woody Heritage

23/11/2010

Announced to coincide with National Tree Week (27 November – 5 December), the five year scheme has been awarded a confirmed grant of just over £650,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)*.

Set to involve hundreds of people of all ages from across the region in an education and activity programme focused on Kent's rich stock of heritage trees, the project will also survey and record over 10,000 heritage trees across the county.

The project aims to celebrate and promote the value of heritage trees, defined by the Forestry Commission as 'old trees, wide trees, rare trees and trees with historical and cultural significance.' The funding will provide two project officers to oversee all the project's activities, a programme of courses for 330 volunteers who would like to become 'Heritage Tree Surveyors,' 24 habitat management courses and 64 biodiversity courses, all of which will be open to volunteers and members of the public.

Aimed specifically at schools, families and people under 35 but open to all, there will also be 480 'Woodland Wonder' community educational sessions. These sessions will provide an introduction to practical conservation and the natural world with fun activities like welly walks, natural art and music, tree decorating and mini-beast hunts.

Kate MacKenzie, BTCV Operations Director, said: "South East England has the highest proportion of heritage trees in Western Europe, offering biodiversity, providing habitats and food for a range of creatures and representing hundreds of years of Kentish culture, yet we know little about them. Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund, for the first time we will be able to properly identify, protect and manage these hugely important natural assets. The project will also offer great opportunities for the region's residents to get involved in the fantastic countryside and wildlife right on our doorsteps."

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in South East England, said: "Native British species such as ash, oak, yew, black poplar and chestnut make up many of our ancient trees, and there is a significant range of indigenous tree specimens in the South East and Kent in particular. As a supporter of the UN's International Year of Biodiversity 2010, HLF is right behind organisations helping communities to safeguard the rich variety of plant and wildlife on their doorstep – something that this HLF funded project can now make a valuable contribution to."

Damian Green, MP for Ashford, Kent, offered his support for the project: "This is a really exciting project. I hope it puts Kent's young people in touch with their natural heritage. We have so many great woodlands to enjoy in the county that we should celebrate them as much as possible."

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project Kent's Heritage Trees is for £652,400 (83% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

Established in 1959, BTCV is now the world's largest environmental volunteering charity enabling people to make a difference in their lives and improve the places around them. Across the UK, BTCV supports more than 628,000 people working on more than 29,000 projects each year to improve the environment. Our mission is to invest in a more sustainable future by inspiring people and improving places. Current issues such as climate change and recession mean that BTCV's offer of hands-on environmental opportunities and help for people developing skills for both life and

work is as critical as ever. www.btcv.org.uk

BTCV work includes:

• Regular conservation tasks across the UK.
• UK & International Conservation Holidays.
• BTCV Green Gym.
• Training, from practical skills like hedge laying to NVQs in Environmental Conservation and helping unemployed people get back into work.
• Online shop, including native trees and plants, conservation handbooks and tools.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has not only revitalised hundreds of museums, parks, historic buildings, landscapes and wildlife sites, but has also given new meaning to heritage itself. People from every walk of life are now involved with the heritage that inspires them, making choices about what they want to keep and share from the past, for future generations. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £428million to more than 3,000 projects across the South East England region alone.

First mounted in 1975, **National Tree Week** is UK's largest tree celebration annually launching the start of the winter tree planting season. National Tree Week offers a great chance for communities to do something positive for their local treescape. www.treecouncil.org.uk

2010 has been declared as **International Year of Biodiversity** by the United Nations - the year that celebrates the diversity of life on earth, including every plant, animal and micro-organism. HLF is supporting the International Year of Biodiversity. The diversity of life on earth is crucial for human well-being and now is the time to act to preserve it. www.biodiversityislife.net/

Further information

BTCV: Elizabeth Hudson BTCV Press Office on 01302 388 833 or e.hudson@btcv.org.uk

Vicky Wilford, HLF Press Office on 020 7591 6046 or vickyw@hlf.org.uk