‘Vole patrol’ volunteers will help save endangered mammals habitat

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The project has been made possible thanks to a grant of £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group will be setting out to create its volunteer ‘task force’ in the area south of Chichester, one of just two areas along the Sussex coastline where a native population of water vole is still living. In the past 30 years, an estimated 95% of the timid creatures have been lost, some as a result of habitat changes, and others because of their main predator, the American mink.

Now a flood protection scheme, the Medmerry Realignment, will alter the shape of the Manhood Peninsula west of Selsey and this will affect the network of ditches, streams and ponds where the vole lives.

The project will train up to 30 volunteers over three years to survey the area, identifying where the voles live. They will assess the condition of ditches and what conservation work will be necessary so the animals can move around the habitat without difficulty when the engineering works take effect in March next year.

Supporting the practical work will be an education programme to raise awareness of the water vole with local communities, schools, colleges and landowners. Part of the HLF funding will support a project officer whose task is to arrange the volunteer programme and the environmental work needing to be done to protect the species.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: “This vital project will help safeguard an endangered population of water voles while enabling local people to understand more about the area’s biodiversity and how they can help to sustain it in future.”

For The Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group Jill Sutcliffe said: “The key aim is to create a long term sustainable future for the endangered water vole, the only native population in West Sussex. The work will enhance the sites and link them up, which will, in turn, allow the species to migrate and expand in numbers. The grant is fantastic news and especially for a group of volunteers.”

Notes to editors

Water voles are a priority species within the UK Government’s Biodiversity Action Plan. They experienced one of the fastest declines of any native mammal in the 20th Century. The only remaining populations based in Sussex are on the Manhood Peninsula and on the Pett and Rye Levels.

The aims of the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group are to: Research, conserve and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and heritage of the Manhood Peninsula through community involvement and to foster its care, enjoyment and understanding for the benefit of the public. The Manhood Peninsula is all that area of Chichester District in West Sussex that lies South of the city of Chichester and which comprises the civil parishes of Apuldram, Birdham, Earnley, East Wittering and Bracklesham, Donnington, Hunston, North Mundham, Selsey, Sidlesham, West Itchenor and West Wittering.

Further information

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