



US Army Corps of Engineers®



Lake Sonoma

BRIDGING THE GAP

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New National MOU: FICOR

On July 21, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) joined Department of the Interior, Agriculture and Commerce federal land management agencies in reestablishing the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR) by signing a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The purpose of this MOU is to partner across Departments, bureaus and agencies to find solutions for common issues that challenge all Federal outdoor recreation providers. This interagency collaboration will address the Administration's goals of environmental justice, climate change, and equitable outdoor opportunities.



The FICOR will help coordinate policies, facilitate partnerships, and improve implementation on issues such as:

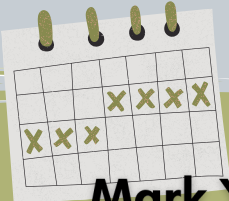
- Investing in resilient recreation infrastructure, such as electric vehicle charging stations, trails, campgrounds, visitor centers, docks, and boating access
- Bolstering education and career opportunities in conservation, outdoor recreation, habitat restoration, and resource management work, and providing comprehensive visitor information for the hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, birding, climbing, and boating communities
- Cooperating with State, Tribal, territorial, and local governments, including those in communities near Federal lands and waters
- Improving equitable access to Federal lands and waters and creating a welcoming visitor experience in collaboration with private, public, Tribal, and nonprofit organizations. ■

About Bridging the Gap

"Bridging the Gap" is an electronic publication produced biannually by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC). The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information about partnerships and volunteer program around the country. For more information, or to submit stories for future editions, contact your PAC representative.

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Mark Your Calendars!



*Lynden Wood, Lead Natural Resources Specialist, Sam Rayburn, SWF
Jennifer Linde, Natural Resources Specialist, Fort Worth District*

The USACE Fort Worth District (SWF) is comprised of 25 lake projects organized into four regions: Piney Woods, Capitol, Three Rivers, and Trinity. Each project utilizes prescribed fire to achieve various goals such as habitat improvement, timber production and wildland fire prevention. Historically, prescribed fire efforts have been limited to what USACE personnel at each lake could accomplish with USACE resources. Individual lakes within the District had successfully partnered with the Texas A&M Forest Service (TAMFS) to assist with management goals, but these efforts were local and specific to individual lakes and regions within the District. The solution: expand those local partnerships with TAMFS to a district-wide partnership.

TAMFS is the State agency charged with managing timber on lands owned by the state of Texas. They are also the premiere wildland firefighting agency within the state. TAMFS not only fights wildland fires, but trains local agencies such as volunteer and municipal fire departments in fighting wildland fires. TAMFS also assists at the national level, dispatching crews outside of Texas to fight fires across the nation.

In the summer of 2021, Lynden Wood, a natural resources manager working a temporary assignment in the District Operations branch approached TAMFS with the idea to enter into a district-wide partnership via a MOU. Lynden worked with Andrew McCrady, Program Coordinator III – Fuels, Forest Resource Protection; Mitigation and Prevention Department, TAMFS, to start the process. Together, Wood and McCrady identified the key personnel who would need to be involved for both USACE and TAMFS to make the partnership work and ensure that regulations for both agencies were followed. They modeled the District-wide partnership after similar partnerships utilized by lakes within Fort Worth's Three Rivers Region and at Wright Patman Reservoir. The MOU requires the involvement of the Environmental Stewardship Business Line Managers for each Region, as well as the Manager for each Lake to coordinate with Regional Managers for TAMFS to identify, plan and initiate projects at each of the twenty-five lakes within the District. The MOU was reviewed by USACE and TAMFS legal departments before being signed by Colonel Jonathan Stover, Fort Worth District Commander, and Al Davis, Interim Director for TAMFS.

The MOU is still very new, but work performed under previous regional and lake MOUs gives an idea of what can be accomplished district-wide. At Wright Patman Lake, TAMFS provided dozer work to clean existing burn lines and fire breaks totaling approximately 11 miles and repaired approximately three miles of fire breaks in an area not under a burn plan. TAMFS also completed burn plans for 3,145 acres at Wright Patman Lake.

