



# BRIDGING THE GAP

Volume 7

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## National MOU: America the Beautiful Interagency MOU on Promoting Equitable Access to Nature in Nature-Deprived Communities



In September 2022, ten federal departments signed a new MOU to establish a framework to collaborate, learn from each other, and engage more effectively in supporting local leaders' efforts to improve access to and create, expand, steward, and conserve parks and green and blue spaces for current residents of nature-deprived communities. This effort focuses on strengthening investments in communities who have been locked out of the benefits nature provides, and to ensure all Americans can benefit from safe parks, natural areas, and waterways where they live, work, and play by expanding access to local parks, tree canopy cover, conservation areas, open space and water-based recreation, public gardens, beaches, and waterways. ■

Photo below: Charleston District Wounded Warrior fishing event.

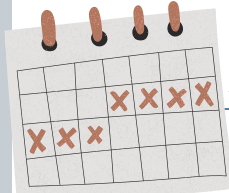


### About Bridging the Gap

"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 the 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!

Have you attended the PROSPECT Partnerships in NRM class yet? If not, sign up for one of our classes:

- ✓ FY 23 Session 3: Summersville Lake, Summersville, WV. September 11 - 14, 2023
- ✓ FY 24 Session 1: Mark Twain Lake, Monroe City, MO. June 24 - 27, 2024
- ✓ FY 24 Session 2: Falls Lake, Wake Forest, NC. September 16 - 19, 2024

### Reminder: April 16 - 22, 2023 is National Volunteer Week

This is a great opportunity to recognize the collective impact of volunteer service to the USACE NRM program. National Volunteer Week can be used to offer up new volunteer opportunities and identify and thank volunteers who lend their time, talent, and voice to make a difference in their communities. ■

## 2022 National Volunteer of the Year Award Recipients



This year's USACE national volunteer of the year award recipients are Red and Joy Lyons of Carters Lake in the Mobile District. They have donated more than 5,100 hours of volunteer service over a two-year period. In 2022, they coordinated, led, or supported a dozen interpretive events, made hundreds of water safety contacts, saved USACE tens of thousands of dollars in repairs and specialty construction work, and provided thousands of dollars' worth of training to produce a hands-on artistic experience for visitors. One of their most substantial contributions was working to form Carters Lake's first and only nonprofit organization, Our Beautiful Carters Lake.



The national volunteer award is sponsored by the Corps Foundation to recognize extraordinary service provided by volunteers, draw attention to their vast skills and contributions, and encourage an attitude of stewardship and responsibility in caring for USACE lands, facilities, and resources.  
 Photo above: Red Lyons with Buddy Beaver preparing for a water safety program.

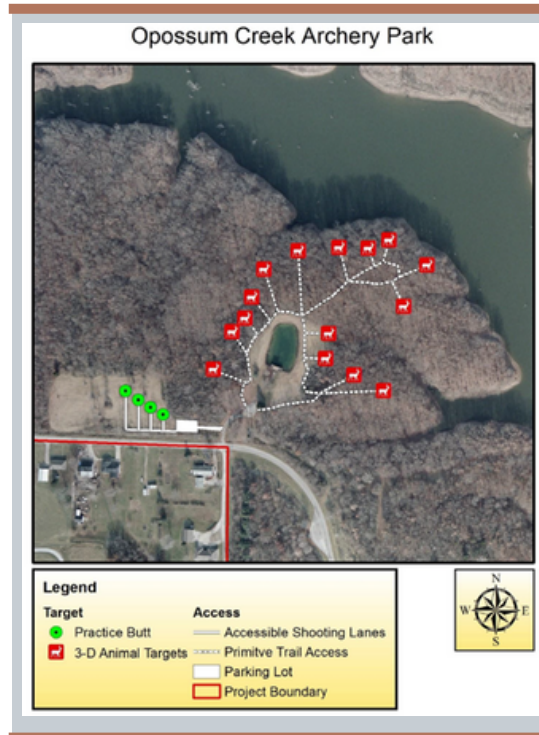
## 2023 Handshake Program Funding Recipients

The Handshake Program offers a source of seed money to USACE lakes/rivers for worthwhile partnership projects. The intent of this program is to enhance existing recreation opportunities and natural resources by providing an incentive to USACE projects to utilize partnering initiatives to their fullest potential by combining funding from local USACE projects and their partners to benefit the public.

