

Handshake Partnership Program Final Project Close-Out Report

1. Fiscal Year Selected as Winning Project: 2020
2. Name of Corps Project/Lake: Blue Marsh Lake
3. District / Division of Corps Project/Lake: Philadelphia District, North Atlantic Division
4. Handshake Project Name: Blue Marsh Lake Trail Restoration Project – Phase 1
5. Amount of Handshake Funds remaining: \$0.00
6. What has been accomplished? Please provide photographs; before, during, and after!:

Blue Marsh Lake Trail Restoration Project (BMLTRP) – Phase 1 consisted of a 1.5 mile reroute of the existing trail to improve connectivity between other trail systems to the Dry Brooks Day Use Area as well as an addition of a Mountain Bike (MTB) Skills Area to encourage outdoor recreation and skills development for beginner and intermediate cyclists. The handshake funds were used to pay for materials, equipment rental and specialized equipment operations during the MTB Skills Area development. The MTB skills area is a .25 mile circular track with two loops, an inner beginner loop and an outer intermediate loop. The tracks consist of different features such a earthen berms and rollers, and wooden constructed bridges and jumps. The area is shaded by pines and provides a small open area for parents to watch or riders to take a rest.

Through the national partnership with Kids In Parks, Pump Track signage was added to the skills area to provide instruction to riders and an opportunity to earn prizes for logging their rides at the skills area.

Before MTB Skills Area Development



During MTB Skills Area Development





Volunteer Work Day to finish out MTB Skills Area with BAMBA and local youth mountain biking teams.











Final Product and Soft Opening







Addition of TRACK Trails Signage from Kids In Parks

Bike TRACK Trail Overview – Blue Marsh Lake MTB Skills Area

WELCOME
to the Blue Marsh Mountain Bike Skills Area

Please review the rules and safety sign before riding the track.

The Mountain Bike Skills Area is a unique mountain bike course where you can learn, practice, and master a variety of basic skills for mountain biking. There are two different skills level tracks within the skills area, beginner and intermediate. The beginner track allows new or inexperienced riders to practice and develop their mountain biking skills whereas the intermediate track allows more experienced riders to test and further develop their skills.

Through a partnership formed with the Kids In Parks program, the pump track here at Blue Marsh MTB Skills Area has signs placed around the track with tips to increase your skills and enjoyment on the track. In addition to illustrations and text, each sign contains a QR code that links to an educational video about each skill. Additionally, kids can register their rides at the Blue Marsh MTB Skills Area at [kidsinparks.com](https://www.kidsinparks.com) to earn special bicycle gear.

The Blue Marsh MTB Skills Area was made possible through the trails partnership established between USACE Blue Marsh Lake and Berks Area Mountain Biking Association (BAMBA), and funded by the USACE Handshake Partnership Program. The MTB Skills Area was created by DirtSculpt and BAMBA Volunteers.

BLUE MARSH LAKE PARTNERS
Berks Area MOUNTAIN BIKING Association
US Army Corps of Engineers

KIDS IN PARKS FOUNDERS
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
Blue-Crest BlueShield of North Carolina

PRIVATE DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS
Organizational Support: USACE Handshake Partnership Program
Maintenance: BAMBA Trail Crew & Members, Wyomissing Area Mountain Biking Team

[kidsinparks.com](https://www.kidsinparks.com)

Blue Marsh Lake staff worked with Berks Area Mountain Biking Association members to develop and construct a mountain bike skills development area for beginner and intermediate riders.

The project was made possible through the established trails partnership, volunteer work, and funding provided by the USACE Handshake Partnership Program.

After the construction of the skills area, the partnership implemented the use of the KIP Bike TRACK Trails program to provide valuable interpretive signage and an additional interactive layer to the project.

<https://www.kidsinparks.com/blue-marsh-mountain-bike-skills-area>



Bike TRACK Trail Kiosk – Blue Marsh Lake MTB Skills Area

WARNING!
YOU ARE ENTERING A SPECIAL MOUNTAIN BIKE AREA.

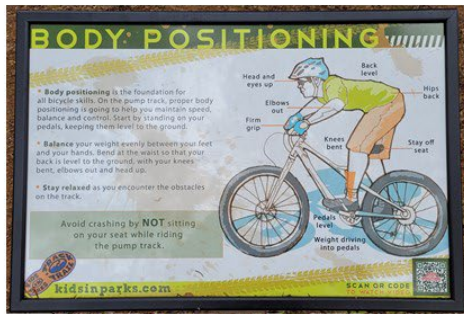
- The Skills Area is open from **8AM TO SUNSET** accordingly through the seasons.
- All riders **MUST** wear a helmet at all times while riding the MTB Skills Area Track. Other appropriate safety gear, like pads, are recommended.
- Use of this area is at your own risk. **YOU** are solely responsible for your safety. Ride within your limits and abilities.
- Ride only during dry conditions. The MTB Skills Area will be closed accordingly during wet conditions. This will help maintain the quality and sustainability of the tracks.
- **ONE WAY** travel only. Please follow the posted directional guides for each track. Do not jump between tracks. If you do not wish to continue on the track you are on, you may dismount and walk within the resting areas back to the beginning of the track.
- All motorized vehicles are **STRICTLY PROHIBITED** within the MTB Skills Area.
- Always pay attention to your own safety, be courteous and be aware of other riders. It is suggested that children be supervised when riding the skills area. This can help ensure the facility will be open to the public in the future.
- All forms of mountain biking are potentially dangerous and your risk increases in special areas such as this containing enhanced terrain and technical features.
- Features in this area include: bermed turns, rollers, dirt/wooden jumps (which will result in your bike leaving the ground if approached at higher speeds)
- Report any maintenance needs or dangerous conditions to the Blue Marsh Lake Park Office at 610-376-6337.
- **CARRY IN, CARRY OUT.** Please clean up and dispose of trash items accordingly.