The partnership benefits both agencies. TAMFS acts as a force multiplier for SWF by providing personnel to perform prescribed burns for various management goals and to install firebreaks. TAMFS receives opportunities to train and certify personnel on equipment such as fire engines and dozers. They also can recertify personnel, as their regulations require that their personnel perform a required number of hours on active burns, operating equipment, and leading burn crews. >

Photo Left: SWF staff monitor the prescribed fire.



Prescribed Fire Partnership Continued

The partnership provides cost savings for both agencies. SWF personnel are freed up to work on other missions, while TAMFS personnel can train closer to their regional offices instead of traveling across the state. This also enables TAMFS to maintain their fire crews to fight wildland fires across Texas and be an available resource to assist in fighting wildland fires across the Nation. ■



Photo Above: Successfully executed prescribed fire.



NRM Gateway Spotlight

Did you know that pretty much every USACE project has a rich partnering resource within their community? Schools and universities are a natural fit for mutually beneficial partnerships, whether working with elementary or college-age students. Check out the School/University Partnerships page on the NRM Gateway to find great examples of successful partner projects that have been done at USACE projects. Learn about the Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit program that provides opportunities for USACE and universities to collaborate on research, technical assistance and education in the biological, physical, social, and cultural sciences needed to address natural and cultural resource management issues. If you have examples at your project that aren't on this page, please send them to your PAC team member so they can be shared with everyone!

The screenshot shows the NRM Gateway website header with the US Army Corps of Engineers logo and the tagline 'to the future...'. Below the header is a navigation menu with buttons for Home, Visitors, Lake Discovery, Recreation, Env Compliance, Env Stewardship, Partners, News/Events, People, Forums, Learning, GETS, Tools, New Postings, Submit, and Index/Search. The main content area is titled 'School/University Partnerships' and contains a paragraph about the benefits of partnering with schools and universities. Below the paragraph is a list of links: Success Stories, Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Units, List of HBCUs/HIS/Tribal Colleges and Universities, News/Current Issues, and Every Kid Outdoors. On the left side of the screenshot, the word 'Partnerships' is written vertically.

Image Above: A screen capture of the School/University Partnership page on the NRM Gateway.



Mississippi River Project Connects with Iowa Teachers through STEM Externships

Meet Your PAC Team Members



Joseph Lundh, Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist, Mississippi River Project, MVR

The Iowa Governor's Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Council - Teacher Extern program began in 2009. The Rock Island District and Mississippi River Project have partnered with the State and program since 2013 bringing nine teachers to the Project (11 total teachers to the District) from a variety of communities for Externship experiences totaling over 1800 partnership hours (2300 total in District).

Iowa STEM Teacher Externships (Externship/Extern) are full-time, six-week temporary summer positions in local businesses and agencies for secondary teachers of mathematics, science and/or technology. STEM Teachers earn a stipend paid by the Iowa STEM program, as well as three continuing education graduate credits. During the 200-240 hours of the Externship program, STEM teachers work alongside USACE staff. They develop content/plans to bring real-world applications back to the classroom including

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Scott Sunderland - Chair
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LRD (Huntington District Office)

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Taylor Baughn
SPD (Lake Mendocino)

Keith Hyde
NWD (Lucky Peak Lake)

Jennifer Linde
SWD (Fort Worth District Office)



creation of lesson plans and units inspired from the experience or content provided to the Iowa PBS' online Iowa Science Phenomena website, a resource for Iowa classrooms. At the Mississippi River Project, teachers participate in forest and vegetation sampling, forest management site visits, wildlife monitoring, shoreline management, and recreation program activities.

This program has been a win-win for USACE and the teachers. The STEM teachers have all been professional, engaged, quick learners, and flexible. The extra hands extend our capabilities and efficiency. They experience areas of the project, our mission, and exposure to our partner agencies and staff not otherwise possible. It brings additional content and real-world connections back to the classroom. The program generates connections and awareness between USACE and the community. It also gives students information about career possibilities with USACE. Special thanks go out to Abby DeBaillie and Zach Miller, this year's externs, as well as all the great externs over the years. We would recommend engaging with a STEM program in your area. If it is anything like our experience, it is well worth it. ■



Photo Above: Adaptive management at ecosystem resotration project.