Seven projects selected for 2023 Handshake funding are:

- Alum Creek Lake - ADA trail for all
- Beach City Lake - Disc golf course
- Dale Hollow Lake - Fishing access improvements
- Lake O' the Pines - Dock safety improvements and kayak launches
- Mansfield Hollow Lake - Pine barren restoration
- Lake Shelbyville - Archery park
- Truman Lake - Roadside park

For more information regarding the Handshake Program, please visit the Handshake page on the NRM Gateway or contact your division Partnership Advisory Committee member.



## Rathbun Regional Water Association

Phillip Brown, OPM, Rathbun Lake, NWK

"Value to the Nation," sure that may be true...but for most who live around USACE water resource projects, it's "value to a region." Rathbun Lake, located in the Southern Iowa region of the Kansas City District, fits that description. Beyond the most obvious or nationally visible reasons for a water resource project is the often 'overlooked' authorized purpose of water supply. Rathbun Lake is a vital water supply source to 90,000 customers throughout an 18-county area in S. Iowa and N. Missouri. Our water supply allocation contract is with Rathbun Regional Water Association (RRWA). RRWA recognized long ago the significance of collaboration to facilitate their need to improve water quality of Rathbun Lake, and they have been leading the charge for over 20+ years.



Photo above: USACE Park Ranger sampling water.

## Rathbun Regional Continued

Rathbun Lake is listed as a 303(d) impaired water body. The partnership starts with USACE and our water quality sampling program, which provides essential data for our partners to justify grants or other funding sources. In the Rathbun Lake watershed, partnerships exist with Natural Resource Conservation Service, Rathbun Land & Water Alliance, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Ag & Land Services, local county, and private landowners. These entities work together building structures by 'pooling' resources. One of the cornerstones of our partnership



Photo above: Greenville Marsh restoration project.

success stories is USACE's Continuing Authorities Program Section 1135 - Environmental Improvement Projects. This avenue for funding has been a significant resource towards the building of structures that improve water quality in Rathbun Lake since the mid-2000s. Since that time, there have been three multi-cell wetland developments built, another that is in the final approval/design phases, and 12 extensive shoreline stabilization areas armored to reduce sedimentation effects on fisheries. All these initiatives ultimately result in the primary goal of reducing siltation and nutrient load run-off with a product of improved aquatic environmental conditions. ■

## Feral Hog Elimination at Missouri Lakes

Melissa Bean, Natural Resources Specialist, Kansas City District

When it comes to invasive species, it can be hard to find success stories. The Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership is bucking that trend and seeing success in eliminating feral hogs from private and public lands - including Harry S. Truman, Pomme De Terre, and Stockton Lakes.

The partnership, established in 1998 and led by Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), has united private landowners, universities, and over 15 federal and state agencies under the common goal of eliminating feral hogs from public and private lands throughout Missouri to protect public health, agriculture, and natural resources. Achieved over time, the approach is multi-faceted and includes legislative actions and enforcement, education, control measures, and population and disease monitoring. Since implementing hog hunting prohibitions on state (and elective federal) lands in 2016, the Task Force has removed 54,000 hogs (statewide) and is seeing an overall downward trend in populations despite increasing acres surveyed - a measure of success in a very long battle. >



## 2022 National Excellence in Partnerships Award Recipient

The New River Alliance of Climbers (NRAC) at Summersville Lake in the Huntington District have been selected as the 2022 Excellence in Partnerships Award recipients for their steadfast commitment in creating sustainable use and continued access to climbing opportunities along the stunning sandstone cliffs of Summersville Lake. Since 2019, NRAC has contributed \$60K in funding, provided \$50K in volunteer services, and generated over \$100K in environmental stewardship value to Summersville Lake, constructing a 20-foot metal staircase against a cliff for improved emergency evacuation and filling gabion baskets to prevent erosion of the shoreline.



The Excellence in Partnerships Award, sponsored by the Corps Foundation, annually recognizes exceptional contributions by a partner providing substantial support to the USACE Recreation and Environmental Stewardship programs.

