



THE recreation RETREAT

HQ Update: Gateway Operational Status

POC: Ryan Hartwig, Recreation Program and Business Line Manager

As you may be aware, during the COVID-19 pandemic our Natural Resource Management Gateway Managers, NRM Technical Support Team, and the USACE Common Operating Picture (UCoP) worked to create the Operational Project Status site within the Recreation Assessment to track and report COVID-19 impacts and closures.

This site has evolved to be a standalone data reporting portal that includes ALL closures and project status changes as impacts to our projects stemming from COVID-19 have waned. Every Tuesday and Friday morning, this data is pulled, processed, and sent to a UCoP Dashboard, as well as uploaded to an ArcGIS Online Portal for public viewing, access, and use. Updates made automatically appear on our public page, <https://corpslakes.erdc.dren.mil/visitors/status.cfm>. Many other public websites and portals for data sharing utilize this information for their own pages and maps, heightening the importance to maintain current operational status data.

This is no longer a “COVID thing;” this is the new normal. The importance of maintaining accurate data for this use cannot be stressed enough. Federal land management agencies are required to provide accurate and accessible geospatial data to improve public access with the recent passing of the MAPLands Act (PL 117-114). Unfortunately, our data has multiple Project Site Areas (PSAs) and Projects across the enterprise with statuses that have not been updated in nearly two years, including those with closures stemming from seasonal changes, flooding, low water, and wildfire. This means for nearly **TWO YEARS** we have been inaccurately reporting operational statuses to the public.

To rectify these errors and meet our requirements of the MAPLands Act, USACE Recreation Projects are required to log in at <https://gateway.erdc.dren.mil/nrm/opstatus/> and IMMEDIATELY update or report closures and project status changes. Additionally, project staff should regularly review and update statuses as needed.

Even if the status currently listed for your PSAs is accurate, please hit the “update” button to refresh the last entry date so that those working to disseminate this data to the public know it is up to date. We are tracking 2,752 USACE recreation areas on this site. That’s 2,752 opportunities to get it right and show the public we care about their recreation experience!



US Army Corps
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YOUR Thoughts

We are looking for contributors and ideas!

*If you have a topic, success story, lesson learned, or helpful suggestion—let us know.

Send to: Tara.J.Whitsel@usace.army.mil

The Recreation Retreat is an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

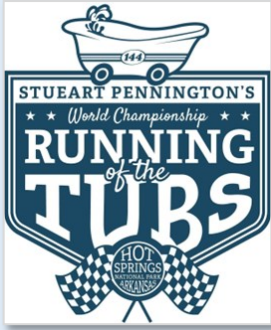
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This Issue:



Campaign Hat Photo Credit:
Cynthia Mitchell, USACE

2023 Stueart Pennington World Championship Running of the Tubs



Hot Springs, Arkansas, has a unique annual event, called "The Stueart Pennington World Championship Running of the Tubs", that honors the city's history as the city that proclaimed, "We Bathe the World!" Both local and far away teams build custom bathtubs on wheels. The different tub designs are very creative and energetic. The teams push the customized tubs down the Historic

Bathhouse Row while navigating fun and crazy obstacles. Spectators are lined along both sides of the street cheering on the teams. The spectators are also armed with super soakers to "assist" with cooling off the bathtub teams as they race down Bathhouse Row. It's no surprise why this event is labeled as "the cleanest event in town!"

Lake Ouachita Park Rangers competed in this fun event for the second year in a row with their Water Safety Patrol Tub Boat. The tub is modeled after both Park Ranger trucks and water patrol boats that are used by Rangers for their daily patrols. The tub "boat" has numerous decals for promoting water safety.

The event began on Friday, June 2, 2023 at the Hill Wheatly Plaza for the judging of the tubs. This is where the team impressed the judges with their water safety theme patrol boat tub and their passion for water safety. The team started by providing the judges with some of the best water safety giveaways. Jon Munz then conducted a mock vessel safety inspection with COL Klein using the new vessel safety inspection booklet. Jon verified that COL Klein had the proper vessel safety equipment on board, such as a lifejacket, an engine emergency shutoff switch, a fire extinguisher, a throwable, a sound producing device, and navigation lights. The team then went around saying different motivational water safety slogans and concluded by shouting in unison, "Life Jackets Worn...Nobody Mourns," then activating their auto-inflatable life vests and blowing whistles to win over the judges.

