



THE recreation RETREAT

Your Recreation HQ Update

POC: Scott Strotman, Recreation Program & Business Line Manager, 202-761-0036

Like so many others, this Spring has been especially busy as we prepare for the upcoming recreation season and a few **THANK-YOUs** are needed. First, the FY23 budget build, with all of its changes, has been completed by field and district staff, THANK YOU! Now it is HQ's turn to work on ranking the many needed funding packages that were developed and submitted. Second, during National Volunteer Week, held April 18th-24th, many like Allatoona Lake (below) celebrated and recognized the volunteers who dedicate their time and skills to make our public lands the best they can be. A special THANK YOU to all of those volunteers who have and continue to serve on USACE lands and waters—your efforts are truly appreciated. Third, a THANK YOU to our Park Rangers, we know that in many areas, your “crazy



US Army Corps
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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

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.
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Campaign Hat Photo Credit:
Cynthia Mitchell, USACE

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Allatoona Lake
April 21 at 3:02 PM · 🌐

It is National Volunteer Week and the Corps at Allatoona would like to recognize the staff of the Allatoona Volunteer Village, AKA "The Village People". Despite a complete shutdown of volunteer services for 3 months last year during the COVID-19 Pandemic, thirty different volunteers were able to complete over 9,000 hours of volunteer service doing about everything you can imagine. As well, the Allatoona Volunteer Program and staff were also featured in Workamper News Magazine... See More

season” is just about to begin. Our record visitation experienced last summer is anticipated to continue again this year as people have once again embraced our natural resources. We recognize the challenges associated with the continuing pandemic and will work to support your efforts in all ways possible. Stay safe and THANK YOU!

This Issue:



VA Training
National Water Safety Awards

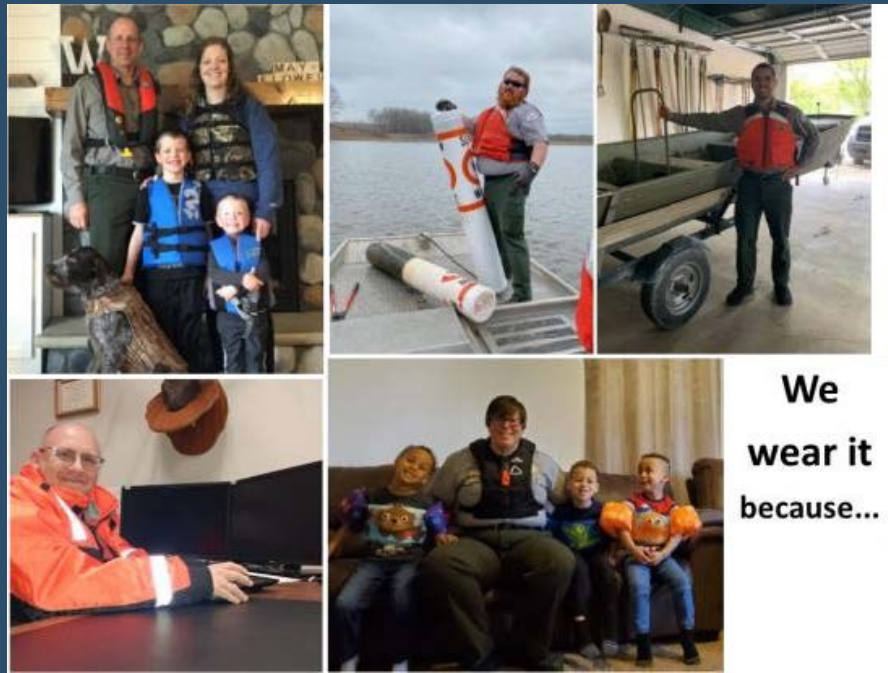
2021 National Water Safety Employee and Team of the Year Award Winners



POC: Pam Doty, National Water Safety Program Manager, 817-886-1727

It is my pleasure to introduce you to this year's National Water Safety Award Winners. The National Water Safety Awards are done in cooperation with the National Boating Federation to recognize a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employee and team that have contributed to boating and water safety and through their efforts have made a difference in saving lives on our nation's waterways.