Photo above: NRAC volunteers fill gabions for shoreline protection.

## Meet Your PAC Team Members

Heather Burke  
HQUSACE

Francis Ferrell - Chair  
SAD (Falls Lake)

Scott Sunderland  
NAD (Blue Marsh Lake)

Mike McCoy  
LRD (Huntington District Office)

Phil Manhart  
MVD (Lake Shelbyville)

Taylor Baughn  
SPD (Lake Mendocino)

Keith Hyde  
NWD (Lucky Peak Lake)

Jennifer Linde  
SWD (Fort Worth District Office)

Photo below: PAC team members.



Year after year, H2Ozarks takes charge of coordinating this annual cleanup event. In the 2022 event alone, H2Ozarks organized 22 sponsors and 40+ self-organized teams with 491 volunteers contributing 1,328 hours of service, equivalent to a value of \$39,774. They hauled away 1.5 tons of trash, 48 tires, and cleaned 150 miles of shoreline. USACE supports this partnership by supplying dumpsters, trash bags, and lake access. The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), who coordinates NPLD efforts nationally, sent coupons to H2Ozarks for all participants to enjoy one fee-free day to a participating public lands site. >

## Feral Hog Continued



USACE has aided in this goal by adopting hunting prohibitions on feral hog on federal lands, promoting messaging, and working directly with MDC, USDA-Wildlife Services, and the University of Missouri partners to eliminate populations. As of fall 2021, feral hogs have been eliminated from Harry S. Truman, Pomme De Terre, and Stockton Lake watersheds. Monitoring continues and efforts have progressed to sampling tributaries for feral hog DNA. USACE staff are optimistic that this winning trend will continue under this successful partnership model. ■



Photos Left to Right: Feral hog, courtesy of Missouri Department of Conservation. Park Ranger Ward with judas pig.

## Partners in Grime - Little Rock District & H2Ozarks' National Public Lands Day Event

Ryan Braaten, Lead Park Ranger, Table Rock Lake, SWL

If you build it, they will trash it, but forming a partnership with a dedicated organization can help you put trash in its place.

For 22 years now, H2Ozarks has partnered with Little Rock District's Beaver, Table Rock, and Bull Shoals Lakes for an annual shoreline cleanup event on National Public Lands Day (NPLD). H2Ozarks, a nonprofit organization formed in 2001, has the mission of preserving the water quality of the upper White River watershed, located in Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas. H2Ozarks' vested interest in clean water makes them an ideal partner for USACE.

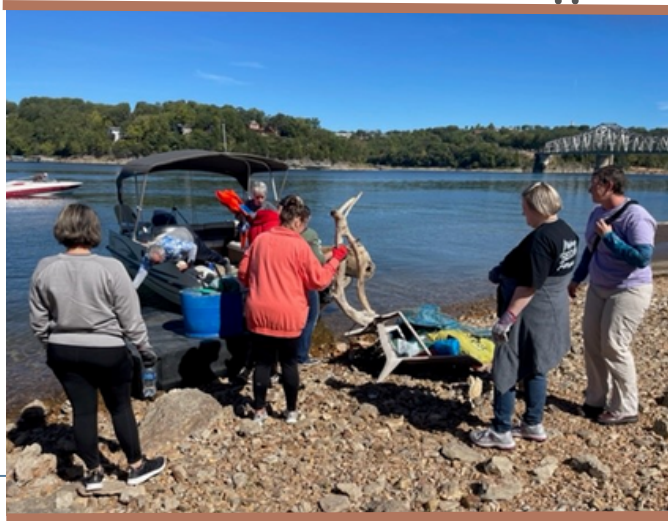


Photo above: H2Ozarks team shows off the fruit of their hard work.

