

THAMES BASIN HEATHS - JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 30th September 2016

Subject: Eutrophication of Soils Trial Project – Funding Proposal

Report of: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM)
Project

Recommendations:

- To APPROVE funding for the trial project

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with the background to the trial project and its likely outputs along with the cost of funding the trial on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

1. Proposal

1.1 Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) have approached the SAMM project with a proposal to develop and trial a monitoring project to determine the impact of soil eutrophication as a result of dog fouling. The proposal is to run a limited trial on selected Thames Basin Heaths SPA sites using the SAMM Wardens to collect the necessary data.

2. Background

2.1 Soil eutrophication (nutrient enrichment) in semi-natural habitats can lead to composition and structural changes and therefore a decline in value of that habitat. There are many sources of eutrophication in the countryside, but one source that has the greatest potential for reduction through behavioural change is that of dog fouling. The majority of dog fouling occurs around car parks and at site or footpath entrances (NE 2003) and it is these areas that are likely to experience the greatest eutrophication and habitat changes.

2.2 There is considerable unease among the general public with regards to dog fouling and local authorities and other land managers spend a lot of time and effort trying to encourage dog owners and walkers to clear up after their pets.

However, there is little coordinated monitoring of the effects of various methods to reduce dog fouling or on its consequences. This project aims to harness public support for dog fouling action to monitor the impact of dog fouling on the environment and the effectiveness of programmes to tackle dog fouling.

3. Aims

3.1 The aim of the project is to set up a programme to record and monitor:

- The effect of eutrophication from dog fouling on habitat structure and composition
- The effect of measures to reduce dog fouling

4. Approach

4.1 The project will take a citizen science approach to collect the relevant data.

TVERC will recruit and train volunteers to carry out surveys of plants, collect soil samples and count dogs and their faeces from points at set distances from footpath entrances.

4.2 To provide a pilot for this project, TVERC will initially focus the work on the Thames Basin heaths Special Protection Area to test the methods, before potentially rolling the work out more widely across Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

4.3 TVERC will ask volunteers to record information about (1) vegetation structure; (2) indicator species; (3) botanical species composition; (4) amount of dog faeces at fixed points along a 100 m transect from the entrance along the path; and (5) count the number of dogs using the entrance.

4.4 TVERC will create a bespoke online recording form to collect this information. Using the data collected they will be able to identify hotspots of eutrophication, heavy use areas and areas that are vulnerable to or experiencing significant habitat changes as a result of eutrophication. These data can help land managers target work in the most affected areas.

4.5 Volunteers will be asked to repeat their surveys annually and TVERC can use these data to monitor changes in the habitat, as well as identify any improvements that could be the result of any campaigns to address dog fouling.

5. Benefits

5.1 The issue of dog fouling is one which is regularly raised to the wardens by the public on the SPA, and the project actively encourage site users to pick-up after their dogs. The collection of site specific data on the impact of dog fouling on

soil and species composition would provide an additional source of data for the wardens to utilise to support their requests to dog owners to pick-up on the SPA sites.

5.2 The data would also be useful for site managers in terms of highlighting the level of impact soil eutrophication is having to the composition of their sites.

6. Costs

6.1 TVERC have made a request for **£3200** for the trial, this cost is based on 10 days of staff time at £320 per day, to provide the following:

- Writing the methodology for the trial
- Training for the wardens
- Analysis of the data
- Production of a report of the trial's findings

7. Discussion

7.1 The proposed trial project would provide site specific data on the contribution of dog fouling on the eutrophication of parts of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The trial would enable the comparison of areas near car parks where the issue is likely to be most acute with more remote areas to ascertain the level of impact of dog fouling on habitat composition. This would appear to fit within the monitoring remit of the SAMM Project.

7.2 In terms of monitoring the effectiveness of measures to control the issue of dog fouling, data would need to be gathered over a number of years and this would not be achieved by the trial. There is a risk that future funding will not be available and therefore this aim of the project may not be achieved. However, a successful trial would be likely to significantly increase the likelihood of future funding being secured.

7.3 The requested funds are likely to be available from with the existing SAMM budget for 2016/17, but this will involve a slight scaling back on other expenditure.

7.4 The JSPB Board is requested to consider whether funding the soil eutrophication trial is an appropriate use of the SAMM Project's resources.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 Given the relatively modest overall cost of the trial it is recommended that the JSPB Board agree to funding the trial, but with no commitment to providing any further funding for the project until after the findings of the trial have been analysed and the report presented to the JSPB.