This year's National Water Safety Employee of the Year is Ms. Shawna Polen. Shawna is a Natural Resources Specialist at Coralville Lake in the Rock Island District. She is recognized for her incredible efforts in promoting water safety and its importance to the public and employees. Shawna developed key partnerships with local entities with the focus on promoting water safety through numerous initiatives. One of the initiatives included providing a haunted trail program with the Friends of Coralville Lake that included boat scenes to illustrate the importance of life jackets. This program was successful in capturing the attention of multiple age groups and will more than likely become an annual event. She coordinated the placement of a water safety billboard on one of Iowa's busiest highways, updated recreation area information boards to include water safety tips, developed daily water safety messages for staff to incorporate into daily hydrological information available to the public online and by telephone, redesigned the Coralville Lake Visitor Center to incorporate a lab room that will feature a "drowning machine" exhibit, and worked to procure a new water safety trailer that will be used at events.



This collage along with messages from lake staff were coordinated by Shawna to bring attention to the importance of wearing a life jacket.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Shawna shifted the lake's outreach efforts to virtual and social media to reach the public with educational and interpretive water safety messages. She developed and posted videos on social media that featured Coralville Lake staff sharing important information about life jackets, boat safety inspection, and other water safety topics. Since schools were not able to bring their students to the lake due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Shawna developed an initiative to record water safety messages with the lake staff that were shared virtually with local schools. As part of her effort to create a strong social media presence, she developed a character specific to Coralville Lake. The lake is known for the discovery of a historic species fossil from the Devonian timeframe called Dunkleosteus, so Shawna developed Dudley the Dunkleosteus. Dudley was used on Coralville Lake's social media pages on a weekly basis to promote water safety and provide project information and has become a local celebrity.

Due to the higher number of visitors and restrictions resulting from COVID-19, Shawna provided training to the seasonal lake staff on how to maintain the health and safety of staff and visitors while promoting water safety using promotional products from the National Water Safety Program and purchased locally. Also, loaner life jackets were cleaned and sanitized during regular inspections to help ensure visitor safety.

Shawna has become an invaluable asset when it comes to promoting water safety at Coralville Lake and the surrounding community. Her work to provide public outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic, ability to find ways to reach groups of all ages, and ability to engage with the public and motivate them to take ownership of their own safety while in, on, or near the water in new and creative ways is exemplary and very much appreciated.

This year's National Water Safety Team of the Year is the J. Percy Priest Lake Seasonal Park Ranger Team. The following USACE employees were on the team: Mandy Porter, Jonathon McCracken, and Anderson Schmittou. During this uniquely challenging year, the student park rangers at J. Percy Priest Lake took great pride in promoting water safety. From the moment they arrived, they began searching for creative ways to promote life jacket wear and safe boating practices.

Just 15 minutes from downtown Nashville, Tennessee, J. Percy Priest Lake hosts millions of visitors annually and the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of visitors to recreation facilities. With the influx of new lake users, the student park rangers took on the task of educating visitors about the importance of life jackets. They utilized resources made available by the National Water Safety Program including promotional give-away items, printed materials, and the "Life Jackets Worn...Nobody Mourns" pavement stencil that was purchased by The Corps Foundation utilizing grant funds from the U.S. Coast Guard. They ensured the life jacket loaner stations at three swim areas were consistently inspected and stocked with life jackets that were donated by the Sea Tow Foundation. While maintaining proper social distancing, they spoke with children and adults at the lake's marinas, campgrounds, islands, swim beaches, and boat ramps to share important tips to keep the visitors safe in, on, and near the water.

To accomplish their goals, the student park rangers each had specific focus areas they managed, while also assisting their co-worker's efforts. Mandy concentrated on increasing the number of visual cues around the lake to provoke visitors to wear life jackets. This included updating signs with current statistics and while updating the signs sharing with fisherman, boaters, swimmers, and other visitors the stories of those who had lost their lives and how the tragedies could have been prevented by wearing a life jacket. Banners were installed at campgrounds, day use areas, and boat ramps, pavement stencil was used to paint the "Life Jackets Worn...Nobody Mourns" message on USACE and marina courtesy docks, information boards were updated with water safety messages, and promotional products were handed out to visitors. Jonathon's insight was essential in creating a Facebook page that resonated with a wider demographic. Social media content shifted from wordy posts to more photographs and questions that invited feedback.