In case of an Emergency Call 911.

Blue Marsh Lake staff, KIP staff, and Berks Area Mountain Biking Association members collaborated together to produce a rules and safety sign specific to the bike skills area developed at Blue Marsh Lake.

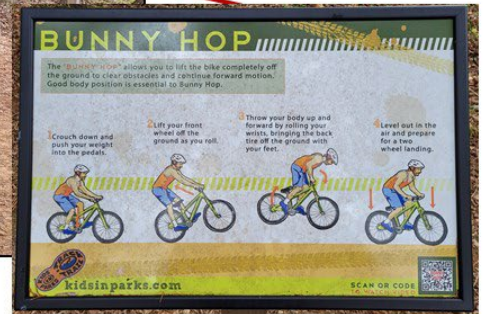


Bike TRACK Trail Activity – Blue Marsh Lake MTB Skills Area

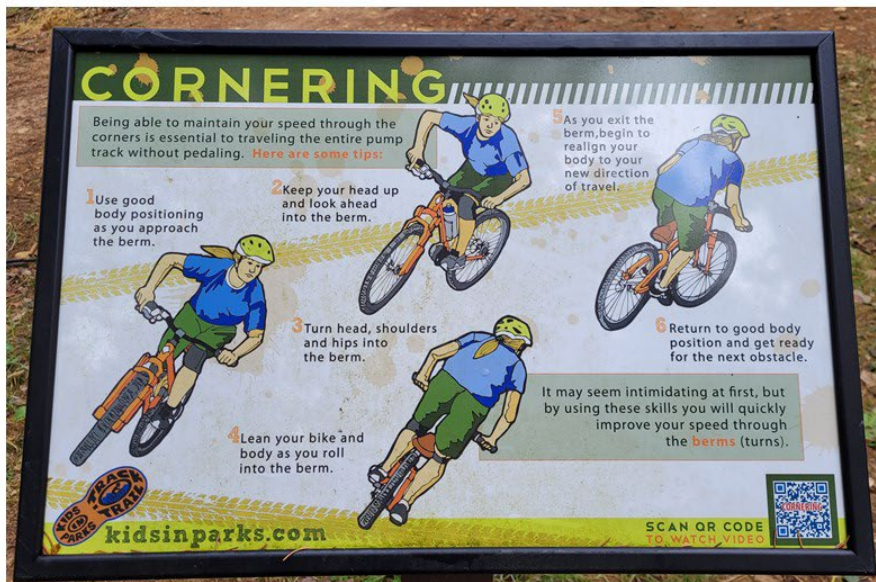


The KIP Bike TRACK Trail program includes skills signage with QR codes for instructional videos.

Blue Marsh Lake staff worked with Berks Area Mountain Biking Association members to install the signs in appropriate locations throughout the bike skills area. Skills signage aligns with the skill to be implemented on the upcoming feature.



Bike TRACK Trail Activity – Blue Marsh Lake MTB Skills Area



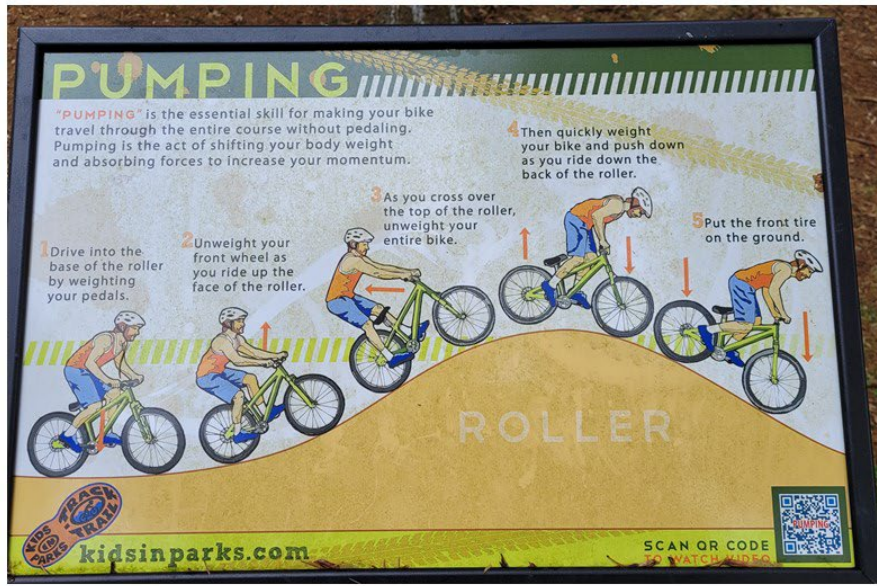
Bike TRACK Trail Activity – Blue Marsh Lake MTB Skills Area



