

Handshake Partnership Program Final Project Close-Out Report

1. Fiscal Year Selected as Winning Project: 2022
2. Name of Corps Project/Lake: John Martin Reservoir
3. District / Division of Corps Project/Lake: Albuquerque District - South Pacific Division
4. Handshake Project Name: Tamarisk Removal and Native Habitat Restoration
5. Amount of Handshake Funds remaining: \$34.66
6. What has been accomplished? See below



The Handshake Partnership Award allowed the John Martin (JMR) staff to clear five acres of tamarisk by hand, create new parking areas and clear 0.25 miles of previously inaccessible road. All supplies have been purchased and the PIN has been approved signs, kiosks, picnic tables, benches and dumpsters in the area. JMR is awaiting the construction of new fencing to increase asset security as well as approval from SPA Operations for the creation of new recreation assets (that may increase O&M costs over the long-term; “Black Bridge” PSA). A walking trail is currently undergoing cultural approval. Mechanized tamarisk removal approval is underway with SHPO for remainder of tamarisk in Black Bridge Area. Soil testing and native plant selection for revegetation efforts following removal has been completed.

Table 1 – Partner Contributions

	Total
Handshake Program Funding Amount	\$25,000.00
Local Corps Office Funds (total expended on labor, materials, contracts, etc.)?	\$105,472.56
<i>Labor-Aver. \$75 burden per hr. (*200hrs); Contracts-Aver. \$15,000 per (*6); Materials-Direct cost</i>	
Partner’s Contributions (total value of funds, goods, services, volunteer hours, etc.)	
Partners Name	Total Value of Contributions
1 Rocky Mountain Field Institute	\$4,829.52
2 Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado	\$3,541.65
3 Bent County 4-H	\$256.00
4	\$
5	\$

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.

JMR staff very much appreciates the additional funding that was provided by the Handshake Program. This allowed the Project to purchase tools, resources and equipment to be used for the completion of the abovementioned work. Unfortunately, the current staff of JMR are unable to provide feedback as to the development and implementation of the agreement because none of the current staff was involved in the process (except the final expenditures of the remaining additional funding).

JMR staff would like to stress that future applications should have reduced components. Due to the complexity of these agreements and description of work to be accomplished under this project, the reality of it proved to be unattainable with staff changes, partner unresponsiveness, scope of work and future budget projections.

District staff would add that the expectations, workload for both field and District and financial constraints could be emphasized at the beginning of the application process.

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](#).

This project suffered several setbacks during implementation. The first of which was major staff changes during the course of the project. From the time of application (end FY21 – start FY22) to the final funds being spent (end of FY23), almost the entire Ranger staff took positions in other Divisions across USACE. The OPM changed and very little guidance was left on how the project was conceived, developed and realized. This required many hours of work by the new staff to determine how the project would work and move forward.

The partners' lack of communication was at times a constraint to the project. After the initial agreement was signed and workdays were completed, the organizations were unresponsive. It was difficult to pinpoint times, dates and locations for work to be done by RMFI and VOC. Only Bent County 4-H remained in contact, and JMR was unable to determine dates for parties during which work could be accomplished. RMFI and VOC did not respond to contact attempts (potentially due to staff changes). The contributions as illustrated in Table occurred during the initial phases of the project in FY22.

When this project was first developed, District funding and Project staffing supported the creation of a new recreation PSA at JMR. Unfortunately, staff loss/change and reduction in future recreation funding caused the dissolution of this idea. Operations was uncertain as to how the creation of a new recreation PSA would be funded for future O&M costs and thus determined that it would be unwise to create a possible burden on dwindling future recreation funding. JMR thus reevaluated the project to accomplish necessary work (removal of tamarisk) while reducing the formation of new recreation assets. Equipment and supplies were purchased as in accordance with the initial application including benches, trash cans, tools, road base, fencing and herbicide. However, the work itself has yet to be completed due to a lack of staff time and volunteer support.

Due to the vast amount of tamarisk in the area, it was determined early on that hand removal was illogical and unwise for the entire site. The project was then halted for the creation of a new mechanized tamarisk removal plan which is still being reviewed for feasibility and safety due to the presence of cultural resources. JMR staff is awaiting approval to purchase the necessary equipment which will require contracting.

Now that new staff has been onboarded and an updated plan has been developed to work within the confines of the new recreation asset restrictions, the equipment and materials will be used to finish the tamarisk removal where mechanized removal is not an option. Additionally, materials and equipment will be used to improve the existing road and parking area. JMR will also complete fence and gate installation for security purposes. These improvements will allow for the potential creation of a new recreation PSA in the future, if and when the budget supports additional O&M costs.