

COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD

Engagement of the Public in the Maintenance of Hiking Trails in Country Parks

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper aims to brief members on engagement of the public in the maintenance of hiking trails in country parks.

2. Background

2.1 There are over 500 kilometres of hiking trails in country parks. These include long distance hiking trails, country trails, family walks and nature trails, and are designated for the different needs of hikers with a wide spectrum of interest and abilities. Trails are the core facilities of country parks, enabling visitors to access different parts of our country parks such as picnic sites, camp sites and scenic spots, etc. as well as simply for enjoying hiking *per se*. These trails are managed and maintained by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to provide a pleasant and safe environment for the public to enjoy. With a view to preserving the natural setting of our country parks, natural materials such as soil, gravels, boulders and wood logs are used as far as possible in constructing, maintaining and restoring these trails.

2.2 Hiking trails in country parks are subject to deterioration caused by high visitor usage and natural processes such as water runoff and landslide, and require regular maintenance. Nevertheless, maintenance of the trails is often labour intensive and requires craftsmanship.

2.3 To promote the sustainable use of our country parks and enhance the sense of stewardship and cooperation, AFCD has started engaging the public in trail maintenance since late 2016.

3. Engagement of the Public in the Maintenance of Hiking Trails

3.1 Since late 2016, AFCD has organised a number of workshops involving more than 250 volunteers in trail maintenance and restoration. Stakeholder groups such as hiking groups, trail event organisers, trail conservation concern groups and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are engaged to assist in recruiting volunteers to participate in the workshops. During the workshops, AFCD staff share with the volunteers the basic principles and techniques of trail maintenance, while the volunteers would assist in collecting and transporting necessary materials on site and restoring the trails using hand tools. These workshops aim at providing opportunities for the public to understand the principles of trail maintenance, and to appreciate the importance of trail conservation through hands on experience.

3.2 The workshops are well received by the volunteers, with positive reports on social and general media. AFCD would continue to organise trail maintenance workshops from time to time to engage the public and stakeholder groups.

4. Engagement of NGOs in the Maintenance of Hiking Trails

4.1 In August 2018, The Green Earth (TGE) initiated a two-year public education programme to promote enjoying nature in a responsible manner through engaging the public in sustainable trail maintenance. The programme (entitled “Make Our Nature Trails Sustainable - Leave No Trace Education Program”) is funded by the Environment and Conservation Fund and includes public seminars, guided tours, trail cleanups and photo contest as well as the training of 120 volunteers. Further information on the programme is at the Annex.

4.2 As the objectives and the proposed activities of the programme are in line with the principles of AFCD on trail management and maintenance, AFCD will work with TGE in coordinating trail maintenance activities for the public. AFCD also welcomes more NGOs and the public to join hands with us in promoting the sustainable use of our country parks through organising and participating in trail maintenance activities.

5. Advice sought

5.1 Members are invited to comment on the initiative of AFCD in engaging the public and NGOs in the maintenance of hiking trails in country parks.

Country and Marine Parks Authority
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
November 2018

COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD

Make Our Nature Trails Sustainable – Leave No Trace Education Program by The Green Earth

Background

Hiking trails is the access for the public to encounter and appreciate nature. People in Hong Kong enjoy going to the countryside, but few are aware that the trails they walked on need to be well tendered and managed. With the recent increase in number of visitors and the surge of trail running events, the usage and intensity of impact has accelerated the process of trail erosion, as well as causing the waste problem.

There have been a number of trail conservation education program in countries abroad. By enhancing the awareness and knowledge of trail conservation in the public, organizations are able to inspire people to enjoy the outdoor responsibly. There was limited studies, discussions and education activities on the topic of trail conservation in Hong Kong. In 2015, green groups stepped up their concerns on littering along the hiking trails in country side, which in turn promote the collaboration of green groups and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to implement the “Take Your Own Litter Home” program. The program was well received and has inspired public to start rounds of discussions on ways to enjoy the nature in a responsible manner. In 2016, a number of nature enthusiasts also raised concerns on the concretization of nature trails in country side, and a concern group on the matter was formed to advocate keeping the trails natural and harmonized with the environment. Construction and maintenance of “hand-built” trails utilizing natural materials and in traditional way with hands is labour intensive and resources demanding. Nevertheless, some of the trail building steps and methods are less skill demanding, government agencies and NGOs abroad would often engage public in the maintenance of hiking trails in form of education program and volunteer engagement. Organizations like Appalachian Trail Conservancy (USA) and Thousand Miles Trail Association (Taiwan) are able to foster stewardship of the countryside and crafted trails among participants by engaging them in hands-on trail building and maintenance.