Photo Right: STEM Extern Abby DeBaillie taking a tree core.

Partnerships in NRM Class Visits Allatoona and Carters Lakes

Francis Ferrell, Chief Ranger, Falls Lake, SAW

The Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC) had not taught the Partnerships in NRM Prospect class “in-person” since the fall of 2019, so it was great to get back to teaching the course in-person at our lake projects again. In early May, Allatoona Lake hosted the class at the project’s Visitor Assistance Center.

Besides getting to actually see people’s faces, the main highlight of the in-person class is always the class field trip, where students get on a bus, see examples of successful partnership projects and meet with the key stakeholders. This class had the opportunity to visit partners at two Mobile District projects. After several stops at Allatoona, the bus headed deeper into the Southern Appalachians to visit Carters Lake and see some of their great partnerships.



The class had a busy day visiting two lakes and making 8 stops to meet with partners and volunteers from all around the projects. The partners represented a variety of partnership agreements and authorities, including examples of Handshake Funding, Challenge Partnerships, Memorandum of Understandings (MOU), Contributions, and Volunteer Agreements.

One of the key takeaways that comes up over-and-over again in the Partnerships in NRM class is that USACE can no longer go it alone in managing our Recreation and Environmental Stewardship missions. We must build and maintain successful partnerships to provide world class water resource projects to the nation. This class and the field trip help foster the future of new partnerships by providing ideas and inspiration for the class to take back to their home projects. ■



Photo Top: Students met with partners at the Etowah Disc Golf Course. Jennifer Sleezer (SWF) demonstrates her driving skills. Photo Bottom: The class stopped at Carters' Ridgeway Recreation Area and hiked a short section on the mountain bike trails built in partnership with SORBA.



Partnerships in NRM Class Highlights

A few of the highlights of the Partnerships in NRM Class included touring the Allatoona Volunteer Village and meeting the recent Volunteer of the Year Award winners, Brenda Grano and Wynona Brakeman. Afterwards the class visited the Etowah Disc Golf course and got to try out their disc golf skills. At Carters, the class got to see some of the new innovative technology the staff is using in environmental education interpretation at their Visitor Center, much of which had been funded through the Handshake Program. The final stop of the day was at the Ridgeway Recreation Area where we met with a local Southern Off-Road Bike Association leader and took a short hike on their mountain bike trails.

Lending Tackle Box Program

Lending Tackle Box Put Into Action

On Sunday, May 15th, 2022, Deer Creek Lake was honored with the installation of a new program called 'The Lending Tackle Box'. Being the first of its kind on any Huntington District project, this box is actually a Uline locker filled with various fishing necessities such as rods, tackle, line, hooks, etc. to be borrowed and returned by recreators in the area looking to try something new!

On July 23, 2022, Alum Creek Lake, the Scioto Area Corps Cooperating Association, a current Alum Creek Partnership, and The Lending Tackle Box partnered together to install a Lending Tackle Box at the Alum Creek Below Dam Area. The staff have been working towards their goal of Recreation For All over the past 18 months and the Lending Tackle Box supports that program. The goal of this project is to provide increased access to recreational opportunities for visitors to Alum Creek Lake. The Lending Tackle Box will help reduce the financial barriers of trying a new sport by providing loaner equipment. Staff and volunteers will routinely check the supplies and restock as needed. We continue to look for opportunities and partners to help us remove access barriers to our facilities and activities.

Mike McCoy, Natural Resource Specialist, LRH; Sylvia Chelf, Resource Manager, Alum Creek Lake, LRH; Elizabeth May, Park Ranger, Deer Creek Lake, LRH

Huntington District had the opportunity to partner with a non-profit business and concept known as Lending Tackle Box Program. This program was founded by Kim Taylor in honor of Christopher Custer - an outdoorsman who had a passion for fishing and enjoying the outdoors during his time with his loved ones. Kim chose to honor his memory by creating a system for people to "drop a line... lend a line", a clever slogan she created, meaning you can borrow the resources stocked in the locker to fish, or you may donate rods or hooks for others to enjoy. Either way, Custer's love of the sport lives on and through a partnership the Corps of Engineers in Huntington District hopes to increase access to the sport of fishing. The program creates rack cards to place in brochure racks that showcases the location and intent of the lending tackle boxes, advertises program on Lending Tackle Boxes' Facebook page and engages local sponsors to assist with resupplying boxes by gathering donated materials.