## Partners in Grime Continued

This great partnership wouldn't have the same impact if it weren't for the commitment of H2Ozarks. Sometimes these partnerships fall into place and sometimes you must seek them out. It can be hard work, but in the end, finding the right motivated partner who wants to accomplish the same goals as you can be worth its weight in...trash. ■

*Photo right: H2Ozarks volunteers collect trash on the shoreline.*



## Keeping DeGray Lake Beautiful Partnership

*Jimmie Ward, Natural Resource Manager, DeGray Lake, MVK*

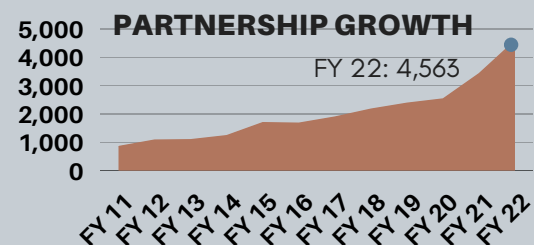
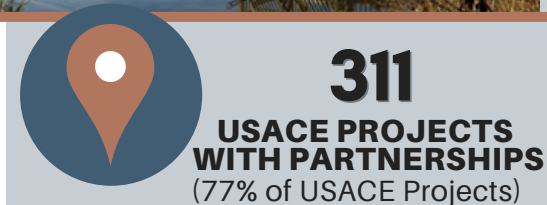
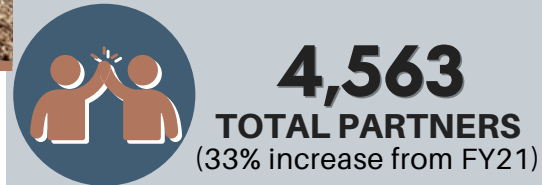
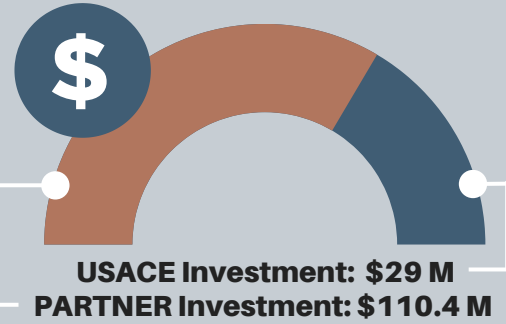
Keeping DeGray Lake Beautiful (KDLB) is an extremely active friends group with 501(c) (3) status that entered into a Challenge Partnership Agreement through the Handshake funding program with DeGray Lake in Southwest Arkansas in March 2016. This organization has been involved with the DeGray Lake project for over 30 years. The Handshake Project is for a six-foot-wide, handicap accessible, <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> mile, all weather asphalt, watchable wildlife interpretive path known as Sunset Trail. A handicap accessible fishing/wildlife observation pier was also constructed.



*Photos left to right: Sunset Trail paved path, Sunset Trail partner sign, Sunset Trail fishing/wildlife observation pier.*

In addition to the trail project, Keeping DeGray Lake Beautiful partners annually with the Lake Hamilton School District, USACE, and Mount St. Mary's Academy to teach approximately 150 4th-grade students about water safety, water quality, native flora and fauna in Arkansas, ecosystems, and environmental awareness. The group assists in hosting a mobility impaired duck hunt adjacent to the Sunset Trail where four lucky hunters are drawn to hunt in the No Public Hunting Wildlife Management Area. KDLB has completed projects such as an 18-hole disc golf course and an ADA fishing deck for the yearly veteran and intellectually disabled fishing derbies. They also host DeGray Lake's Annual Shoreline Cleanup for 400 volunteers during National Public Lands Day. ■

## FY22 Partnerships Program Accomplishments



# Navigating Gray Areas: Working with Partners in a Personal and Official Capacity

*Emily Jones, Natural Resource Specialist, John H. Kerr Reservoir, SAW*

Have you ever wondered about being a member or serving in a leadership role of an organization your lake project is actively partnering with? These were questions I was asking myself several months ago.

Beginning in 2020, John H. Kerr Dam & Reservoir formed a partnership with the Southern Piedmont Virginia Master Naturalists Chapter (SPC). As the Outreach Ranger, I work regularly with the SPC to plan interpretive programs, volunteer events, and additional partnership opportunities between USACE and SPC; however, I am also a certified Virginia Master Naturalist and an active member of the SPC in a non-work-related capacity. In fact, I was recently elected by my fellow chapter members to serve on the SPC Program and Outreach Committee.

