The story of the North East's Lumber Jills' to be heard for the first time

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Led by local volunteers, the project tells the previously untold story of the great work of women of the Women's Timber Corp. during the Second World War.

The 18-month project will let local people discover one of the unrecognised stories of the Second World War. Volunteers with help collect and catalogue memoirs from at least 20 ex-Lumber Jills using digital research and recording skills. The project will promote these stories and provide volunteers with opportunities to develop media and communication skills as part of their career development.

Over 250 school children will also get involved by re-enacting a 'Day in the Life of a Lumber Jill'. The project culminates in an exhibition, an information leaflet plus a new digital phone app will share the project findings with the local community and further afield.

During the Second World War, Chopwell Wood was with the base for the Women's Timber Corps, part of the Women's Land Army nicknamed the 'Lumber Jills' from the Forestry section. The girls, often between the ages of 17 and 20, were picked up as early as 4am every morning for a full days hard labour felling trees, cutting, splitting and loading logs that were then sent to the sawmills wand transformed into pit props.

The amazing work they did has never been recognised and this project seeks to change that and acknowledge the tremendous effort made during the war. Groundwork North East is an organisation inspiring people to make a lasting difference to their neighborhood and environment.

Commenting on the award Julie Bhabra, Senior Project Officer, said: "We are thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and are confident the project will support young people to be active in exploring their local heritage. Finding out more about this untold wartime story will let them find out more about this fascinating part of history and how it impacted on today's community."

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: "We at the Heritage Lottery Fund are proud to be supporting this project. As well as the vast collection of practical skills participants will learn, this in-depth look at this previously unexplained part of local heritage will help everyone form a clearer picture of what life was like and how their community worked together during the war."

Notes to editors

Groundwork North East is part of the Federation of Groundwork Trusts, a network of charitable trusts across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Their vision is of a society made up of sustainable communities which are vibrant, healthy and safe, which value the local and global environment and where individuals and enterprise prosper.

This is achieved by:

- Enabling an integrated and community lead approach to local regeneration
- Using environmental improvements as a means of achieving social and economic change
- Helping individuals and organisations contribute to sustainable development

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible in England for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woods and forests and increasing their value to society and the environment. Forestry makes a real contribution to sustainable development, providing social and environmental benefits arising from planting and managing attractive, as well as productive, woodlands.

Chopwell Wood comprises 360 hectares of beautiful mixed woodland managed by the Forestry Commission. Reflecting the importance of the wood to local people, the community's friends' group was formed in 1991 by volunteers to provide additional financial and practical support for conservation, education and recreation projects within the wood. Today, the Friends of Chopwell Wood (FoCW) has over 200 members, organises a programme of events and conservation tasks throughout the year, and are partners in the annual sale of Christmas trees.

Gateshead Council is the third largest local authority in Tyne and Wear. Located on the south bank of the River Tyne, it provides a wide range of services to some 200,000 residents and supports a large number of voluntary, charitable and community organisations in the area. The borough has won international recognition for its cultural developments, which include Anthony Gormley's Angel of the North, the multi-award winning Gateshead Millennium Bridge, and the world class music venue, the Sage Gateshead

Further information

HLF Press Office: Lucinda Tyrrell on 020 7591 6031, email: lucindat@hlf.org.uk for images and interviews.

Forestry Commission: Richard Darn on 0775 367 0038 for media calls or visit Forestry Commission website.

Friends of Chopwell Wood: Liz Searle on 01207 542 495 or visit Friends of Chopwell Wood website.

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