



# THE recreation RETREAT


## Your Recreation HQ Update

**POC: Scott Strotman, Business Line Manager for Recreation, 202-761-0036**

With two major summer holidays behind us and only one more to go, New Years is less than two months away! Of course, I am referring to the fiscal New Year. Back on 12 March, the President formally announced his budget for fiscal year 2020. As you may know, the new fiscal year for the federal government begins on 1 October each year, and this October 1<sup>st</sup> will mark the beginning of fiscal year 2020. In the federal budget world, this means that all eyes are now on Congress and the progress they are making towards developing and passing the various appropriation bills that will keep the federal government funded and avoid a shutdown. When funding bills are not passed by midnight 30 Sept, we are faced with two scenarios. Either Congress passes a Continuing Resolution (CR) as a temporary funding measure while they continue to work on the appropriation bills, or no funding legislation is passed and the federal government shuts down. At this point in time, it is anyone's guess as to how the new fiscal year will play out come the first of October. In September 2018 Congress passed, and the President signed, the appropriations bill that funded USACE for FY2019. This was the first time in a decade that USACE was fully funded prior to the start of the fiscal year and CR's were not required. In an ideal world, this would be the case every year. So, let's keep our fingers crossed that funding legislation will once again be passed by 1 October, preferably a funding bill or at the very least a CR because the alternative is a shutdown.

### This Issue:

 **Fee Machines  
Buck Ridge Trail  
Park Ranger Survey**



Department  
of the Army  
Office, Assistant Secretary  
of the Army (Civil Works)

FISCAL YEAR 2020  
**Civil Works  
Budget of the  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

March 2019



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**

## YOUR Thoughts

We are looking for contributors and ideas!

\*If you have a topic, success story, lesson learned, or helpful suggestion—let us know.

**Send to: [Tara.J.Whitsel@usace.army.mil](mailto:Tara.J.Whitsel@usace.army.mil)**

*The Recreation Retreat is an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This online publication is produced quarterly with the purpose of providing its readers information about the USACE Recreation Program. Editorial views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army. Mention of specific vendors does not constitute endorsement by the Department of the Army or any element thereof. Managing Editor: Tara Whitsel. [Tara.J.Whitsel@usace.army.mil](mailto:Tara.J.Whitsel@usace.army.mil)*

*Campaign Hat Photo Credit:  
Cynthia Mitchell, USACE*

# Use of Automated Fee Machines: Project Experiences

## 1 Lake Sidney Lanier

POC: Rachel J. Rush Natural Resource Specialist, Lake Sidney Lanier – Buford Project

In the year of 2017 myself, the park operations recreation fee cashier, and the acting OPM, Mike Montone, started a study on the safety and efficiency of collecting day user fees via honor vaults here at the project. What we found was in order to maintain compliance within regulations we spent an extra 39 days of labor to collect, count and remit the fees. This resulted in a loss of approximately \$628,000 overall, as we spent more time and money collecting and processing the fees than we were remitting. When the staff and volunteers started counting the number of empty envelopes we calculated over 40% of our customers were "fake paying" and putting empty envelopes into the vault while still hanging up their pass. The biggest concern with the cash collection fee process was the safety risk to the volunteers and rangers. Every weekend volunteers, typically senior citizens, accompanied by one ranger would drive around the lake stopping in 18 different parks carrying upwards of \$20,000-\$30,000 dollars. Two rangers were then responsible for transporting this money from the office to the local bank. During the recreation season, we would also have 6 park attendant couples, again, typically senior citizens, who were responsible for transporting \$20,000-\$30,000 by themselves to the bank for remittance. There were several instances where both the volunteers and the rangers felt unsafe following these procedures. The ultimate solution to solve the safety and cost issue, automated fee machines!

