

Handshake Partnership Program Report - FY 2008 Recipients

1. **Name of Corps Project/Lake:** John H Kerr Reservoir (SAW)
2. **Handshake Project Name:** Forestry / Riparian Demonstration and Study Area
3. **What has been accomplished?** Please provide photographs (before, during, and after):
Please see attached document.
4. **Amount of Handshake funds received?** \$9,230
5. **Amount of Corps funds expended in addition to Handshake funds (labor, materials, contracts, etc.)?** \$\$23,843
6. **Partner's Contributions (total value of funds, goods, services, volunteer hours, etc.):**

Partner Name	Total Value of Contributions
1 Dowling Clan Volunteers	\$40,763
2 Virginia Dept. of Forestry	\$2,000
3	\$
4	\$
5	\$
6	\$

7. Handshake Program Recipient Feedback

Please take this opportunity to provide feedback on all aspects of the Handshake Program and the Challenge Partnership Agreement authority. Your productive comments are important to the ongoing improvement of the program. Make sure to let us know how the Handshake funds have benefited your efforts to initiate and/or strengthen your partnership efforts.

A. Experience with Handshake Program: _____

B. Experience with Challenge Partnership Agreement: _____

C. Comments: The Handshake Program allows lakes to gain attention at the National level, and demonstrates the focus the Corps has not just on serving the public, but encouraging and supporting their involvement in it.

D. Recommendations: _____

**FOREST & RIPARIAN STUDY AREA
John H Kerr Reservoir
2008 Handshake Partnership Report**

The woods at Kerr Lake are much less a mystery to kids and their parents thanks to the hard work of a group of dedicated volunteers, the Virginia Department of Forestry, and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Kerr has a popular environmental education center, created in an old office building at the dam. Wanting to match an outdoor educational experience with efforts at teaching stewardship values to the public, a four-acre stand of pines and mixed hardwoods located next to the center was identified as an ideal outdoor classroom.



The four-acre stand of pines and mixed hardwoods had been recently thinned due to pine bark beetles. To create the study area, it was divided into quadrants, each with a different “management technique” to demonstrate. A gravel pathway 12 feet wide was created to separate the quadrants and to facilitate group walking space.

Each quadrant is unique. One area, heavy with the native orchid “Pink Lady’s Slipper”, was set aside as the “control”; the second area was heavily thinned and is used as to demonstrate regeneration after thinning; the third area was thinned and managed by controlled / prescribed burn every other year; the fourth area is managed by prescribed burn only.

Twenty-three volunteers from the “John Dowling Clan”, a family who has been camping at nearby North Bend Park for 35 years, performed a variety of tasks during the two summers, from the blazing



and clearing of the debris on the pathway, to spreading the 112 tons of gravel and building and installing six wooden benches for the area. They also improved an existing trail from the forest area to the river below Kerr Dam. No volunteer was considered too old or too young for a task! After safety briefings, even the tiniest Dowling was assigned “pine cone pick-up” from the trails!

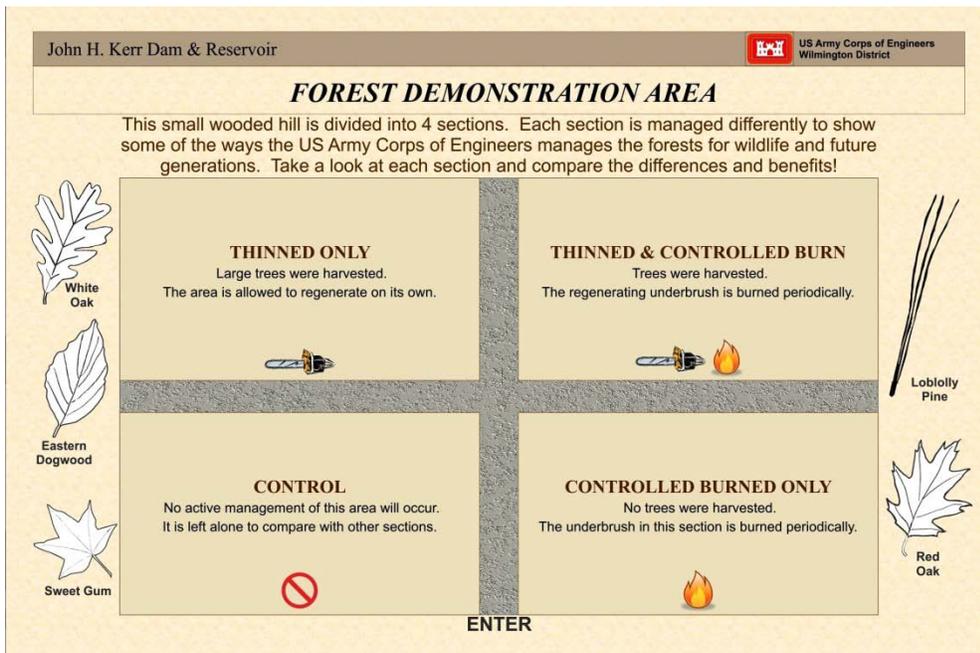


The Virginia Department of Forestry assisted by providing interpretive guidelines and study guides for the environmental education programs. In addition, they donated old soil augers, tree augers and a Biltmore stick to aid in the programs. They have hosted environmental education programs in the demonstration area as part of an ecology competition. Lesson plans range from kindergarten through high school and cover a range of topics from soil types, tree aging, insects, fungi, wildlife, and habitat diversity.