## FY22 Volunteer Program Accomplishments

**32,398**  
TOTAL VOLUNTEERS



*Photos left to right: Park Ranger Emily Jones, in official USACE capacity and Master Naturalist Emily Jones, in personal capacity.*

**1,536,732**  
TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS SERVED  
(Equivalent to 739 FTEs)



As USACE employees, you can be a member or officer of a partner organization in a personal capacity or in an official capacity, but there are also things that you cannot do and potential conflicts of interest (COI) to avoid. This may feel daunting and complicated, but with diligence and clear communication, it's possible to be a member of a partnering organization and have a productive partnership! I have included three tips below from my experience participating and serving in a partner organization in a personal capacity.

**\$46 M**  
TOTAL VALUE OF VOLUNTEER HOURS



- **Keep work separate:** The first thing I did when becoming a certified Master Naturalist and a member of the SPC is set boundaries and remind the Chapter that when I am out of uniform and participating in SPC events, meetings, and programs, I am Emily Jones, a Master Naturalist volunteer, and not Ranger Emily Jones. Participating as a member of a partner organization in a personal capacity means that your involvement is occurring on personal time, so any SPC member related email communication is connected to my personal email. The exception is when the Chapter asks me as Ranger Emily Jones to facilitate a volunteer event or program. When this situation arises, I am facilitating as Ranger Emily Jones in an official government capacity (e.g., official uniform, government vehicle, official time, etc.) and not as a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer or member of the Chapter. >

**80%**  
PROJECTS USING VOLUNTEERS  
(322 of 403 USACE Projects)



## Navigating Gray Areas Continued

- **Inform your supervisor:** It's equally important to inform your supervisor(s) that you are participating in a personal capacity with an organization your project is partnering with. This ensures that everyone is on the same page and any pertinent policies are reviewed.
- **Avoid any conflict of interest:** Avoiding any COI is imperative when participating in a personal capacity as a member (or officer) of a partner organization. For example, being the treasurer, president, vice president, or serving on any fundraising-related committee may be a COI since those positions inherently have decision-making power and may involve funding for the entire organization. I preemptively let organization leadership and members of the Chapter know that as a Federal government and USACE employee I am unable to serve in certain leadership roles, and that I must avoid any COI.

Personal participation in a partnering organization must not compromise an employee's first responsibility to represent the interest of the Federal government. If you have questions or are interested in being a member of a partnering organization in either a professional or personal capacity, reach out to your division representative on the Partnership Advisory Committee and/or your Office of Counsel to learn more. ■

## Somerfield North Launch Ramp Improvement Project

*Vince Klinkner, Resource Manager, Youghiogheny River Lake, LRP*

Youghiogheny River Lake staff were approached in late July by several members of the recreation community regarding improvements to the boat ramp at Somerfield North Recreation Area to promote easier access to the courtesy dock for individuals with impaired mobility, as well as improved traffic flow. Access to the courtesy dock previously required crossing through the rocky, and sometimes muddy lakebed, and the single-lane ramp resulted in long waits for boaters seeking to launch or load boats.

Lake staff met on site with the concerned individuals, PA State Representatives Office, PA Fish and Boat Commission, and local stakeholders to address concerns and discuss a joint effort to improve the launch. The Friends for Youghiogheny River Lake (Cooperating Association) coordinated efforts for the improvement through community donations utilizing the Pittsburgh District's Contribution Plan authorities. Local donors raised \$11,500 dollars, and a member of the cooperating association donated the equipment and labor to excavate and grade the site. >

*Photo top to bottom: Partners gather to set up for the launch ramp improvements. Contractor paving expands the boat launch.*



### FY22 Volunteer Program Accomplishments



**1,468**

**AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL PASSES ISSUED**

*(for 100 hours of volunteer service)*



**225**

**USACE ANNUAL PASSES ISSUED**

*(for 250 hours of volunteer service)*



**31**

**VOLUNTEER EXCELLENCE COINS**



## Somerfield North Ramp Continued

### NRM Gateway Spotlight: Grants/Alternative Funding Sources

WWW.

Visit the Grants page to learn more about where to find grants or how to work with partners to apply for grant funding. Our Contributions authority provides the means and processes on how to accept donations plus administer any funds USACE might receive directly or indirectly from a grant. On this page you will find links to grants and funding available to USACE, related sites and links, FAQs, and success stories.

