

International Mud Day is a Dirty Success at West Hill Park

by Jess Levenson & Ron Woodall

As part of International Mud Day June 29, 2017, park rangers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) West Hill Dam Project in Uxbridge, MA, partnered with three local parent groups to organize an event to please all those who enjoy getting muddy.

When it comes to mud, there are two types of people: those who like to get their hands a little dirty and those who like to roll in it.

In a woody clearing at West Hill Dam, the team created a special area where children could experience a creative nature play experience. Rangers prepared the area with pits and pools of thick brown mud.

They cleared brush, excavated and mixed soil, placed slides, set up signs and assembled a truck-mounted water hose for the families who arrived to greet the wet earth with open arms.

Angie Stormont from the parent group Roots in Nature, explained the unusual scene. "International Mud Day is all about spending more time outdoors with your children; getting in nature, playing in the mud and getting dirty," she said.

Some of the excited youngsters molded mud to bake mud cakes while others played catch with mud balls. Others let it drip like paint and ooze down mud slicked slides. Parents were good-natured canvases for budding mud artists. "We enjoyed working with the Roots in Nature, Woodland Adventures and Beginning Bridges parent groups to organize this event," said Ron Woodall, a ranger at West Hill Dam.

"There were about 100 smiling faces as the kids reveled in an opportunity to get down and dirty with their parents' full approval," added Woodall.

"It's not often you can go play in a mud hole with your son," said one happy father. "I love it here and I want to come here every day!" howled one of the participants.

"We were pleased that so many people could enjoy our park through this event," said Woodall. He anticipates that other community partnerships will evolve to utilize the existing play area again in the future. "We hope to transform this area into a nature based play area instead of a traditional playground. Given the huge success of this initial event, it seems that nature based play at West Hill Park is a sure thing," said Woodall.



Two children enjoy a mud slide



Ranger Ron Woodall uses a pressure washer and 100 gallon truck-mounted water tank to aid in clean up



Crowds of children revel in the mud pits at West Hill Dam



Ranger Ron Woodall and SCA intern Donovan Vatelana deliver another 50 gallons of water to feed demand for more mud