In the last week of March 2018, Lake Lanier installed 12 automated fee machines within our most frequented day use parks. Customers are able to select any day use option (passenger vehicle, pedestrian/bicycle, bus) and also purchase an annual

USACE pass. There was a learning period at the beginning of the season but repeat customers caught on quick and were very pleased with the new system. Most customers stated they would have to make special trips to the bank to get cash to visit the parks. It is a new era where park users often don't carry cash and prefer to pay by card. For those customers who do not own a card, they may visit the nearest gas station or grocery store to purchase a prepaid card. Customers can purchase a prepaid card within 5-10 minutes of any day use park on the lake. It has thus far, not been an issue gaining compliance with visitors to pay the day user fee with a card.

PARK	2017	2018	NET
Buford Dam Park	\$ 90,797.00	\$ 93,486.80	\$ 2,689.80
Burton Mill	\$15,498.00	\$ 39,844.00	\$24,346.00
Keith's Bridge	\$10,223.00	\$ 16,472.00	\$ 6,249.00
Lanier Park	\$74,406.11	\$ 86,779.80	\$12,373.69
Little Hall	\$49,614.93	\$ 44,578.00	\$ (5,036.93)
Long Hollow	\$3,656.00	\$ 9,756.00	\$ 6,100.00
Lower Pool East	\$6,709.00	\$ 15,385.00	\$ 8,676.00
Lower Pool West	\$31,315.00	\$ 58,058.00	\$26,743.00
Old Federal DU	\$55,458.00	\$ 59,227.00	\$ 3,769.00
Two Mile	\$8,965.00	\$ 15,576.00	\$ 6,611.00
Van Pugh North	\$60,302.00	\$ 81,379.00	\$21,077.00
West Bank	\$105,176.50	\$116,434.00	\$11,257.50

Overall net gain of \$125,000.00

**Table Above:** Revenue collection at Lake Sidney Lanier before and installation and use of automated fee machines.

**Photo Below:** Automated fee machine at Lake Sidney Lanier.



The data collected via the automated credit card machine helps in other aspects of the recreation program as well. Data on the automated fee machine software was used to assist in the master plan recreation surveys. We were able to pick high density visit times to place those implementing surveys to get a wide range of comments. I also used this information to help with the visitor comment card surveys. The user can generate reports to see what type of visitors are coming into which parks and at what times. For instance, we learned that one of our more popular day use areas utilized for fishing tournaments receives majority of its traffic between 4-6 AM, and then receives another hit between 1-3 PM for weigh in times. In other parks on the lake you may see the largest number of visitors coming between 9-11 AM. Collecting and analyzing the data of visitation trends helps us better place rangers/attendants in the parks during their times of need.

Another added bonus of the fee machines is the receipt which prints out once the payment is processed. Customers do not obtain a receipt until the purchase has gone through. This has eliminated the option for customers to "fake pay," and still display a receipt. The receipt allows project staff to present a lot of beneficial information as well. It states the purchase is only valid for that day, and it also shows the expiration time when the parks close at 10PM (5PM during non-recreation season). We also have added a water safety message on each receipt as an extra reminder to wear your life jacket! In the case of a lost receipt, transactions can be verified with the last 4 digits of a customer's credit card.

All aspects of the machine are all accessible by phone or computer including the display and receipt layout. This has been extremely beneficial. In preparation for Federal Holidays, I can remotely change the display on all machines to say for example "Happy National Lands Day – Free Entrance," from my phone or computer and they will update at midnight on that day and not charge a single fee. During high water events I have been able to access the system remotely and display safety messages such as "High water – park closed," and within a half hour the system will update and display my message. You can make changes to any part of the system on any specific individual location from anywhere. The system also sends text and e-mail alerts when maintenance is required, or if there is any indication of someone tampering with the machine.

The table to the left depicts the difference in fees collected in FY 17 utilizing honor vaults and in FY 18 utilizing automated fee machines. With the installation of the automated fee machines we had a net gain in revenue of \$125,000. The only area where we did not collect an increased amount of fees was at Little Hall Park. I believe this is because Little Hall is predominately visited by fishing tournaments, typical picnic day users are few and far between. Due to this customer base, this park's machine sells more annual passes than any other location. Therefore, I believe most customers at this location are repeat customers with a pass. We also more than doubled our annual pass sales, I believe in part due to them being available on the machine at all times. Not only are we collecting more revenue to deposit into the treasury, the amount of time we have to dedicate to remittance has drastically been reduced. With honor vaults it took 2 volunteers and a ranger an entire day to collect fees, 6-8 volunteers and a ranger 1-2 days to count fees, and 2 rangers 1-2 days to remit fees to the treasury. With the automated fee machines it now takes 1 ranger 30-40 mins per week to send the proper forms to Millington to help them sort the fees which are immediately deposited from the machine. This is one of my favorite improvements with this new program because rangers can spend more time in the field promoting water safety and ensuring safety of visitors within our parks.