The Handshake Challenge funds purchased the crusher run gravel, the interpretive signs, and the materials and supplies for the wooden benches, built by the volunteers.

The staff at Kerr continues to work with local schools and the community college to attract students to work outdoors, to appreciate the Corps mission, and to make natural resources stewardship part of our national heritage.



Interpretive sign displayed at the entrance to the “Forest Study Demonstration Area” at Kerr Lake.

Controlled Burns



Benefits for the Forest

When properly conducted a controlled burn does not travel to the canopy, or tops, of the trees. The fire creeps along the ground and only burns the leaf litter and forest understory. The larger healthy trees are not harmed by the burn.

A controlled burn is necessary for many reasons:

- Protect trees from disease and insects.
- Limit understory growth that competes for tree nutrients.
- Controlled burns are important for reducing "fuel load", or massive amounts of downed woody debris, helping to prevent catastrophic forest fire.



Only trained professionals should use fire as a tool

Dangers of Fire

If controlled burns are not correctly done they can quickly become out-of-control forest fires. Forest fires can lead to loss of property, injury, or even death. There are many important factors that are used in determining the proper time and area to burn. The area must be surveyed for fuel amount and topography. Weather also plays a large factor in safe burning conditions. The area must not be too dry and there can not be a strong wind, or the fire can become too intense and quickly spread to undesired areas.

A Fire Line is used to keep the fire in a designated area



A Drip Torch is used to start a burn

Benefits for Wildlife

Fire removes the thick vegetation that grows under the tree canopy. This allows the wildlife to move easier and forage for food.

The removal of the dense brush also allows young trees to sprout up across the forest floor. These saplings provide a good food source for deer and other game species.

Undesirable tree species in the understory, such as sweet gum, are not resistant to fire. The removal of these trees allows more nutrients for the large mast producing trees, like the oaks and hickories. These trees can now generate a larger crop of acorns and nuts for the deer, turkeys and other wildlife to eat throughout the year.



Notice the new oak regeneration following a controlled burn. These oak saplings will provide great food for wildlife, now and in the future.

Interpretive signs at the trail entrance help to describe the area and the benefits of good forest management, such as prescribed burns.



The "controlled burn" interpretive sign is set at the junction between the quadrants. Benches provide students and teachers opportunities to rest, converse, and take notes.



Courtesy Photo

Pictured above, the Dowling Volunteers are shown in 2009.



Pictured left, on behalf of the Dowling Volunteers, John Dowling and his wife were presented a plaque by Head Ranger, Sherry Storm on behalf of the Army Corps of Engineers.

How Do You Spend Summer Vacation? We Volunteer!

For the family and friends of John and Kathy Dowling of Graceham, camping and having fun while volunteering has been the yearly ritual for the past 30 years. Their July "Home-Away-From-Home" has been spent at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's John H. Kerr Reservoir and Dam in the North Bend Park Campground, Area D, Virginia for several generations. Each year as a group, the "Dowling Volunteers" have spent part of their days doing countless projects in the campground and around the lake and management center, such as trail blazing, erosion control on the lake (piling stone and rip rap on the banks), beach clean ups, tree planting, bench making, wood splitting, spreading stone and playground mulch, creating park areas and more. All of these activities help keep the campground in better shape year after year.

For all their continued efforts, the members of the group have each received personal certificates of

appreciation from the Park Rangers.

The group as a whole received a plaque from the Corp of Engineers for their 25th Year Award and celebrated with balloons, t-shirts and a Thanksgiving dinner (prepared in the campsite). They also received a Presidential Award and Pin for Volunteering from the White House, signed by President George W. Bush.

In July 2009, for their 30th year the volunteers were treated to a surprise breakfast at the Management Center with all the Rangers in attendance and were presented a beautiful walnut Army Corps of Engineers Plaque by Head Ranger Sherry Storm. The volunteers were all very surprised and grateful that their hard work to help make camping fun for all in the many years to come was recognized. No matter what their age, from very young to senior citizens, all pitch in to better our "Home-Away-From-Home" so all can enjoy!

A newspaper article that appeared in the Dowling family's hometown newspaper in Thurmont, Maryland demonstrates the pride with which the volunteers work.

Submitted by Sherrill C. Storm
28 September 2012
John H Kerr Reservoir, Wilmington District