The actual running of the tubs took place on Central Avenue along the historic Bathhouse Row on Saturday, June 3, 2023. The event started with a parade to the starting line near the Historic Arlington Hotel. The Rangers handed out water safety frisbees along the way to spectators of all ages. Spectators were armed and ready to drench the tub runners while they raced down Bathhouse Row. The Lake Ouachita Park Rangers competed against the Hot Springs National Park tub team with a Ted Lasso theme. The race had three obstacles that consisted of a sponge toss, a gift unwrapping to give to a spectator, and an obstacle to run around the tub. Once an obstacle was successfully completed, the judges gave permission to move on. The Lake Ouachita Park Rangers were behind in the beginning but were able to dig in and pull ahead for the win! The second race was against the Austin Weirdoes' Power Rangers themed tub. The Power Rangers got off to a great start and maintained the lead across the finish line.



The Water Safety Patrol Tub is modeled after Park Ranger trucks and water patrol boats used by the Rangers for their daily patrols. The Tub Boat has numerous decals for promoting water safety.



2023 Lake Ouachita Park Ranger's Tub Team lineup:

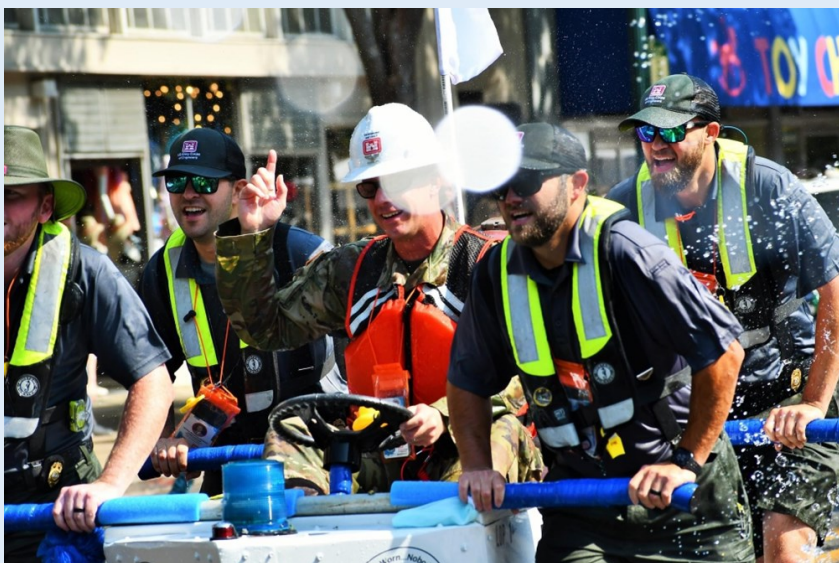
- Natural Resources Specialist, Joshua Tyler (Loofa Attendant)
- VA Natural Resources Specialist, Jon Munz (Soap Attendant)
- Natural Resources Specialist, Robbie Morphew (Bathmat Attendant)
- Park Ranger, Asher Kight (Towel Attendant)
- This Year's Special Guest: Vicksburg District Commander, COL Christopher Klein (Captain Tub Driver)



2023 Stuart Pennington World Championship Running of the Tubs

The awards presentation was after the race at Hill Wheatly Plaza. The Lake Ouachita Park Rangers won the "Most Spirited" tub team award for their enthusiasm for promoting water safety in a fun-spirited way. The crowd demanded an encore, so the Rangers did the "Life Jackets Worn... Nobody Mourns" chant and activated their life jackets to much delight by the spectators! The Lake Ouachita Park Ranger's tub team competed for the first time last year and won the same "Most Spirited" tub team award.

The free fun family-friendly event was a great way to promote water safety in an entertaining way to a wide variety of spectators. The event was also a way to promote USACE and the Park Ranger image to the community.