This program has proven to be tremendously beneficial for our project and its implementation is growing immensely across the South Atlantic Division. I have overseen the very first implementation of the fully cashless fee system, and I have seen first-hand the improvements it can provide to USACE. I sincerely hope this initiative spreads throughout USACE projects. If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to call!

## 2 Carters Lake

*POC: Allen Earhart, Natural Resource Specialist, Carters Lake*

Take a second and open your wallet. How much cash do you have? Odds are you do not have any cash or if you do, you do not have correct change for an Honor Vault. This was a daily struggle for Rangers working to gain fee compliance at Carters Lake. Now, how many people do you know that do not have a credit or debit card? The average American has three credit cards. Now take into account the time and effort it takes to collect fees from Honor Vaults, not to mention the "fake payers", "Honor Vault Fishers" and "I'll just torch the locks off and take the money box thieves", this why we decided to try something new.

In March of 2017, we installed our first Automated Fee Machine. Ordering the machines is quite easy because all the work has already been done on the front end for all USACE projects. Really about all you have to do is call Ventek let them know if you want an AC or solar fee machine. They will put the quote together for you and we used our DLA contract to purchase our machines. Once you get the purchase completed the setup process begins, which if you are already taking credit cards and have a merchant ID can be done in a flash. If you do not have merchant ID, one can be obtained via pay.gov. Installation of the fee machines is also very easy with the blueprint provided by the company. Four bolts and some concrete! Our maintenance guys had our pads ready to go in just a couple hours. The Ventek representative completes the fee machine installation and programming then gives you lessons on its operation. Basically, if you can turn on a computer you can operate the fee machine.

To date we have three fee machines. We are using the machines to collect day use fees, sell USACE Annual Passes and even operating a primitive campground. People seem to really like using the fee machines and our compliance has gone up drastically. The best comment I have gotten from the public when asked what they think about the new fee machines was "about time the government catches up, nobody carries cash". Hopefully, we will get funding to add two more fee machines this fall, which will let us completely remove all the Honor Vaults from the project. In summary, fee machines make fee collection easier. No cash and checks to handle, count, and deposit. Easy access to fee data and real time updates. The process is setup and proven to be simple. In the end, take a minute and think how much time and manpower can be saved by removing almost all of the cash collection from your Use Fee Program.

**Photo Below:** Automated fee station installed at Carter's Lake.





## YOUR National Water Safety Program: The Best Dog within the Corps of Engineers

**POC: Pam Doty, Water Safety Program Manager, (817) 886-1727**

Without question the best dog within USACE is Bobber the Water Safety Dog. Bobber is our National Water Safety Mascot and has helped promote water safety to millions of kids over the years. He was created in 2003 by the USACE National Operations Center (NOC) for Water Safety. Other characters associated with Bobber include Corkey, Sinker, Tackle, Ranger Jane, Ranger Buck, Ranger Toro, Catsto, Hot Dog, and Chilly Dog. Bobber and his friends are featured on several water safety products produced by the NOC and all of the products are available for you to use.