Bike TRACK Trail Activity – Blue Marsh Lake MTB Skills Area



Bike TRACK Trail Activity – Blue Marsh Lake MTB Skills Area



	Total
Handshake Program Funding Amount	\$25,000.00
Local Corps Office Funds (total expended on labor, materials, contracts, etc.)?	\$11,379.12
Partner's Contributions (total value of funds, goods, services, volunteer hours, etc.)	
Partners Name	Total Value of Contributions
1 Berks Area Mountain Biking Association	\$72,772.20
2 Berks Nature	\$500.00
3 PA Americana Visitor's Bureau	\$1,000.00
4 Berks County	\$1,000.00
5 Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce	\$1,500.00
6 Mt. Penn Planning Commission	\$1,000.00
7 Berks County Community Foundation	\$1,000.00
8 Reading Recreation Commission	\$500.00
9	\$
10	\$

6. 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 partnerships.

For the Blue Marsh Lake Project the Handshake Program became a pivotal piece in the development of the Blue Marsh Lake Mountain Bike Skills Area as part of the Blue Marsh Lake Trail Restoration Project (BMLTRP) – Phase 1 and the evolution of our partnership activities with Berks Area Mountain Biking Association (BAMBA). The funding awarded to the project allowed USACE to provide more skin in the game for project execution and were also leveraged as matching funds to other grant applications.

The completion of the project lead to greater investment by BAMBA and the community which has resulted in the development of about 10 miles of an integrated trail network. The new trails provide a multitude of opportunities for visitors to experience professional and sustainable trails while enjoying the outdoors. The partnership with BAMBA became a key example when reaching out to other potential partners, and has lead old and new partners to step up to the plate to contribute to the restoration and enhancement of recreational opportunities for all.

7. Handshake Summary:

Please also include a separate newspaper type article describing the project and the benefit to the Corps of Engineers and to the public as a result of this partnership project. Examples can be found on the gateway under [Handshake Success Stories](#).

HANDSHAKE SUCCESS STORIES – BLUE MARSH LAKE, PHILADELPHIA DISTRICT

During the summer of 2019, before the world came to a standstill due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Blue Marsh Lake applied for and was later awarded \$25,000 in Handshake Program Funding to contribute to a large scale, long term partnership project with a local mountain biking organization called Berks Area Mountain Biking Association (BAMBA).

The Blue Marsh Lake Trail Restoration Project (BMLTRP) – Phase 1 consisted of a 1.5 mile reroute of the existing trail to improve connectivity between other trail systems to the Dry Brooks Day Use Area as well as an addition of a Mountain Bike (MTB) Skills Area to encourage outdoor recreation and skills development for beginner and intermediate cyclists. The awarded handshake funds were used to pay for materials, equipment rental and specialized equipment operations during the MTB Skills Area development.



The MTB Skills Area is a 0.25-mile circular pump style track with two loops, an inner beginner loop and an outer intermediate loop. The tracks consist of different features such as earthen berms and rollers, and bridges and jumps constructed from wood. The area is located within a small shaded 0.50-acre pine grove and provides a small open area for parents to watch or riders to take a rest.

Additionally, through the national partnership with Kids In Parks (KIP), Bike Pump Track signage was added to the Skills Area to provide instruction to riders and an opportunity to earn prizes for logging their rides online. Blue Marsh Lake staff worked with BAMBA and KIP to develop the signage and layout of the signs.

Development of the Skills Area was made possible by working with a local professional trail builder employed by BAMBA and good old fashioned volunteer labor. Volunteers coordinated by BAMBA helped with brush grubbing and cleaning up the pine grove for equipment access and finishing out the wooden features. They also coordinated a Volunteer Work Day with local youth mountain biking teams to complete the finishing touches

to the MTB Skills Area, such as laying down mulch and stone, planting native shrubs, installing a post and rail fence, installing signage, and christening the track with its first ride.

For the Blue Marsh Lake Project, the Handshake Program became a pivotal piece in the development of the MTB Skills Area and the overall evolution of the partnership with BAMBA. The funding awarded to the project allowed USACE to provide more skin in the game for project execution and was also leveraged as matching funds to other grant applications.

The completion of the MTB Skills Area led to greater investment by BAMBA, which has resulted in the development of about 10 miles of a new integrated trail network. BAMBA stepped up to the plate and raised over \$300k to contribute to trail projects and improvements. The new trails provide a multitude of opportunities for visitors to experience professional and sustainable trails while enjoying the outdoors.

The partnership with BAMBA has become a key example when reaching out to other potential partners, and has led old and new partners to reinvest in projects at Blue Marsh Lake to contribute to the restoration and enhancement of recreational opportunities for all.