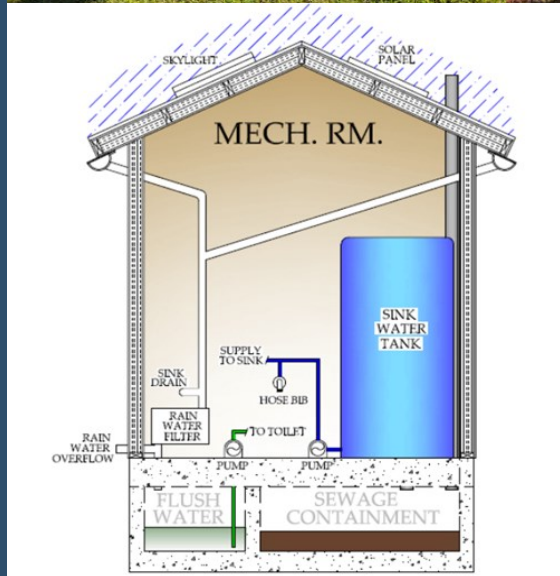
BIL Work In Action: Mobile District's Utility-Free Park at Lake Seminole

POC: Ranell Franklin Natural Resources Program Manager, Mobile District

USACE unveiled cutting-edge, sustainable technology in May this year when it installed its first modern off-grid public restroom at Faceville Landing Park. This utility-free park is part of USACE's Mobile District of the South Atlantic Division, offering a boat ramp, group shelter, picnic area, and fishing pier on Lake Seminole. This new unit replaces a deteriorated pit toilet, now providing all the comforts of a traditional restroom while also taking advantage of the rain and sun in Georgia.

A solar power system provides overall electricity for the lights, pumps, an automatic door lock, and other components. Concrete block construction ensures that the restroom facility is climate-change resilient, resistant to tornado/hurricane damage, and vandalism-resistant. The non-utility restroom consists of a metal roof with a skylight and one solar panel that recharges a battery located in the mechanical room. Rainwater is collected and filtered from the roof, then deposited in a vault for flushing. The toilet is a regular flush system that is more resilient to outages and weather events than traditional utility-connected units, which also leads the industry in water conservation. Another cool feature of the unit is the dusk-to-dawn automatic locking doors that will also lock the restroom from outside entry when the rainwater collection vault reaches below a certain level, restricting usage until additional rainwater accumulates.

The restroom and vault were completely finished off-site, then delivered and assembled at the prepared location. Local O&M contractors performed minor excavation prep work prior to delivery, followed by installation of small interior fixtures, groundwork, and landscaping after the restroom was successfully in place. The breakdown in cost to acquire the restroom was \$134K for the unit and \$54K for project and Contracting Division labor.



This was a custom design-build project scoped and appraised for USACE by Green Flush to fit the intended public use area. Green Flush was founded in 2010 by father/son Ken and Kyle Earlywine. Ken is a former employee of USACE working in both the Pacific Northwest and Germany. He worked for a total of 30 years as a civil engineer for the federal government. Green Flush has over 60 restrooms in 30 states. Rainwater flush restroom buildings can operate without power, sewer, or water utilities, and even without direct road access.

Utility-Free Park at Lake Seminole Continued

With concentrated efforts to foster energy and water sustainability, prefabricated restrooms have proven to be more advantageous than site-built structures. Additionally, prefabricated restrooms offer consistent quality, lower costs, and decrease time spent on planning, design, and installation. The omission of utilities minimizes maintenance, making them cost-effective over the long term. Sanitary facilities, such as public restrooms, are critical amenities to public recreation areas and a lack of facilities can result in serious health and/or sanitation issues. The installation of these types of facilities during area repairs have been and continue to be looked upon favorably in the budget package selection process for energy and water sustainability submittals.