**Click here for the  
Bobber the Water  
Safety Dog Website!**



**Click here for Bobber  
costume ordering!**

The NOC has created numerous Bobber graphics and artwork designs over the years. Most of them are available on the NRM Gateway in the Water Safety Graphics Library. (If you cannot find the graphics or artwork you are looking for email me, and I might have what you are looking for.)  
[Pamela.J.Doty@usace.army.mil](mailto:Pamela.J.Doty@usace.army.mil)

**Click here for the  
Water Safety  
Graphics Library!**



**Photo Far Left:** Bobber at the Pool - April Pool's Day Water Safety Interpretive Program in Honolulu District. **Photo Left:** Bobber in Parade - Armed Forces Day Parade in Torrence, CA, **Photo Right:** Bobber at the Ballpark - Sacramento River Cats Water Safety Game Night in West Sacramento, CA

The official Bobber the Water Safety Dog website is [www.Bobber.info](http://www.Bobber.info). The website includes four animated cartoons in English and Spanish; "Dog Paddling Puppies", "Don't Blow a Day at the Beach", "Sinker has a Fit", and "Who's Your Buddy". Coloring/activity sheets, trading cards, Take Along Bobber, and Locking Through simulator are also available on the website. The cartoons on DVD and Bone-A-Fide trading cards are available from the NOC and can be ordered when you place your annual National Water Safety Product Order in December. Different coloring/activity sheets are placed on the website for a limited time throughout the year, so make sure you continue to visit the website on occasion to see what resources are available. Share the website and resources with teachers, librarians, youth group leaders, and anyone that will benefit from and use them to help us promote water safety.

A new Bobber the Water Safety Dog Fun Book was created by the NOC a couple of years ago and can be ordered when you place your annual order in December. It is full of interactive activities for kids to enjoy. Some of the activities are designed to get adults involved, so through doing the activities together both kids and adults learn about the importance of water safety. The fun book includes Take Along Bobber and a Bobber Buddies page. Kids can use the Bobber Buddies page to draw a water safety picture or write Bobber a letter. Kids can mail in their drawings, photos, and letters to the address on the Bobber Buddies page or email them to [Bobber@Bobber.info](mailto:Bobber@Bobber.info) to receive a letter from Bobber and three Bone-A-Fide trading cards.

Most of you might have or have seen the Bobber the Water Safety Dog costume. The NOC worked with Robotronics, Inc. to design the costume. Robotronics is the only company authorized to sell the Bobber the Water Safety Dog costume and only USACE offices can purchase the costume. If you would like to purchase a Bobber costume information is available on the Robotronics website, [www.Robotronics.com](http://www.Robotronics.com). With your help Bobber has participated in parades, interpretive programs, special events, television interviews, public service announcements, and ballpark water safety nights across the country. Keep up the great work and if you need anything regarding Bobber the Water Safety Dog contact your division representative on the National Water Safety Committee.

# “The Interpretive Corner”: Hiram M. Chittenden, Who?

POC: Roseana Burick, Louisville District, (502) 315-6718



**“The greatest service which official authority can render to posterity is to maintain and transmit this possession as it came from the hand of nature.” Hiram Martin Chittenden (1915)**

Hiram M. Chittenden (1858 – 1917) was a native of the Finger Lakes Region of New York, an 1884 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and an officer of the Corps of Engineers. As an engineer he served on the Missouri River Commission for much of his career, surveyed the irrigation potential of western states, and studied flood control needs in Pennsylvania and Ohio. He was responsible for surveying the boundaries of Yosemite and Mount Rainier National Parks, served briefly as Commander of the Saint Paul District and

ended his army career as Seattle District Engineer. There he planned the Lake Washington Canal linking Lakes Washington and Union with Puget Sound. Seattle’s Chittenden Locks are named for him. He retired in December 1909 with the rank of Brigadier General.

Hiram Chittenden’s interpretation of the importance and grandeur of Yellowstone was important in the development of the National Park ideal. He also contributed greatly to the understanding of the exploration of the American West. Hiram Martin Chittenden was nationally renowned in his day as an author, advocate, engineer, and historian.

The Hiram M. Chittenden Award for Excellence in Interpretation in the Corps of Engineers, was so named because of his reputation within our agency as a highly regarded Army Engineer, his work in Yellowstone and other National Parks, studies of water resources in the Rocky Mountain West, flood control in the Ohio River basin, and his design and construction of the Lake Washington Ship Canal in Seattle. He was also a published writer in many popular periodicals of his day and was successful as an advocate for the National Parks in the years before NPS was created. As a West Point graduate and former District Engineer he provides our program standing with our agency’s higher leadership.