The resources from the National Water Safety Program were used to create weeks' worth of Facebook posts. Due to these increased efforts, the J. Percy Priest Lake Facebook page averaged a daily reach of 800 people and the number of followers grew by over 11%. Anderson partnered with the YMCA Camp to teach water safety as part of their weekly camps and with the waterpark to set up a staffed socially distanced booth to promote responsible recreation. Registering island campers and conducting vessel safety checks provided opportunities to remind visitors about the importance of safe boating and life jackets. The student park rangers led by example by wearing their inflatable life jackets during these events to show the advantages of the inflatable-style life jackets compared to traditional life jackets that can be bulky and hot to wear. Each member of this team brought unique life experiences and perspectives that enabled them to promote water safety authentically, widely, and persuasively.

A huge thanks and congratulations go to both Shawna and the J. Percy Priest Lake Seasonal Park Ranger Team for all that they have done and continue to do promote water safety and save lives! Several exceptional nominations were received for these awards and all of those that were nominated are doing great things regarding promoting water safety. The announcement for nominations for next year's awards will be coming out later this year so please keep an eye out for it. I encourage each and every one of you to put in a nomination!



J Percy Priest Lake Team Member at Waterpark Booth

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT!

Powerlines Policy Update

The revision to ER 1110-2-4401, *Clearance for Electric Power Lines and Communication Lines Over Reservoirs*, has been finalized and published; the line heights were reviewed and validated, updates to electrical code references, updated internal references, and updates to formatting. The revision was initiated to support public safety and assess program conditions after a tragic incident at one of our projects. Please reference 21 December 2018 Policy Memo US Army Corps of Engineers Overhead Lines Crossing Reservoirs. The update does not change any items that would impact operations or procedures at our projects. HQ POC is Jeremy Crossland, Program Manager for Land Use and Natural Resources, 202-821-8226,

jeremy.m.crossland@usace.army.mil

Enforcement of New Federal Vessel Engine Cut-off Switch Use Requirement

CECW-CO Memorandum signed 13 April 2021, provides guidance on the U.S. Coast Guard's (USCG) new requirement requiring operators of recreational vessels, less than 26 feet in length, to use an engine cut-off switch (ECOS) and associated ECOS link.

USACE has the authority to enforce this regulation under Title 36 CFR, Section 327.3 (e), which stipulates that all vessels on project waters must comply with USCG boating safety regulations. The new USCG regulation is only applicable to recreational vessels. It does not apply to government-owned vessels. For USACE vessels less than 26 feet in length ER 385-1-91, Section 10.e. states, "Inspect and use the vessel engine cut-off device and safety lanyard, and attach the safety lanyard to their person (exclusive use of wireless engine cut-off devices are not authorized)."

The USCG regulation was created to address the problem of recreational vessel operators who fall off or are suddenly and unexpectedly thrown from their vessel thereby causing the vessel to continue to operate with no one in control, which has led to injuries and fatalities. A Notice sign has been developed for USACE to use as an option to inform the public about this new requirement and is available on the NRM Gateway in the Sign Section.

HQ POC is Pam Doty, National Water Safety Program Manager, 817-886-1727, pamela.j.doty@usace.army.mil.

NRM Gateway Communication Tools for USACE Park Rangers

POC: **Bonnie Bryson**, Bonnie.f.bryson@usace.army.mil

The Natural Resources Management (NRM) Gateway offers tools to enhance internal communication within the NRM community.

1 SmartBook: The SmartBook provides an electronic directory making it easy to connect when you need to locate or email other USACE employees and groups. A major update in April 2021 consolidated previously separate NRM, Park Ranger, and OPM CoPs directories into a single SmartBook. The SmartBook enhances communication with filters for program points of contacts, subject matter experts, and by duty station. This offers connections and workforce context information far beyond what a DLL mailing list or an Outlook search can produce. The SmartBook works best when everyone periodically reviews and updates their personal (and their team's) information regarding areas of expertise, PDT membership, location, and other organizational information. The link for the SmartBook is on the NRM Gateway homepage under the Discussion Forums but is only accessible from the army.mil network and requires a CAC card to enter.

2 Gateway Glimpse: Gateway Glimpses are virtual newsletters issued when there is a need for CoP Chairs or the Gateway Team to communicate with everyone in the CoP. These newsletters are distributed to every email address in the Glimpse mailing list. The distribution email addresses come from the SmartBook, supplemented by recipient actions to opt-out or opt-in.