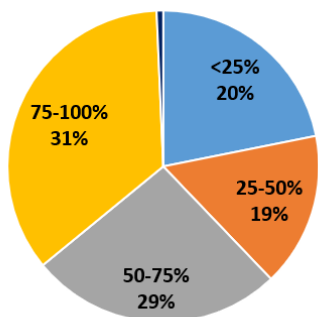
Park Ranger Safety Survey 2022 Results

SURVEY - DEMOGRAPHICS

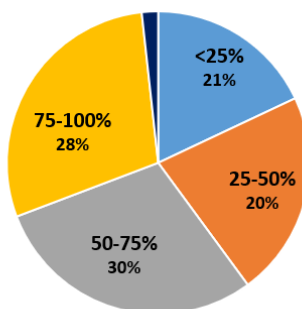
What % of your time during the summer season is spent performing visitor contact duties?

* Dark Blue indicates no response

Historical Average



2022

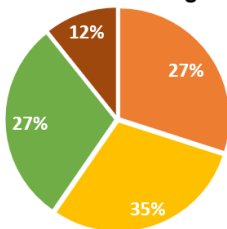


CORPS PARK RANGER UNIFORM

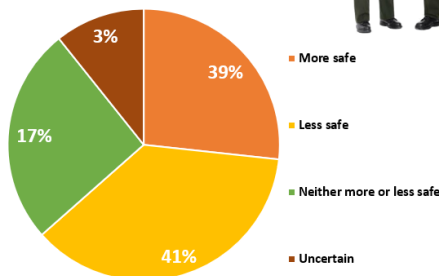
Do you believe wearing the Corps park ranger uniform, compared to the way other Corps employees dress, makes you:



Historical Average



2022



- 79% believe visitors are safer because of having a law enforcement contract.
- 76% believe Park Rangers and employees are safer for having a law enforcement contract.
- 30% responded to no to having contracts for law enforcement services. (Historical average 24%)



Key Summary Notes from the 2022 Park Ranger Survey:

- 2022 survey responses were back to pre-pandemic levels, with 663 people completing the questions asked.
- In 2022, there was a return to the historical averages on the percent of time during the summer recreation season that is spent performing visitor contact duties. This suggests a return to the normal duties after the pandemic.
- The 2022 survey results showed a more divided opinion among Park Rangers regarding the USACE Park Ranger uniform. 2022 had the highest number of people respond that the uniform made them “less safe,” while also having the highest number of responses saying that the uniform makes them “more safe.”
- Biggest change in the 2022 survey results from the previous years regarded the topic of law enforcement contracts. 30% responded “no” to having contracts for law enforcement services. (Historical average 24%)
- Since the start of the survey “Park Ranger Training” has been the #1 response for the factor that will most enhance Park Ranger safety at their project.

Ranger Training

1 SWT Natural Resources Workshop. On Mar. 20-22, 2023, the annual SWT Natural Resources Workshop was held on Ft. Gibson Lake, Sequoyah State Park. This two-day training consisted of over 70 NRM personnel training in personal protection, pepper spray, verbal defense and influences, ranger safety, Title 36, and much more. This was the first time the team had convened since the COVID-19 pandemic.



2 Portland District Visitor Assistance Ranger Training. June 5-9, 2023, Rangers from the Willamette Valley, Rogue, Bonneville, Dalles, John Day, and Dworshak Projects met at the Cottage Grove Community Center, Cottage Grove Armory, and Schwarz Campground. This is the second year the Portland District hosted a visitor assistance training course that qualified USACE staff for citation authority. Eleven permanent rangers attended two days of the training to complete their annual visitor assistance refresher requirements. Training included lessons in visitor assistance history and policies, USACE rules and regulations, verbal defense and influence, enforcement and reporting, court and legal consideration, unarmed self-defense, and pepper spray. Partner law enforcement officers provided a law enforcement panel and assisted with visitor contact scenarios.



In case You Missed It

1 Grant Opportunity. A grant opportunity is announced through the Federal Highways Administration for Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects (NSFLTP). This is for large scale transportation projects estimated at no less than \$12.5M.

More information is available here: <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/programs/significant>. Information on FY22 recipients are listed here: <https://highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/docs/federal-lands/programs/significant/37221/fy-2022-nsfltp-award-selectees.pdf>. Applications are to be submitted through Grants.gov: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=349112>

Webinar dates for FY23 have not yet been announced.