<https://corpslakes.ercd.dren.mil/partners/grants.cfm>

*Photo below: Team volunteers pack out following day one of the NPLD event.*



gathered into brush piles for use by wildlife, while larger trunks and branches were trimmed and set aside for use in future recreation infrastructure such as trail markers, kiosks, and railings.

This event was a part of TRI: The Tamarisk Removal Initiative, which is a larger scale habitat improvement project within the Black Bridge Area of John Martin Reservoir. TRI seeks to greatly reduce the amount of invasive tamarisk trees clogging the river corridor in this area, increase native biodiversity and ecosystem health, and provide better recreation access for the public. This project is ongoing and has been generously funded through the 2022 Handshake Partnership program, The Corps Foundation (CF), and the 2022 Waterways 4 Wildlife grant offered by the National Wild Turkey Federation. In sum, the total amount of grant money received from CF and the Handshake award was \$30K. ■



Lake staff coordinated with Operations and Planning Divisions to review the proposed design plans, identify required erosion and sediment controls, and complete an environmental and archeological review of the improvement area. The archeological review included the involvement of the PA State Historic Preservation Office. Coordination with 3 different paving companies was required to complete the project due to scheduling conflicts and equipment failures.

Finally, on Nov. 23, 2022, the final day local asphalt plants were open, Blout Paving was able to complete the project. Four months of planning and coordination resulted in a 250 foot long by 18 foot wide addition to the launch ramp. This addition will improve access to the courtesy dock, as well as allow for easy maintenance and adjustment of the courtesy dock with fluctuating water levels. This project highlights the ability to accomplish great improvements at our facilities through utilization of partnerships and the authorities granted in the District's Contribution Plan. ■

## National Public Lands Day at John Martin Reservoir

*Mike Bullock, Natural Resources Specialist, Albuquerque District*

On Sep. 24th and 25th, USACE at John Martin Reservoir partnered with the Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado and Rocky Mountain Field Institute for its 2022 National Public Lands Day Event. The 27-person team, consisting of both staff and volunteers, worked together to clear five acres of tamarisk from along the Purgatory River and Arkansas River Canal. This opened three new water access points as well as renewed access to a quarter mile stretch of road that was previously overgrown and impassable.

The areas cleared during this event will serve both as a staging area for equipment during future removal and revegetation operations, as well as access points for the recreating public. This event also sought to have a zero-waste mentality for removed vegetation. Smaller branches and saplings were



*Photo above: A volunteer re-treats tamarisk regrowth from a previously treated area.*



## Grandma Does Know Best, Recipe Substitutions Can Work In Partnerships

*Viola Bramel, Park Ranger, West Hill Dam, NAE*

Look as far as your own backyard...West Hill Dam is fortunate to have about 10 elementary and private schools in our local area. There are also many early education councils (similar to Head Start programs) and a major family childcare/gymnasium education complex nearby. All these, in addition to our regular visitors and the organizations they volunteer for or belong to, are your visitors, volunteers, and supporters who invite and/or tell others! You made the Major Leagues when families are announcing your park in the food courts at the local malls as their favorite place to visit! An additional benefit is that they watch over your property, bring their children, grandchildren, and neighbors to your programs and are resources to utilize.

Network and visit your local boards, organizations, and agencies. Don't overlook other federal agencies such as the National Park Service or U.S. Forest Service. Our local Police Chief hosts a monthly Interagency Group resource meeting encompassing 17 towns and all the schools and superintendents. The Corps is well represented with our missions and programs, explaining why the dam is in their backyard and sharing all our recreational opportunities, resources, and service projects.



*Photos Left to Right: Cohosted event with the National Park Service, Park Ranger Viola Bramel and Eagle Scout Rusty Sovine at the Woodland Trail, USACE Park Ranger provides water safety education at a community event.*

Since 1995, along with Eagle Scout Rusty Sovine, the Bay State Trail Riders, Inc. (BSTR) equestrian group has cleared the Woodland Trail system (five miles multi-use trail: horse, hike, and bike). Their design for a pedestrian, horse, and all user-friendly safety fence was used on the walkway at the dam. They have been a partner for almost twenty-five years, with an annual trail maintenance day in the spring after flood and snow season. They also partner with Buffumville Lake. Their 501(c)(3) nonprofit status provides partnership grants. BSTR is celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. Multiple generations have enjoyed and helped with regular upkeep and hosted equestrian trail rides and competitions at both Corps dams. >

## Together Outdoors Resource Hub



Our partners at Together Outdoors have put together a website to share resources dedicated to understanding how we can build an outdoor community where everyone belongs.

