

PRESS RELEASE

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EXMOOR HAS THE eX-FACTOR THANKS TO DEFRA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND

Projects to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds enjoy and understand the countryside, improvements to birdwatching facilities and a nationally innovative project to train plumbers in installing new household wood boilers are among the activities in Exmoor that have been supported by Defra's Sustainable Development Fund.

As part of National Parks Week, Defra is highlighting the important work carried out by many projects on Exmoor to encourage more sustainable use of our National Parks.

Defra's Sustainable Development Fund was launched in 2002 to develop new ideas of achieving a more sustainable way of living in National Parks, whilst conserving local communities, culture, wildlife and landscape.

Defra provides £200,000-a-year to each National Park Authority (NPA), including Exmoor NPA, who operate the fund. The funding scheme is open to private, public or voluntary organisations.

The **eX-factor**, organised by Imayla, (a community enterprise based in Bristol and Somerset) has received a £40,800 grant to allow at least 200 young people, from black, minority ethnic and other disadvantaged communities in Bristol stay for a week each at the Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Education over the summer holidays.

They will learn about sustainable living, environmental awareness, cultural heritage and conservation activities across Exmoor as well as enjoying the great climbing, mountain-biking and surfing the area has to offer.

For many it will be their first experience of the moors, and for some their first stay in the countryside. The work will be integrated with youth and community groups local to Exmoor and educational activities will include film and radio programme-making, music, dance and arts activities – all inspired by their new environment. The educational and leisure activities will introduce the young people to the vast resources available on Exmoor, whilst creating an environment that they are comfortable in and catering for their specialist needs and interests.

Project co-ordinator Kim Cavanagh said: “Imayla is very excited to be involved in this linking of urban and rural communities and encouraging the involvement of young people and other groups who are traditionally less likely to benefit from our National Parks. Learning new things in a new environment will give these young people new inspiration, fresh motivation and a first-hand understanding of their relationship with nature. This will help them gain the confidence to step out of their comfort zones and experience their rural heritage more often. It’s about new horizons.

“The project will also be benefiting the local economy, hiring in local youth workers, activity instructors, transport providers, food producers among others, contributing to economic sustainability in the area.”

The **South West Lakes Trust** has received a £9,000 grant to improve birdwatching facilities at Wimbleball Lake. The works include provision of a new bird hide, information leaflets, improved access to the site, information panels on species to be seen, a series of conservation days for volunteers and guided walks to increase awareness of the environmental importance of the lake.

South West Wood Fuels received funding to assess the available supply of local wood on Exmoor for local heating needs for homes and farms in log, woodchip and pellet boilers. They concluded that half of Exmoor’s 400 farms could be heated from local wood sources.

The Sustainable Development Fund is now funding South West Wood Fuels to recruit and train local plumbers and electricians to increase the capacity for installation. Other National Parks and projects across rural Britain are coming together in October to learn about the new technologies and wood fuel cooperatives that SWWF have set up to ensure continuous supply of local wood fuel.

Me in My Exmoor (MIME) has engaged teenagers across the National Park to record their, and other residents’, experiences of current and past life. The resulting short films will be projected across the National Park Authority’s headquarters building on the evening of 23rd September 2005.

The MIME project, run by Somerset Rural Youth Project, provides a cultural snapshot of life on Exmoor through the eyes of 300 local young people. This is being achieved by recording their experiences of the past and present; and their fears, hopes and aspirations for the future. Additionally, the participants were encouraged to engage with older members of the community to find out what life was like in the parishes in days gone by.

The project will result in a range of multimedia digital files (audio clips, video clips, images, artwork etc) for web and CD promotion and be a valuable demonstration of competence in participants’ CVs, hopefully enhancing their employment prospects.

Jim Knight, Minister for Rural Affairs said:

“These projects are excellent examples of what the Sustainable Development Fund can achieve. Our National Parks are outstandingly beautiful and are essential to nurturing wildlife. Through such initiatives, we can ensure that our National Parks work just as well for people, who help us to protect the heritage and secure the future of these Parks.

"These projects also illustrate how we are testing and developing ways of behaving more sustainably. The knowledge gained here can be transferred outside of the Parks and contribute to achieving Defra's core aim of sustainable development."

Tim Braund, Exmoor National Park Authority's head of education and interpretation, said:

"The National Park Authority has worked with under-represented groups for many years to share and experience the delights of this unique and special place. Historically, we have been constrained by a small team and limited resources. However, the money provided by Defra for the Exmoor Sustainable Development Fund has been a huge boost and has enabled us to be innovative and expand opportunities to a range of new audiences, locally, regionally and nationally. As more people have an 'Exmoor Experience' I am confident that we will see an increase in non-traditional users routinely visiting the National Park to discover the delights on offer".

The Countryside Agency monitors the Sustainable Development Fund on behalf of Defra. Andrew Wood, Director of the Countryside Agency said:

"Balancing conservation of our finest landscapes with the needs of local communities and visitors is crucial to the prosperity of both. The on-going success of the Sustainable Development Fund, and the wide-range of innovative projects it supports, is strengthening the relationship between people and places. This is excellent news for the future of National Parks and our enjoyment of them now, and for future generations."