2 Free Training. Our partners at Leave No Trace (LNT) have just launched a new, free online Leave No Trace 101 course. It takes about 45 minutes to complete and provides a good overview of the LNT principles. Check it out at: <https://learn.lnt.org/courses/101>

Farewell From Bonnie Bryson

When I retired at the end of the business day on July 12, 2023, I found myself in a status I had not experienced since Oct. 25, 1977. I am no longer officially attached to the USACE NRM program.

After 31 years as a federal employee, plus 14 years as a part-time contractor employee, I still feel that my overall favorite jobs were as Park Ranger and Park Manager early in my career. That is partially because those jobs represented my young college-student dreams coming true and partially because that field experience was the foundation for every other position I ever filled. The icing on the cake has been the positions and experiences that followed, with opportunities to work at all levels of the NRM organization (except Division Office). I worked with, and for, great people at every stop along the way.

I am especially proud of two initiatives, because they can serve Park Rangers long after I leave: 1. helping launch the NRM Gateway knowledge management website and continuing to build content for the past 23 years and 2. helping launch the Park Ranger CoP Advisory Board in 2008 (and serving as the Board's ERDC Advisor from 2008-2023).

I see a bright future for NRM because of the dedicated people who comprise it and because you have communication tools that we couldn't even dream of in NRM's early days. I recognize the double-edged sword of things like email that can swamp you; but having lived with and without such features--trust me—your professional life is better with them. Take full advantage of the NRM Gateway, M-S TEAMS (especially the NRM Community Teams channel), approved social media resources, etc. You have unprecedented capabilities to connect with your peers and to carry our message to the public.

Some advice I offer, especially to the younger cohort of Park Rangers:

- Don't be shy about taking special assignments and details. You will meet people and learn something new.
- If you ever get the opportunity for a detail at Headquarters, go. It will broaden your horizons in several important ways.
- One last "voice of experience" tip: If you need a credential to accomplish your career goals, enroll and get it done by the time you are 40. You can further your education at any age of course, but it's harder after 40. It just is.

I wish you all well and invite any of you travelling through northeastern KY on a Saturday to stop by Bryson General Store. You'll find me behind the counter managing my late grandparents' and parents' historic business. The coffee pot will be on, so please stop by, and we can chat about local history and NRM, present, past, and future.

Sincerely,
Bonnie Bryson Ed. D.



Thank you Bonnie for all of your dedication, support, and commitment to USACE's Natural Resources Management Program. Your contributions are immeasurable and truly appreciated. Enjoy your FULL retirement!!

Recreation Around USACE

1 Celebrating Earth Day. In the St. Louis District, Carlyle Lake and the Kaskaskia River Project celebrated Earth Day with local students.

The Carlyle Lake Project office hosted the 28th Annual Celebrate the Earth event on April 21, 2023, where 2,900 students from 33 local schools enjoyed five different 30-minute environmental education presentations. Fifty-two educators supported the presentations from organizations such as the St. Louis Zoo, Butterfly House, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the National Park Service, University of Illinois Extension, St. Louis Aquarium, USDA Water and Soil, and Bayer.

Over 150 junior high students enjoyed a day outside celebrating Earth Day on May 1, 2023, at the Kaskaskia River Project. Students enjoyed watching a barge lock through, which demonstrated the value of the Jerry F. Costello Lock and Dam. Beyond the navigation mission, students were introduced to recreation and environmental stewardship opportunities through the day.



Photos. Top Left: Illinois Conservation Police introduce students to native wildlife. Top Right: Park Ranger interprets the importance of levees and USACE missions. Bottom Left: Park Ranger interpret the value of natural habitats. Bottom Right: A USACE volunteer tests the construction of a student designed beaver dam.

2 Gateway Park Relinquishment. In 2021, the City of Clarkston relinquished the Gateway Park outgrant after experiencing increasing homeless encampments and associated health and safety issues. Lower Granite NRM staff worked with the Project and District offices to develop a viable plan for the park given the requirements found in ER 1130-2-550 to not increase O&M costs and the confluence of previous encampment and safety issues.