 **NRM Glimpse subscribe!**

 **Click here for an example Glimpse!**

3 NRM Community Forums: You can link to the Forum from the Gateway home page under the Discussion Forums heading. This discussion area is "behind the castle" (on the army.mil network and requires CAC card for access) and therefore cannot be reached by the public. You can view content without registering but cannot comment until you create your own username and password. Although you must register to participate, usernames are not currently displayed along with the discussions.

NOTE: MOBILE PHONES offer a streamlined view of the NRM Gateway. Simply open the NRM Gateway link on your cell phone, then add an icon on your phone screen.

Gateway on the Go
<https://corpslakes.erdc.dren.mil/nrm-mobile.cfm>

The beginning of the recreation season is an excellent time to review these tools and ensure everyone is taking advantage of their features. This is also a good time to make sure that new hires are aware of the NRM Gateway by including Gateway 101 as a link or a handout during orientation.

Virtual VA Training: Scavenger hunt a creative solution for interactive virtual training

POC: Alicia Kohl, Sacramento District, (916) 557-5283

Conducting virtual trainings has become a part of the 'new normal' and finding innovative ways to keep the audience engaged, involved, and excited has been challenging. When SPD started planning annual ranger training the thought of having 100 park rangers stare at a screen for three days seemed daunting. Park rangers are generally outdoor enthusiasts who thrive off human interaction and the planning team knew keeping them actively engaged was going to be challenging.

To overcome this challenge they created and implemented a scavenger hunt as part of the training that allowed projects to work together as a team, get outdoors, discuss Title 36, review national policy and program requirements, practice their tactical communications skills, and discuss project specific challenges and management techniques. The scavenger hunt was conducted over two days and projects submitted photos and videos as answers to the questions. Each question had a point value and projects competed against each other. The project with the most points upon completion of the activity was the winner, in this case Lake Sonoma. Each morning the most creative or 'best' pictures were showcased, discussion questions were presented, and the leaderboard revealed. The rangers seemed excited to conduct the scavenger hunt and were actively engaged throughout the activity, a win-win for everyone.

Here are a few sample questions and the answers!
What would your photo be?



Question: Visitors locate what when they don't have proper fitting life jackets for all occupants onboard their vessel to comply with 327.3(e)?

Answer: Life Jacket Loaner Station

Question Point Value: 3



Question: Park rangers ask the visitor if they are in possession of what when enforcing 327.11(a)?

Answer: Leash, Cage, Restraint

Question Point Value: 2



Taking the Soo Locks Visitors Center Outside: COVID-19 Adaptations

POC: Michelle Briggs, Chief Park Ranger, (906) 635-6171

The transformation of the Visitor Center at the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan took 10 years. Outdated, text heavy, static exhibits were replaced with bold graphics, punchy headlines and text that got straight to the point answering visitor's main questions about locks, Great Lakes shipping and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Interactive exhibits added deeper layers of information for those who wanted it and children took advantage of new hands-on activities as well as a scavenger hunt. In the Spring of 2020, COVID-19 stopped everything in its tracks.

On March 17, 2020 the park at the Soo Locks closed to the public for three months. It quickly became clear that the Visitor Center which has served and inspired 400,000 people every summer was not going to open that year. When the park re-opened at the end of May, Michelle Briggs, chief park ranger at the Soo Locks, took a hard look at the services provided in the Visitor Center

Visitors to the center most highly valued the ability to view vessel arrival schedules and chat with attendants who could answer their questions. "We have contractors staffing our Visitor Center and I shifted their area of operation outdoors to the covered porch of our building facing the locks." Briggs created what she called 'the fortress' with tables arranged in a ring to keep visitors at a distance and chalk markings within the area marking the 6-foot boundary and mask zone. From here the attendants kept a supply of brochures on the tables, updated schedules and answered 1,000's of questions, while also sanitizing the table several times a day. "They suffered through some pretty intense hot and cold spells, but most were glad to be back to work and enjoyed the chance to be outdoors despite the lack of air conditioning, heat and occasional bouts of rain" noted Briggs.

With several other attractions in the area operating at reduced capacities or not open at all, Briggs realized people were spending more time in the park than in past seasons. "I think a lot of people felt safer outdoors last summer and I wanted to enhance that experience and make their visit more interesting and rewarding." To this end, she modified the primary exhibits inside the Visitor Center, printed them on vinyl banners and installed 22 of them on the 8-foot iron fences that line the lock canal.