Resource Manager, Chris Schilling, and Park Ranger, Elizabeth Mayo, coordinated with Kim to create a Memorandum of Understanding for this new partnership. Since the concept grew in interest at other lakes in the district, the district decided to develop a District MOU to clear the path for other projects within the Huntington District to partner with them. The established MOU calls for USACE regularly monitoring the supply inventory and the integrity of the lending tackle box, while the Lending Tackle Box Program will restock and maintain its image in accordance with the updates provided. In the time since the MOU was agreed upon by both parties, the program has executed successfully - rods and tackle bags have been returned after use and visitors have had the opportunity to try something new. ■

Photo Above: Lending tackle box installed at Deer Creek Lake. Photo Bottom Left: Installation complete on the lending tackle box at Alum Creek Lake.

Blue Marsh Lake Partners with Kids in Parks for TRACK Trails

Brianna Treichler, Natural Resource Specialist, Blue Marsh Lake, NAP

The Squirrel Run and Great Oak Nature Trails at Blue Marsh Lake were developed in the mid-1980s to be used for school programming, guided hikes, and public use. A self-guided program with different interpretive stops was developed for each trail. Though designed to be self-guided activities, most of the interpretive stops were better suited for a guided program by park staff. The use and relevance of the developed programs degraded over time, and it was necessary to update the overall nature trail program. >



TRACK Trails Continued

The national MOU between USACE and the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, Kids In Parks (KIP) TRACK Trails Program had been recently finalized as staff began to explore options to revamp the nature trails. The TRACK Trails Program proved to be a cost effective, time and labor efficient, turnkey option to upgrade the outdated nature trails at Blue Marsh Lake.

The installation of TRACK Trails at Blue Marsh Lake established the first set of trails from the program within the state of Pennsylvania. Blue Marsh Lake staff and KIP staff collaborated to produce a kiosk sign that embodied many attractions and common sites that can be found throughout the state. The kiosk design will be used for any TRACK Trail installed in Pennsylvania moving forward.

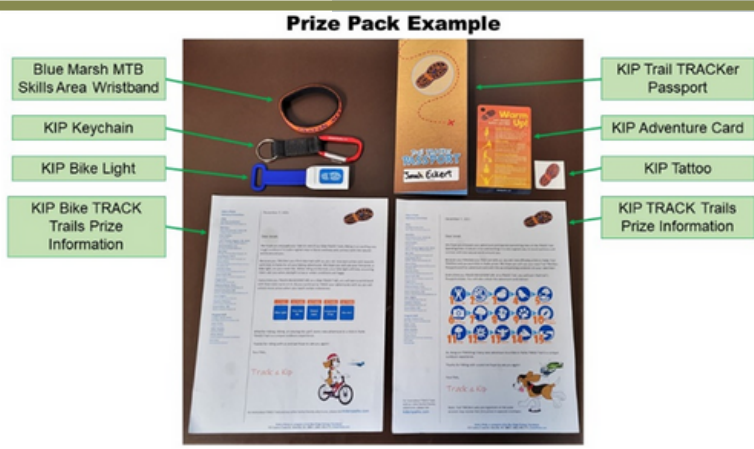
The Squirrel Run and Great Oak Nature Trails are now equipped with new trailhead kiosks and a variety of self-guided activities perfect for families or school groups to participate in. The trail programs can be easily updated as the TRACK Trail program offers a wide variety of brochure activities for use and the ability to develop custom brochures for use. It is a future goal for Blue Marsh Lake staff to work with KIP staff to develop project specific brochures that will highlight specific USACE missions and initiatives.