Photo: Front view of a minicat with soil conditioner attachment that was used to prep the site for planting.

The best alternative course of action was to transition the green manicured lawn to native, self-sustaining vegetation to prevent an increase in O&M for project staff and to dissuade future homeless encampments. After completing environmental and cultural compliance reviews, a USACE wildlife biologist used a soil conditioner attachment to break up and aerate the soil to a depth of six inches.

A reseeded of native grasses and forbs was conducted via a no-till drill towed by an ATV.



Photos. Top Left: Students enjoy touring the lock and dam. Top Right: NRM Specialist, John Hartleb shows the students record high water marks. Bottom Left: NRM Specialist, Stephanie Vallett interprets the navigation mission of USACE. Bottom Right: The Illinois Department of Natural Resources teaches students about the different fish species found in the Kaskaskia River.

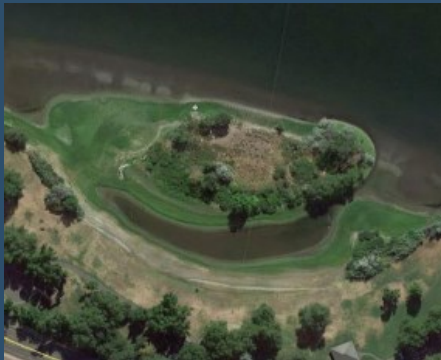
Recreation Across USACE

3 Gull Lake 15th Annual Spring Cleanup. Volunteers helped prepare St. Paul District's Gull Lake for the recreation season opening. This year, 62 volunteers provided 248 hours of service work by removing leaves, downed branches, and litter throughout the project. Some volunteers have participated in this event for more than 10 years.



Photos from the 15th Annual Gull Lake Cleanup.

4 Swallows Beach Restoration Progress. Swallows Park is a high-density recreational use area on the Lower Granite Project, Walla Walla District and receives approximately 306,000 visitors per year. The area was designed with an extremely popular 600-foot swimming beach. Over the years, sediment deposition slowly filled in the beach, and routine O&M dredging became cost prohibitive due to environmental concerns and reviews. Safe beach access has not been possible due to shallow waters resulting from sedimentation and poor water quality, including coliform bacteria concerns from high densities of geese. An environmental assessment was completed in 2017, and restoration work to fill in the former beach and add a beach on the downstream end began in 2022. As of April 2022, approximately half of the fill material required for the restoration was placed. It's anticipated that the remaining fill, sand, topsoil, and seed will be procured and placed during the remaining portion of 2023. Native grasses will reduce O&M in lieu of a manicured lawn, help dissuade geese browsing, and provide areas for Clean Water Act mitigation plantings.



Photos. Top Left: Original Master Plan beach design. Top Center: Google Earth image of sedimentation. Top Right: 2015 photo of former beach area silted in sedimentation.

Photos. Bottom Left: Fill progress as of Jan. 31, 2022, showing the start of work. Photo Bottom Right: Anticipated layout upon completion of restoration.

5 Rend Lake Hosts Volunteer Kickoff. The Rend Lake Project hosted a volunteer kickoff on April 19, 2023. Operations Manager, Jackie Taylor kicked off the meeting by welcoming, thanking, and encouraging the volunteer team. Volunteers at Rend Lake have enabled further mission execution, resulting in increased employee/customer satisfaction and safety. During the kickoff, volunteers shared a meal and then were given training in water safety principles and a pre-season orientation.



In Case You Missed It

1 National Public Lands Day Registration. If you are interested in hosting a National Public Lands Day event at your project, it's not too early to start planning now!

NPLD will officially take place nationwide on Sept. 23, 2023, but you can set up and register NPLD events a week before or after that date. Fee free coupons to provide to participants can be requested now through 4 August. This year's theme is "30 Years of Care and Community" to honor and celebrate the rich history of environmental stewardship on NPLD.