In a typical season the Visitor Center offers a "Soo Locks Expert" scavenger hunt for children to 'earn' water safety prizes. For the 2020 season Briggs modified the hunt to encompass the exhibits and other features in the park. "I made sure it went the entire length of the park and kept them exploring during their visit. Our site is a fairly long car ride from anywhere and you could see many of the parents were glad to have an outdoor activity to let their kids run around for a bit," Briggs recalls.

Overall Briggs reported that in person feedback was also positive. "We had a few hostile visitors, but most people were just thankful that the park was open and there were attendants to answer questions and post the vessel schedules." Briggs reported that visitation far exceeded her expectations. "The park was instantly busy from the day it opened in May through the whole summer. Our visitation was only down about 5%, which I suspect was because after lockdown people were anxious to go do something and felt safer outdoors."

For the 2021 season, Briggs expects to open the Visitor Center in compliance with local and federal guidelines but is also taking advantage of lessons learned from the 2020 season. "The outdoor exhibits were really popular and although I do not want to duplicate what we have inside, we are installing a new series of banners interpreting the thousand-foot-long freighters that pass through the locks." Additionally, given the ease of converting publications to accessible PDFs she is also investigating working with the public affairs office to post their site brochure and other popular handouts on the district website and linking them with QR codes to provide a touch free option that could also save on printing expenses. "So many people are used to doing everything on their phones that they find it easier," she notes.



Preparing banners for outside, contactless interpretation.

Recreation Leadership Advisory Team—Meeting Update

POC: Chris Alford, NRM Specialist, Walla Walla District

Hello Recreation Community! My name is Chris Alford and I am the NWD representative on the Recreation Leadership Advisory Team (RLAT). I have also just started my third year as the Chair of the RLAT. This team provides oversight and serves as an ad hoc committee to the Chief of the Natural Resources Management Branch in HQUSACE. The Team provides input to the strategic planning vision and makes recommendations on national priorities for the USACE recreation program. Each spring, the RLAT meets along with the Stewardship Advisory Team (SAT). Due to COVID-19, the meeting was held virtually during the week of 14 April 2021. The meeting agenda was very full as we focused on items that required lengthy discussion and interactive conversation to develop paths forward. Here are some of the highlights:

- **Recreation Metrics:** Scott Strotman (HQUSACE) led the discussion and development of a team to develop recreation metrics that will help tell the story of the USACE recreation program nationally.
- **NRM Strategic Plan Goal Implementation:** Heather Burke (HQUSACE) and Brian Mangrum (LRN) set up teams to implement the goals identified in the NRM Strategic Plan. Four teams have been identified and are working on priorities and schedules.
- **USACE Visitor Assistance Program:** Steve Austin (HQUSACE) and Jon Carlisle (NWD) discussed updates, successes, and challenges related to COVID.
- **USACE Innovation Team:** Jason Knight (SWT) and Abby Jones (SWT) led a briefing discussing the team's current efforts and next steps. More information about this team can be found at: <https://corpslakes.ercd.dren.mil/employees/innovations/index.cfm>

The RLAT will meet again with the SAT in the fall. If you have questions for the RLAT, please feel free to reach out to me or to your division representative or MSC.

The Division Representatives are:

- SAD - Amy Cobb (MSC is Ryan Hartwig)
- POD - Jill Davis & Justin Kerwin (MSC is Gayle Rich)
- MVD - Ashley Kiley (MSC is Lynn Neher)
- SPD - Alicia Kohl (MSC is Phil Smith)
- LRD - Brian Mangrum (MSC is Jeff Defosse)
- NAD - Tia Mercer (MSC is Mike Vissichelli)
- SWD - Amanda Palmer (MSC is David White)
- NWD - Chris Alford (MS is Jonathan Carlisle)



NISAW IS SOON!

National Invasive Species Awareness Week

May 15-22, 2021: NISAW Part 2—
Outreach and Education

<https://www.nisaw.org>

DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE TRAVELING TRUNK?

The Invasive Species Leadership Team developed an Interpretive Trunk to serve as a tool to enhance the public's understanding of invasive species, the negative impacts they have, management approaches and steps we can all take to help stop their spread. The Traveling Trunk is FREE to borrow!

Learn how on the NRM Gateway.

<https://corpslakes.ercd.dren.mil/employees/invasive/trunk.cfm>