The Green Earth (TGE), as a local charitable environmental NGO, was granted funding from the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) to launch the “Make Our Nature Trail Sustainable – Leave No Trace Program” (The Program). The program aims at inspiring the public to put “Leave No Trace” practice into action while enjoying the countryside and to promote knowledge on the concept of sustainable trail, through a series of talks, guided walks, trail cleanup activities and volunteer trail services.

The Program

Objective: To raise awareness on protection of countryside with a series of public education activities that motivate the public to put “Leave No Trace” practice into action and promote the concept of sustainable trails and trail conservation.

The activities will take the public

- Appreciate the beauty and spectacular views of Hong Kong’s natural trails;
- To understand the underlying cause of the accelerated deterioration and erosion of hiking trails, the state of hiking trails and the challenge in managing trail use;
- To foster the care of natural environment, and avoid any behavior that cause negative impact to the trails and countryside environment;
- To collate public effort in simple trail maintenance works, to relief the demanding resources in tackling trail degradation

Duration: August 2018 to July 2020 (Two-years)

Highlight Activities

Event	Scheduled	Content
“Make Our Nature Trails Sustainable” Public Talks Series	October 2018 to June 2019	To raise the awareness of trail protection through learning the story and history of countryside trails in Hong Kong. Topics include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Hong Kong Old Trails● The Dream Trail – The Making of MacLehose Trail● The Scar in the Mountains – Sustainable Management of Hiking Trails
Public Guided Walk Series	October 2018 to June 2019	Participants to appreciate the beauty and history of hiking trails in Hong Kong, and to observe on site the environmental challenges the hiking trails is facing through a series of themed guided walks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Old Trails in Hong Kong● MacLehose Trail One Step at a Time● 500 Kilometers of “Great Wall” (appreciation of crafted trails)
“Pick Up Your Own Litter” Trail Cleanup Campaign	October 2018 to June 2019	To engage public in hiking trail clean up, and be aware of the issue, the origin and black spots of littering in country side through hands on clean up action and observation

<p>“Fix You Own Trails” Trail Volunteer Training Program</p>	<p><u>Phase I</u> December 2018 to January 2019</p> <p><u>Phase 2</u> November 2019 to February 2020</p>	<p>The program will engage local and overseas “sustainable trail building” specialists to share with the participants the wisdom, knowledge and techniques in trail maintenance. The participants would gain hands on experience in simple trail building and maintenance works under the guidance of the trail specialists and in a safe setting, and to promote trail stewardship among the participants.</p> <p>60 volunteers will be recruited in each phase of the training program, who need to attend training sessions, prior to take part in the on-site trail repairing works</p>
<p>“Hong Kong Trail Day” Kick Off and self-guided hiking tour</p>	<p>Fall 2019</p>	<p>Encourage public to hike on recommended routes with the aid of a self-guided walk program on smart phone, public are able to gain knowledge on trail conservation.</p>
<p>“My Favorite Hiking Trails” Photo Contest</p>	<p>Fall 2019</p>	<p>Encourage public appreciation on the beauty of natural trails and hand crafted trails through the camera lens.</p>

Anticipated number of participants: As least 1,500 members of the public would be engaged in the above listed activities and events, and the vast number of public that could be reached by the educational message released by the program through different media.

TGE has invited and gladly have AFCD as a supporting department of the program, to provide professional advices and technical guidance with their expertise, on the promotion of relevant knowledge and educational messages as well as conduction of trail workshops. This program has gained support from a number of hiking groups and organizations, and trail conservation concern groups, in a concerted effort to mobilize countryside lovers to participate. The promotion of sustainable trail education is only taking its first step in Hong Kong, TGE hopes the program would raise the awareness and interest of the topics among country side enthusiasts, and would encourage the public to learn and consolidate their views on how the natural trails could be sustained with the right attitude going into the nature, through the engagement in the events and activities.

The Green Earth
23 November 2018