

Dungeness, one of the largest shingle ridges in the UK, will receive funding thanks to National Lottery players Jim Higham

The projects - which will together raise awareness of Kent’s marine habitats, coastal areas of the Romney Marshes and threatened inland chalk grassland habitats - have one thing in common. They all seek to educate and give local communities, landowners and other stakeholders the power to make a difference in acknowledging, protecting and celebrating what makes these unique landscapes special.

Landscapes and seascapes benefiting from funding today are Guardians of the Deep and The Fifth Continent – Romney Marsh Landscape Partnership, both run by the Kent Wildlife Trust, and the Old Chalk New Downs Project, to be run by Kent County Council.

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said: “These projects cover huge swathes of the Kent countryside. From the remote, flat, windswept landscape of Romney Marsh - a land of bleak horizons dotted by grand medieval churches, to the nationally and internationally important Marine Conservation Zones of the Kent coast, to the disappearing chalk grasslands on the Kent Downs, each is beset with its own challenges. Thanks to National Lottery players, local communities and organisations will be able to discover, care for and protect these environments, and carry out vitally important work that may otherwise not be possible.”

Tracey Crouch, Heritage Minister, said: "I am delighted that, thanks to the National Lottery, these local wildlife habitats in the Garden of England will be protected and allow both residents of Kent and visitors to connect with this stunning natural landscape."

Guardians of the Deep: £446,100 grant

The Guardians of the Deep is a three-year project that aims to engage communities, businesses and visitors by raising awareness of marine habitats and promoting an active and ongoing guardianship role to protect them for the future. Almost the entire Kent coast falls within a Marine Protected Area (MPA) and will feature 11 Marine Conservation Zones by 2018. Kent's marine habitats are considered at threat from the fishing industry, invasive species, pollutants and regression of coastal defences.

The project will be run by Kent Wildlife Trust in partnership with Thanet District Council, Medway Council and Kent County Council and will divide the coastline into three sections – the White Cliffs of Dover (from Folkestone to Deal), North East Kent (from Deal to Whitstable) and Medway and Swale. It will comprise five key activities which will involve 60,000 people in marine awareness activities:

- Coastal guardians –360 community champions will run marine events and identification surveys to be shared with coastal heritage protection bodies
- Undersea explorers – workshops will be held with young people raising awareness of marine habitats, water safety and snorkelling skills
- Wild beach – a programme of coastal learning activities for 60 schools and youth groups covering geology, biology, social history and the value of marine heritage
- Coastal connections – a digital campaign aimed at reaching up to 150,000 members of the public
- Coastal Citizen Science – volunteers will be trained in survey and species recognition and 60 'coast-busters' will deal with non-native species identified

The Fifth Continent – Romney Marsh Landscape Partnership: £1.76m grant

The Fifth Continent – Romney Marsh Landscape Partnership has been awarded £1.76m to restore and protect habitats and species, and put local people back in touch will the landscape around them. The scheme covers 242 sq km of low-lying coastal land in South Kent characterised by flat, windswept marsh containing the historic settlements of Winchelsea, Rye and Hythe and the shingle ridges of Dungeness. Distinctive Norman churches built on the back of the medieval wool industry dot the landscape, which is nationally important for biodiversity and built heritage, featuring five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), six local wildlife sites, 19 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 10 Conservation Areas and 257 Listed buildings. Dungeness is one of the largest shingle ridges in the UK and supports over 600 plant species – one third of the national flora!

The project will feature three themes, Restore, Rediscover and Reclaim, which aim to address challenges brought by poor transport links, rural isolation and the decline of local industries. National Lottery players' money will be invested in activities and opportunities for volunteers that aim to influence local people into protecting this fragile landscape including:

- restoration and surveying of shingle habitats

- producing guidance for landowners to protect their environmental assets
- a community archeology project to uncover the lost port of Romney
- 55 accredited apprenticeships including land management, livestock management and sustainable tourism
- Creative workshops for young people, community events and film making
- Activities designed to put churches back into the heart of communities

Old Chalk New Downs Project: £1.4m grant

The Old Chalk New Downs project, to be run by Kent County Council, will improve, restore and reconnect threatened chalk grassland habitats in and around the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) specified in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy (2015-2025) – home to rare orchid species and black veined and straw belle moths, found only within the North Downs.

Capital works and land management support for landowners will be complemented by a host of community engagement activities including volunteering opportunities, learning and skills development, surveying and monitoring, public access improvements, a programme for schools and digital and interactive resources.

The project, which is expected to last four years, will cover almost 10,000 hectares from Kemsing Down to Detling Hill and work in partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre, Kent Downs AONB, Tonbridge & Malling Council, Gravesham BC and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership.

Further information

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- To get involved in the conversation about Kent's natural heritage follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use the hashtag #HLFsupported