



THE recreation RETREAT

HQ UPDATE: USACE HISTORY OFFICE & THE USACE RECREATION PROGRAM

POC: Ryan.D.Hartwig@usace.army.mil



HQUSACE was approached by the USACE History office regarding the composition of a history book dedicated to telling the story of the genesis, evolution, and current state of the USACE Recreation program.

The book will focus on two areas: (1) how the more than 400 lakes came into existence and their place in our national outdoor recreation landscape, and (2) how USACE embraced its recreation mission.

The first story has roots in the nineteenth century and climaxes in the Big Dam Era, while the second story, more or less, begins with the Flood Control Act of 1944 and develops through the 1970s to present day.

The book is progressing nicely! Now we need YOUR help. It is time to fill in the story with relevant photos. The history office has many historical construction photos, but is asking for photos that help define and describe the evolution of the Recreation program at USACE lakes and waterways (photos from the 1950s to the present).

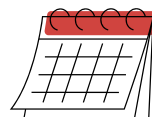
Specifically, they are looking for a good cover photo that can express the historical feel of the Recreation program. The best photo received will make the cover of the book and any other selected photos will be included within the book.



Please send high definition / high quality photos (>1 MB) to: jonah.g.bea-taylor@usace.army.mil. Please CC ryan.d.hartwig@usace.army.mil and heath.r.kruger@usace.army.mil.

Be sure to include a caption or description.

Kindly submit all photos by Mar. 14, 2025. ■



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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. 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 readers with 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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Fee-Free Days

Day Use Fee-Free Dates in 2025 for All Visitors to USACE Managed Recreation Areas

USACE fee-free days was first instituted on Veteran's Day in 2006 with the intent to support and honor the men and women who have served the Nation in the armed serves.

Fee Free Days for 2025

- **Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday:** Jan. 20, 2025
- **USACE Birthday:** Jun. 16, 2025
- **Juneteenth National Independence Day:** Jun. 19, 2025
- **National Public Lands Day:** Sep. 27, 2025
- **Veteran's Day:** Nov. 11, 2025

All day-use fees for all visitors to USACE managed recreation areas will be waived on the dates listed above. This waiver covers boat launch ramp and swim beach fees. This waiver does not apply to camping and camping-related services or fees for specialized facilities such as group picnic shelters.

Other agencies that manage recreation areas located on USACE lands are encouraged, but not required, to comply with this schedule to waive fees in the areas that they manage.



Junior Ranger Program Going Strong

POC: Pam Doty, National Water Safety Program Manager

The Junior Ranger Program has been around USACE for quite sometime. A few years ago, the National Water Safety Program created a brand new USACE Junior Ranger Book. Additionally, the team supported the creation of new artwork that can be used when purchasing Junior Ranger badges and patches.

To become a USACE Junior Ranger, a child of any age (including adults since some of them, as we all know, are kids at heart) must complete seven or more activities within the Junior Ranger Book and demonstrate how to properly put on and wear a life jacket. Once completed, they, along with a park ranger, will read the Junior Ranger Pledge and be given a certificate of achievement and a badge or patch. The certificate includes the pledge and is included in the Junior Ranger Book.

This is an outstanding resource that contains not only water safety activities but many other activities regarding USACE, bicycle safety, trees, bald eagles, fish, invasive species, and more. The book is only being made available electronically so you can print and use it as is or local information and activities can be added before using it. The Junior Ranger Book and patch/badge artwork is available on the NRM Gateway in the water safety section under Junior Ranger Program. ■



USACE, St. Lucie Lock and Dams, Jacksonville District, Park Ranger Robert Wiggins and Bobber the Water Safety Dog stand proudly with their two new Junior Rangers, Brison and Bree. Brison and Bree pose with their backpack loaded with junior ranger badges collected from the parks they visited during their vacation.

Photos by Brigida Sanchez, Jacksonville District Public Affairs Office Specialist.



Mount St. Helens Visitor Center Farewell Exhibits Celebration

USACE park rangers assisted Washington State Parks with their "Farewell Exhibit Celebration" at the Mount St. Helens Visitor Center in Castle Rock, Washington, this past September. The event offered free entry to the visitor center on the final day before the removal of their 1980s era exhibits, and many agencies were invited, including USGS, USFS, and USACE.

USACE park rangers set up an interpretive table highlighting the varying USACE responses to the volcanic disaster, such as dredging the Columbia River Channel of volcanic ash and building the Sediment Retention Structure on the Toutle River in efforts to mitigate downstream flooding events caused by eroding volcanic debris.