The Resource Hub is:

- An interactive database designed to curate content (e.g., books, research papers, literature, toolkits, videos, etc.) on topics such as the history of outdoor recreation and patterns of exclusion, recruitment and retention, marketing and partnerships, and others. Additionally, the platforms strive to showcase groups working to connect underrepresented communities to the outdoors.

- A clearinghouse of resources related to inclusivity in the outdoors.

Visit the Organization page to find grassroots organizations that you can reach out to near your projects that have led the push for outdoor inclusion and introduced underrepresented communities to outdoor recreation.

The mission of Together Outdoors is to nurture an environment where all people have access to welcoming, outdoor recreation experiences. They pursue this work through engagement, partnership, and education across all segments of the outdoor community.

<https://resourcehub.togetheroutdoors.com/>

## National MOU: Trout Unlimited



In January 2023, USACE and the Trout Unlimited (TU) signed a new national MOU to provide a foundation for collaboration related to protection, restoration, and/or management of cold water fisheries of mutual interest. USACE and TU intend to focus on activities that protect, reconnect, restore, and sustain coldwater fisheries and their watersheds using the best available science.



The goals under this MOU are to:

- Protect critical coldwater fisheries habitats
- Reconnect coldwater streams and improve fish passage to benefit river ecosystem health
- Restore coldwater riparian habitats
- Gather and share scientific data and research as it may be related to projects of mutual interest and concern.

<https://corpslakes.ercd.dren.mil/partners/national.cfm?Partner=trout>

*Photo below: Check in station for fishing event with Trout Unlimited at The Dalles.*



## Grandma Knows Best Continued

A pinch of this and a pinch of that: Get those school water safety packets out to your schools, provide them to the curriculum team or work directly with a teacher who has supported you. We have been fortunate to host as many as six elementary schools annually, along with attending their spring school assemblies. Local early childhood education organizations, along with your local police departments, host community days and often a youth or family safety day. Get the USACE Water Safety message out to thousands, and get a big bang for your staffing efforts. Most organizations have a message link on their community page. Applaud their water safety efforts and offer USACE rangers to present at local fairs and police or school events.

Scout Troops: Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Adventure Scouts, and even Royal Ranger's organizations work on living skills and Scout oaths. Water safety, personal safety, outdoor, and water-based skills are their major priorities. Offer to assist your scout leaders with their merit badges, let them know you have special use permits, or allow them to host a scout badge day. Invite them to camp for free in exchange for volunteering at your National Public Lands Day. Plant a seed with every scout you talk to, and invite them to earn their Life Scout or Eagle Scout requirements. West Hill Dam has sixty-eight current Eagle Scouts. Their value to the USACE is well over \$75K. There have also been two Girl Scout Gold Awards, two Girl Scout Silver Awards, and nine Girl Scout Bronze Awards. Several of our Eagle Scouts, Girl Scouts, and seasonal rangers have gone on to serve our nation in the military. These are the future parents, scout leaders, volunteers, stewards, military personnel and leaders, and park rangers!

Blackstone Valley Paddlers hosts annual invasive species removal and "Paddler" calendar event nights. Work with 4-H or parent Home School programs. They have badge and curriculum-based projects that provide numerous volunteers and completed projects. USACE has an MOU with IMBA (International Mountain Bicycling Association). Our local chapter, New England Mountain Bike Association, provides volunteers to maintain trails and can be a repository for the USACE Partnership/grant program.



*Photo above: Trail event with the New England Mountain Biking Association.*

Mix all of these groups together with respect and great appreciation, serve a few treats or homemade baked goods, and these organizations and volunteers, scouts, toddlers, families, regular visitors, and more will participate in your park and volunteer programs for generations to come. ■