Here are some helpful tools to host a successful NPLD event:

- How to register an event video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1d4EijTHMQ>
- Site manager guide: <https://www.neefusa.org/what-we-do/conservation/national-public-lands-day/npld-site-managers/npld-site-manager-guide>
- Promotional toolkit: <https://www.neefusa.org/what-we-do/conservation/national-public-lands-day/npld-promotional-toolkit>
- Registered event map page: <https://www.neefusa.org/npld-event-search>
- Public lands engagement guide: <https://www.neefusa.org/what-we-do/conservation/public-lands-engagement-guides>

2 2021-2022 National Water Safety Photo Contest Winners Announced. The winners of the 2021-2022 National Water Safety Photo Contest were recently announced. Thanks to everyone who entered the photo contest and congratulations to the winners!

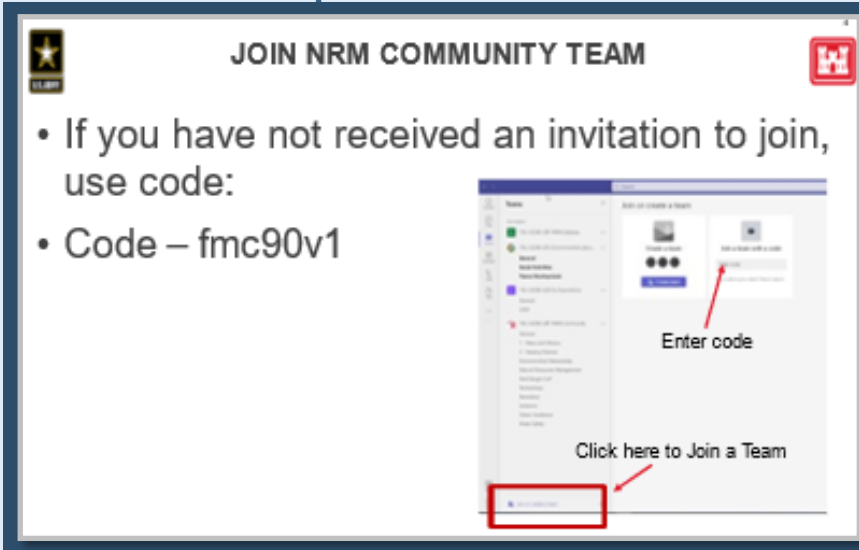
First place winners are Tia Mercer (NAE), Jennie Wilson (NWK), Carmen Paris (LRE), Stephanie Jones (SWF), and Scott Frieden (NWK). Second place winners are Trevor Welsh (SWF), Carmen Paris (LRE), Michael Gross (SWT), and Jessica Schaeffer (MVS). Honorable mention winners are Paige King (NWP), Frankie Bowers (SPK), Carla Robinson (SPN), David Schwartz (SAW), Jenna Conner (NAB), Michael Gross (SWT), Darren Murphy (MVS), Lauren Howard (NWW), and Alicia Palmer (NAB).

The winning photos are posted on the NRM Gateway at this link. <https://corpslakes.ercd.dren.mil/employees/watersafety/photos.cfm>

The 2023-2024 photo contest guidelines are posted at the same link. Please note that the deadline for the 2023-2024 National Water Safety Photo Contest is 31 January 2025. For further information regarding this photo contest contact your Division Representative on the National Water Safety Committee. <https://corpslakes.ercd.dren.mil/employees/watersafety/members.cfm>

Photo: Water Recreation 1st Place—Stephanie Jones (SWF)

3 NRM Community Team. If you haven't already received an invitation to this new site, open MS-TEAMS, click the Join a Team link, enter code fmc90v1 or utilize type "/join" in the search bar followed by the code.



JOIN NRM COMMUNITY TEAM

- If you have not received an invitation to join, use code:
- Code – fmc90v1

4 Remaining Day Use Fee-Free Date in FY 23 for All Visitors to USACE Managed Recreation Areas.

- Sept. 23, 2023: National Public Lands Day

All day use fees for all visitors to USACE managed recreation areas will be waived on the dates listed above. This waiver covers boat ramp launch fees and swim beach fees. This waiver does not apply to camping and camping-related services or fees for specialized facilities such as group picnic shelters.

Other agencies that manage recreation areas located on USACE lands are encouraged, but not required, to comply with this schedule to waive fees in the areas that they manage.

