

Cooper River Rediversion Project Hosts 5th Annual Fishing and Dove Hunt Days

Joe Moran, Chief of Operations, Charleston District

Six years ago, the Charleston District's Operations Division reached out to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to ask for support in hosting Warriors and Veterans Fishing Days and Dove Hunts at the Cooper River Rediversion Project (CRRP). Our DNR partners immediately were "all in". To identify potential participants, USACE staff made contact with the Vantage Point Foundation, an organization that assists post-9/11 veteran transition into civilian life. The organization has assisted in the execution of the events since they began in 2014. The 5th Annual Fishing and Dove Hunt Days were held this year – a testament to the partnership and willingness to provide these opportunities for camaraderie and time in the outdoors to our heroes.

The events are unique opportunities to utilize federal land to give back to our Warriors and Veterans. The land is typically underutilized by the public and these events provide a safe space for veterans to spend time with people who have gone through similar experiences while sharing an activity.

In the past two years the number of participants for these events have more than doubled, and "The Group of Three" - DNR employees Bill Post (Fishing Days) and Will Carlisle (Dove Hunts), and Vantage Point Executive Director Mark Holyfield (both events) have worked closely with USACE staff to ensure quality experiences.

Post, Carlisle, and Holyfield worked closely with USACE personnel to develop a pre-event lesson delivered in March 2019 to the 11th Grade biology class at local Timberland High School, a STEM partner school. Students were provided an overview of the CRRP and the USACE natural resource missions, a fish biology lesson, biological

sampling techniques, and provided an overview of the service that our warrior and veteran participants provide to our nation. Nearly 20 biology students from Timber-

land sampled fish and interacted with the nearly 60 participants at the 2019 Fishing Day. Over the past several years, Timberland administration has actively supported student projects at CRRP, including field preparation and sowing of pollinator-friendly wildflowers. These activities supported the CRRP's pollinator program resulting in ten beehives, which was the first Federally-sponsored pollinator project in South Carolina.

While a lot of hard work goes into these partnership efforts, it is well worth it knowing that these events are giving back to those who have selflessly served our country. This is best described by a participant at our first Fishing Day in 2014. For a young disabled veteran recently

released from the hospital after surgery and treatment for a debilitating head injury, the Fishing Day was his first venture outdoors in many months. After finding the best spot on the bank and working with his family to secure him, he caught at least a dozen fish. Both he and his family cried. That is the essence of our events and these partnerships, and an image that none present will forget.



Mark Holyfield (Vantage Point Executive Director) and Osby Mosely, Jr. (SAC Chief of Resource Management) each served in the US Marine Corps.



Biology students from Timberland High School collecting length and scale samples from the 2019 Fishing Day.