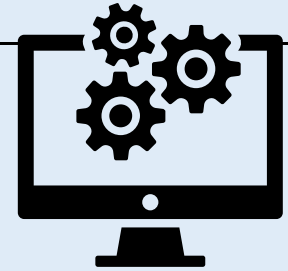
Educating the public about the response of the disaster by the USACE highlights the involvement of our agency in the protection of human life after natural disasters strike. Ranger staff made 100 meaningful contacts with visitors at the event.

Top: USACE Park Rangers presented an education table at the Mount St. Helens Visitor Center in Castle Rock, WA. Right, top and bottom: The Mount St. Helens Visitor Center at Silver Lake saw a great turnout at their "Farewell Exhibits Celebration." USACE Rangers retell the story of the addition of the Sediment Retention Structure to the Toutle River, the dredging of the Columbia River of ash in 1980, and the construction of the Spirit Lake Tunnel.



We Need YOUR Help!

We need recent (within the past year or two) photos that represent our efforts in natural resources management, our visiting public, and our workforce. We use A LOT of photos in various publications and shared media. Please send any images to tara.j.whitsel@usace.army.mil. Thank you!



Knowledge Management Portal for NRM

The Natural Resources Management Program has several pages on the Civil Work Knowledge management Portal.

Please visit:

<https://usace.dps.mil/sites/KMP-CW/SitePages/Natural-Resource-Management.aspx> to access program priorities, metrics, newsletters, and more.





WEBINAR SERIES

2025 Leave No Trace Agency Webinar Series

Our partners at Leave No Trace are offering an agency webinar series.

Feb. 25, 2025: 11am-12pm Mountain time. *2024 Year in Review.* Executive Director Dana Watts will provide Agency personnel with an overview of 2024 and what to expect in 2025 from the Leave No Trace Organization.

Mar. 26, 2025: 11am-12pm Mountain time. *NC State Research - Assessing Knowledge and Behaviors Before and After a Targeted Messaging intervention.* A three to four speaker webinar with NC State staff presenting recent research findings from a study funded by the Leave No Trace organization.

Aug. 28, 2025: 11am-12pm Mountain time. *Utilizing Leave No Trace Gold Standard Designation and Tourism Programs for Federal Agency Success.* Leave No Trace staff present Leave No Trace programs and how they can be accessed and applied to, as well as how agency partners can use these programs to support agency efforts.



Local School Wins National Dam Model Competition Building Franklin Falls Dam

POC: Briana Edwards, Operations Division, New England District

Every year, the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) holds a national competition for students of all ages to construct a dam model and create a plan for using the model to educate others. When the principal of Jennie D. Blake Elementary School in Hill, New Hampshire, caught wind of this challenge, he reached out to the park rangers at Franklin Falls Dam and set up a meeting. A group of eager 4th and 5th grade students, Principal Dr. Brian Connelly, and USACE Park Ranger Briana Edwards came together in December of 2023 to begin their journey.

The community of Hill and the students at the school have a personal connection with Franklin Falls Dam. This competition gave them a unique opportunity to bring their town history to life. The town of Hill was relocated in 1941 due to the construction of Franklin Falls Dam. The dam was built between 1939 and 1943 to mitigate flooding in New Hampshire and Massachusetts following major flooding events in the late 1930s, and the subsequent Flood Control Acts of 1936 and 1938. Old Hill Village is now part of a recreation area within the project land of Franklin Falls Dam. The history of Hill and its relocation is an important part of the curriculum taught at the elementary school. With this shared history as their inspiration, the students came up with a plan to create a scale model of Franklin Falls Dam and its storage basin while highlighting their former village.



Park Ranger Briana Edwards and the team

The first step of this competition was to create a proposal of their model including design plans, materials, budget, and how they planned to use the model to promote dam safety in the community. They competed against elementary school students across the country for the winning prize of \$500 to fund model construction, an invitation to present their model at the ASDSO Dam Safety Conference in Denver, Colorado, a travel stipend for the team members, and a \$1,000 honorarium to the team.

On the day of their first meeting, the pool at Franklin Falls Dam was nearing its peak following recent heavy rains and a mid-winter thaw.

Article continued on next page



Construction of the dam model.

Local School Wins, Continued

For a run-of-river dam that holds a normal pool at 307 feet NGVD, a peak pool level at 360 feet NGVD was an impressive sight. When the principal heard this, parents were called and an impromptu field trip to the dam commenced, demonstrating the school's enthusiasm for the project.