## The 2019 Chittenden nominees and regional award winners are:

**LRD:** Grace E. Trimble, Huntington District, Upper Tuscarawas Project Office at Atwood Dam. **NWD:** Amber C. Tilton, Portland District, The Dalles Lock and Dam. **SAD:** Blake A. Johnson, Wilmington District, B. Everett Jordan Dam & Lake. **SWD:** Aaron Boswell, Little Rock District, McClellan-Kerr Project-Pine Bluff Site Office.

[Click here for more information on Hiram Chittenden or award winners!](#)



## Trail Spotlight Buck Ridge Trail at Hensley Lake

The Buck Ridge Trail is situated in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada at Hensley Lake, a Sacramento District Project. Winding for 3.5 miles along the eastern shoreline of Hensley Lake, the trail is popular with horseback riders, bicyclists, hikers, bird watchers and disc-golfers along an 18-hole course. Popular wildlife species found in this oak savannah ecosystem are the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, pelican, bobcat, king snake, and blue-bellied lizard. The Yosemite Area Audubon Society, a lake partner, can be seen monitoring avian wildlife along the trail.



**Photo Left:** A member of the Yosemite Area Audubon Society banding an American Kestrel. **Photo Right:** The Buck Ridge run-bike race event hosted annually by Fleet Feet Sports, Fresno, CA. **Photo Top:** A view of the Fresno River from the northernmost reach of the Buck Ridge Trail.

According to Central California Off-Road Cyclists (CCORC) member Mike Bloom, riders love to recreate here because “the trail has many areas to work on technical mountain bike skills from beginners to more advance riders,” which is why CCORC “has since the 1990’s supported the Buck Ridge Trail network through trail work, organized club rides, and mountain bike races.”

Another lake partner that helps maintain trail space through environmental stewardship is the Sierra Freepackers, a unit within the Backcountry Horsemen of America. For Vice President Mary Odell, the trail offers members “a front country riding area close to home” where they can keep their horses conditioned during the spring and winter months. Among other features, members love are the white pelicans, springtime wildflowers, and the trail loop options.

At the northernmost reach of this active trail rumbles the Fresno River, the life source of Hensley Lake and water resource to the City of Madera. E. Vitus Campus, a historical society promoting heritage preservation, has documented the existence of a tunnel near the headwaters, which was likely used to move logs along the Madera Sugar Pine Lumber flume during Madera’s construction. It’s no wonder “madera” translates as “wood” in Spanish! Future endeavors include a greater interpretive presence among rangers, partners and the public to support and promote this unique area.

# Next Park Ranger Safety Survey

POC: Morgan Barnes, 559-689-3255

Have a ranger safety issue or concern you are dealing with at your project? Even if you don't, head on over to the survey at <https://cfapps.mvr.usace.army.mil/rangerapp/default.cfm> and make your voice heard!

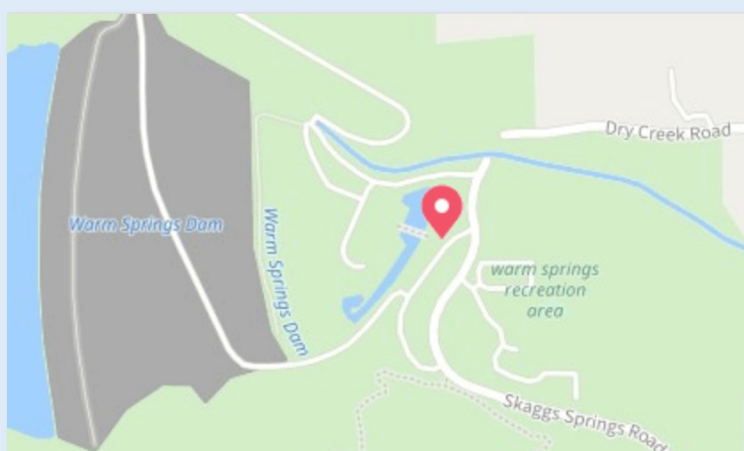
**Click here to access the current survey!**

The survey gives us a snapshot of the topmost concerns and issues we as rangers face in the field. The role of the NRM ranger changed drastically from 1995 when the survey started to 2010 when it resumed. Additionally, so does the climate we operate in from year to year. The challenges in our profession are unique and ever-changing and this is a chance for those in the field to "speak" directly to headquarters to showcase trends we observe daily. The more voices we have, the stronger the message. It's not too late! The survey is open until September 15<sup>th</sup>.

