

## **COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD**

### **Public Engagement in Trail Maintenance in Country Parks**

#### **1. Purpose**

1.1 This paper aims to update members on the progress of a public engagement programme on the maintenance of hiking trails in country parks, and seek members' views on the programme.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 There are over 500 kilometres of hiking trails in country parks, including Long Distance Hiking Trails, Country Trails, Family Walks and Nature Trails. These hiking trails are designated to cater for the needs of visitors with a wide spectrum of interest and abilities. Through careful planning and proper management, these hiking trails are the core facility of country parks that enable visitors to access picnic sites, camp sites and nature scenic spots while reducing visitors' disturbance to the ecologically sensitive areas. AFCD is responsible for constructing and maintaining these hiking trails to ensure a safe environment for public enjoyment. To preserve the natural setting of the countryside, natural materials such as soil, gravel, boulders and wood logs are used to construct new trails or restore damaged trails as far as practicable.

2.2 Hiking trails in country parks are susceptible to prolonged natural weathering such as surface runoff and landslide or damage caused by frequent uses, hence require regular maintenance. Nevertheless, due to topography and remoteness of the sites and the materials used, maintenance of hiking trails is labour intensive and requires craftsmanship.

2.3 With the increasing patronage of hiking trails and growing public concerns on the methods and materials used in the maintenance of hiking trails in countryside areas including country parks, AFCD has initiated a public engagement programme named "Repair Our Own Trail (自己山徑自己修)" Scheme (the Scheme) since 2016 to –

- (a) promote public understanding of the principles and methodologies of constructing and maintaining hiking trails;

- (b) promote the sustainable use of hiking trails; and
- (c) nurture volunteers for the maintenance of country park hiking trails in the long run.

### **3. Public Engagement in Trail Maintenance**

3.1 Since 2016, AFCD has organised four public forums and seminars to promote the principles and methodologies of constructing and maintaining country park hiking trails. Besides, AFCD has organised 29 volunteer trail maintenance workshops, engaging more than 600 volunteers to repair hiking trails in various country parks. During the workshops, volunteers carried out trail repair works under the guidance of AFCD's experienced staff who shared with them the basic principles and techniques of trail maintenance.

3.2 The volunteers not only experienced the hardship of trail maintenance works, but also enjoyed the satisfaction of hands-on participation with other volunteers. The workshops also attracted extensive positive media reports that further promoted the sustainable use of hiking trails in country parks. The trail maintenance workshops were well received by the volunteers who, in turn, shared their unique trail maintenance experiences on social media platforms, and thus further helped promoting trail conservation. Besides, many passing-by hikers praised the contribution of the volunteers and AFCD staff for repairing the trails and some even expressed their interest to join the volunteer service too.

### **4. Engagement of NGOs as Partners**

4.1 At the early stage of the Scheme, stakeholder groups such as hiking groups, trail event organisers, trail conservation concern groups and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were engaged to assist in recruiting volunteers to participate in individual trail maintenance workshops. However, most of these early workshops were one-off and on a trial basis. As the Scheme progresses, a few NGOs have committed to further collaborate with AFCD on a more regular basis in trail maintenance.

#### *The Green Earth (TGE)*

4.2 Inspired by the objectives of the Scheme, The Green Earth has initiated a two-year public education programme entitled "Make Our Nature Trail Sustainable – Leave No Trace Education Programme" (共築可持續遠足山徑——無痕山林教育

計劃), which is funded by the Environment and Conservation Fund, to promote “enjoying nature in a responsible manner”. It includes public seminars, guided tours, trail cleanups and a photo contest as well as trail maintenance training workshops (CMPB Working Paper WP/CMPB/12/2018 refers).

4.3 AFCD supports the programme and works closely with TGE in coordinating trail maintenance activities for volunteers. In particular, TGE has committed to organise two series of “Repair Your Own Trails” training workshops in 2019 and 2020 aiming to train up 120 volunteers who could readily assist AFCD in future trail maintenance works.

#### *Scout Association of Hong Kong (SAHK)*

4.4 The East Kowloon Region of SAHK also collaborated with AFCD on trail conservation. SAHK proposed to incorporate trail maintenance training along with the “Leave No Trace” concept into their regular training programme. Lectures and trail workshops for scout leaders were held in November 2019. These trained leaders are expected to assist in future trail maintenance and train other scout members to become trail maintenance volunteers.

#### *Green Power*

4.5 Green Power recruited volunteers to assist AFCD to repair Hong Kong Trail in 2018. They planned to continue this arrangement as part of their nature education programme. A volunteer trail maintenance workshop at Wilson Trail Section 1 was organised in January 2020 and more workshops are under planning.

#### *Hong Kong Institute of Construction (HKIC)*

4.6 HKIC, which is a training institute offering diversified training programmes for construction workers and in-service personnel, expresses interest in including trail maintenance as a possible volunteering services for their students. A trail seminar and a workshop on trail maintenance for their instructors were conducted in November 2019. Our trail maintenance methods, which heavily rely on the application of simple hand tools and natural materials, are different from trade skills commonly adopted in construction projects. HKIC has been discussing with AFCD on the feasibility of offering training on nature trail maintenance to their students. AFCD welcomes this opportunity and will work with HKIC with an aim to building up a pool of skilled manpower for maintaining trails in a sustainable approach.

## **5. Recognition under the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme**

5.1 The Scheme has been awarded the Special Citation (Interactive Communication with the Public) Award under the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme 2019 – General Service Team Award, which is an honourable recognition of AFCD's continuous effort to engage the public in trail maintenance and conservation.

## **6. Way Forward**

6.1 The Scheme is an ongoing public engagement programme. AFCD welcomes more NGOs and the public to join hands with us on a long-term basis in promoting the sustainable use of the trails in country parks through organising and participating in trail maintenance activities. AFCD also plans to extend the engagement effort to the construction industry sector in order to build up the skilled manpower in the local construction industry for the construction of sustainable trails and their regular maintenance in the future.

## **7. Advice sought**

7.1 Members are invited to comment on the Scheme which engages the public in the maintenance of hiking trails in country parks.

Country and Marine Parks Authority  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
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