Blue Marsh Lake took advantage of the KIP Bike TRACK Trails program to provide valuable interpretive signage and an additional interactive layer



TRACK Trails Program

The TRACK Trails program offers more than just activities for hiking and nature trail experiences but also provides opportunities for biking, paddling, disc golf, and citizen science adventures. The program helps merge our outdoor spaces with online experiences by letting families and kids log their visits to different TRACK Trails around the country. Each time an activity is logged, kids can earn prizes and incentives to continue exploring the outdoors. Some fun prizes include customized stickers for the different trails, a Trail TRACKer Passport, wristbands, Adventure Cards, and more.



to the development of a mountain bike skills area. Blue Marsh Lake staff worked with Berks Area Mountain Biking Association (BAMBA) members to develop and construct a mountain bike skills development area for beginner and intermediate riders. The project was made possible through the established trails partnership, volunteer work, and funding provided by the USACE Handshake Partnership Program.

The signage from the Bike TRACK Trails program proved to be another turnkey program allowing the partnership to produce a customized "Welcome" and "Rules and Safety" sign specific to the bike skills area while also providing different instructions for bikers to develop their skills. The skills signage includes instructions on how to perform different skills while including a QR code for bikers to watch an instructional video. Park staff and BAMBA worked together to install the signs in the appropriate locations throughout the bike skills area.

Graphics Above: Interpretive sign for the Blue Marsh Mountain Bike Skills Area and example of the TRACK Program prize pack. Photo Right: TRACK Trailhead Sign.



Melissa Bean, Natural Resources Specialist, NWK

A first glance, building a wall may seem counterproductive to fostering a community partnership, but in this case it was exactly what a community needed. It all began five years ago with “The Wall that Heals” (a scaled replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C) as it traveled through the city of Stockton, Missouri. During the brief visit, The Wall gave over 10,000 family members, friends and visitors an opportunity to connect to the legacy of those enshrined. It was a privileged moment for this grateful community that was marked by an equally honored gift from The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund – a replica panel from The Wall.



When gifted a piece of history, one of the next questions might be: what to do with it? The Stockton community needed more than a wall to display the panel. They needed a place for remembrance and a place to honor the defenders of our nation’s freedoms. The newly founded Veteran’s Memorial Park Committee and USACE staff worked to develop a plan for establishing a veterans’ memorial on nearby USACE lands. A location that offered beautiful space for quiet reflection was soon agreed upon and volunteers started organizing resources.

Admittedly, USACE had the easier end of the deal. The Committee worked tirelessly for years organizing catfish dinners, garage sales, brick sales, silent auctions, raffles, and other grass roots fundraisers. The community answered their calls for support. Donations of time, money, expertise, and materials started arriving and the plan became reality.

Veterans Park was fittingly dedicated on Armed Forces Day 2022, during the 40th anniversary-year of The Wall in Washington D.C. The Wall panel is prominently displayed alongside service flags, medallions, memorial benches, sculptures, and several other walls in a space that thoughtfully blends manmade features and natural elements. While this project serves as a great example of working with local entities to foster cooperation in achieving partnership goals, the purpose was so much more: to provide a space to remember and honor the defenders of our nation’s freedoms, past and present. By all accounts, this purpose is being achieved. ■

Summersville Lake Selected for 2022 Leave No Trace Hot Spot Program

From Aug. 11-15, Summersville Lake partnered with Leave No Trace to host a weekend dedicated to improving recreation facilities. Summersville was selected as one of 11 Hot Spot locations around the country. Hot Spots are locations that have experienced heavy recreation use and visitor-created impacts including excessive trash, damage to vegetation, trail erosion, disturbance to wildlife and more. This program is designed to help educate people on how to reduce impacts in nature while enjoying our nation’s shared outdoor places. Summersville received five days of targeted, on the ground, Leave No Trace programs and site-specific recommendations. Events included a stand up paddle board demonstration, Leave No Trace trivia night, climber coffee hours, a Leave No Trace workshop, and a volunteer stewardship project.



Photo Top and Bottom: Veterans' Memorial Park at Stockton Lake