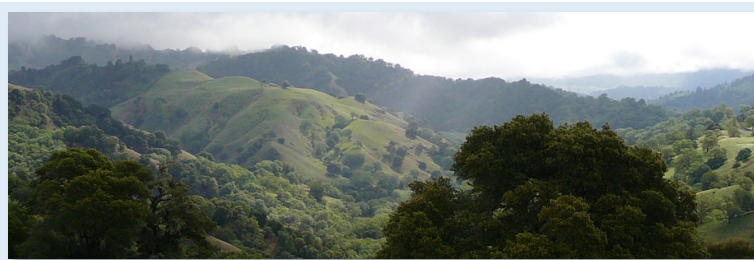
*This survey is the product of the Park Ranger CoP Advisory Board whose goal is to establish a focus on employee, visitor, and resource safety and security at USACE projects. The Advisory Board is a grassroots organization consisting of 17 park rangers who directly represent field NRM staff. Results have been and will continue to be used to make recommendations and decisions within the program.*

Please reach out to POC's Stephen Austin [stephen.b.austin@usace.army.mil](mailto:stephen.b.austin@usace.army.mil), Morgan Barnes [Morgan.J.Barnes@usace.army.mil](mailto:Morgan.J.Barnes@usace.army.mil) or your division ranger representatives on the Ranger CoP Advisory board if you have any questions.

**Click here to access past survey results on the NRM Gateway!**



**Photo Top:** View of the lands surrounding Lake Sonoma.  
**Photo Bottom Right:** The Friends of Lake Sonoma is a cadre of volunteers that supports the interpretive and educational programs managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Lake Sonoma. They help staff the Visitors Center and provide educational programming as demonstrated in this photo. **Map Above:** Lake Sonoma and Warm Springs Dam.



## Highlighting USACE's Visitor Centers Milt Brandt Visitor Center

The Milt Brandt Visitor Center and Don Clausen Fish Hatchery, nestled in wine country at Lake Sonoma, attract visitors from all over the world. The visitor center showcases the cultural and natural history of the region. Visitors can also discover information about the region's wildlife, flora and fauna, water safety exhibits, and interpretive and educational materials.

The kids' corner offers a closer look at native insects through a microscope, coloring books on local wildlife, a space to read books on beanbags, and the opportunity to take a picture with Bobber. The Friends of Lake Sonoma, the local cooperating agency, manages the gift shop and supports the interpretive and educational programs provided at both the visitor center and fish hatchery.

Behind the visitor center and across a short bridge is the Don Clausen Fish Hatchery, the most modern fish hatchery facility in California. The hatchery was built concurrently with the Warm Springs Dam to help mitigate the loss of natural habitat for the Chinook, Coho Salmon, and Steelhead Trout.

The hatchery is open to the public year round and displays interpretive exhibits, educational videos, and an exciting opportunity to feed the fish before they are released. Hatchery tours are provided to hundreds of school groups a year throughout the spring, providing unique educational opportunities to the local community and surrounding areas.

The Steelhead Festival, one of California's largest celebrations of the endangered Steelhead Trout, is held each spring on the grounds of the visitor center and fish hatchery. The event attracts thousands of visitors who gather to celebrate the return of the Steelhead to the hatchery. On hand to educate and entertain visitors throughout the event are more than 60 exhibitors. Activities and entertainment include archery, art projects, a casting pond, food vendors, local beer and wine booths, a live band, and a silent auction. The event provides educational elements that are critical to increasing awareness of the threatened and endangered species of both the Steelhead and Coho Salmon.

For more information contact Emily Kohl at (707) 431-4533.