The following day, the students walked down to see the site of the old village, which varies in elevation from 312 to 340 feet, completely underwater. This visual solidified their understanding of the need to relocate their town during the construction of Franklin Falls Dam. The students made a few more trips to the dam during the planning stages of this project to tour the dam with Ranger Briana, learn about the important flood control structures, and understand the floodplain.

Their dam model proposal was completed and submitted in February 2024, and the students awaited the results with anticipation. The following month they learned that their proposal had been selected and they were the winning team in the elementary division. Ranger Briana continued to support the students as a technical advisor throughout the build.



Completed model of Franklin Falls Dam.

The students worked through lunch breaks, after school, and put in many hours during their summer vacation to construct their dam model. Most of the model is made to scale—complete with realistic topography and the Pemigewasset River running through the middle. Their town history is on display as well with the addition of old building foundations along the river and a small representation of their relocated town.

With the model completed, next came their trip to Denver to attend the ASDSO Dam Safety Conference at the end of September. There they presented their project to conference attendees with assuredness and pride. The students confidently fielded questions about the structure and function of the dam as well as the impact flood control dams have on communities both upstream and downstream.



Students presenting at the ASDSO conference.

Upon their return and in culmination of their hard work, the school held a presentation for the community where the students shared their experience and were celebrated one final time. Looking to the future, the students' goals for the model are for it to be used as part of their existing school curriculum, displayed in the town library, and used to teach other schools about flood control dams.



Recognizing Excellence

Sarah Fisher, Natural Resource Manager, was recognized for her exceptional efforts in planning and executing an Environmental Learning Day for 6th grade students at Farmdale Reservoir. Ranger Fisher created a thorough plan for the event and successfully involved local agencies and private corporations in the initiative. Each participating organization established a learning station for the students.



Recognizing Excellence

Reilly Dolan, Mississippi River Project Office, has performed exceptionally as the Quality Assurance Representative on five contracts—including two timber inventory task orders under a Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) and three forestry service task orders via a Multiple Award Task Order Contract (MATOC). He has effectively conducted quality assurance on inventory submissions for approximately 400 plots, covering regions in Pool 11 for the Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) and the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP).



Improvements to Volunteer.gov

Access Changes for Volunteer.gov

Beginning in April 2025, volunteer coordinators at the project level will be able to access the Volunteer.gov administrator salesforce site as "Team Members." There will be a few restrictions on permissions for field level coordinators (for instance, new opportunities will still need to be created by the district volunteer coordinator who has a full user license), but Team Members will be able to access applications, change their status, onboard new volunteers, electronically sign OF301a forms online, etc.

There will be training provided in spring 2025, but right now district volunteer coordinators can get a jump start and work with project volunteer coordinators to get them registered as Team Members in the system so they will be ready to access in April when the new features are fully launched.



New: Partnerships and Volunteers 2025-26 Photo Contest

POC: Keith Hyde, NWD Partnership Advisory Committee

The Partnership Advisory Committee is pleased to announce a new photo contest for 2025 focused on partnerships and volunteer programs. The goal is to develop a collection of great photos that capture a sense of partnership, collaboration, and accomplishment that can be used in various publications, presentations, websites, social media, etc.

There are four categories of photos for the contest:

- Environmental Stewardship Partnerships
- Recreation Partnerships
- Volunteers in Action
- Special Events with Partners

Entries will be rated and ranked based on the following criteria:

- Composition/quality: The arrangement of elements within the frame, including balance, framing, use of negative space, quality of exposure, focus, and lighting.
- Creativity: The originality and inventiveness of the photograph; unique perspectives or concepts that stand out.
- Emotional impact: The ability of the photograph to evoke feelings or convey a message.
- Storytelling: How well the image tells a story or captures a moment.

Prizes (all donated by the Corps Foundation):

- Grand prize winner will receive a large, heavy duty metal print of their photo for their project office.

- Winners of each category will receive a framed enlargement of their photo for their project office.
- Top three winners in each category will receive a Corps Foundation challenge coin and a one-year membership to the Corps Foundation.

The contest is open to all USACE employees and volunteers. Photographers may submit up to five entries per category—each photo with a descriptive caption.

To Enter:

- Each entry must be submitted with ENG Form 5067-R.
- Deadline for submissions is Jan. 30, 2026.
- Submit by email, Teams, or DoD SAFE to: Keith Hyde, NWD Partnerships Advisory Committee, keith.b.hyde@usace.army.mil.

No need to wait until next January! You can submit photos anytime between now and the deadline. ■

