

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE RECREATION MISSION OF THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Presented by the Recreation Strategy Group

The Recreation Strategy Group (Appendix A) is composed of major outdoor recreation organizations interested in the recreation and environmental management of Corps lands and waters. In response to the August, 2007 meeting with General Van Antwerp, the Group is presenting recommendations for managing the Corps recreation programs to fully integrate the Corps Recreation & Environmental Stewardship programs into the overall mission of the Corps and the US Army.

Reasons for the Strategy:

- There is a public health crisis related to American's physical and psychological fitness and well-being. This crisis affects the Army recruitment and costs for training and fitness for duty.
- Children are particularly impacted by the crisis. This new generation may face shortened life spans by 2-5 years.
- Outdoor recreation and education have been shown to have the potential to improve individual and family health and fitness.
- The Corps manages outstanding areas for outdoor recreation, accessible to millions of people.

Key Recommendations:

- Immediately augment communications assets and undertake a creative and cost-effective effort to increase significantly public awareness and visibility
- Foster use of Corps recreation resources by Active, Retired and Reserve military/veterans and their families to sustain a healthy workforce and families
- Enhance and expand Partnerships and participate in National "Children in Nature" Initiatives
- Foster community vitality through collaboration with the private sector and other federal, state, and local agencies
- Develop research to better identify the social and economic relationships between Corps recreation and environmental resources and the public

Benefits to the Corps

- Improved public awareness and support for the Corps of Engineers overall
- Enhanced financial and human resources
- Improved support to Military readiness, retention, and quality of life of military personnel and their families
- Increased support for expansion of Corps legislative authorities to better achieve recreation and environmental mission and program objectives

A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE RECREATION MISSION OF THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Presented by the Recreation Strategy Group

The Recreation Strategy Group is composed of major outdoor recreation organizations interested in the recreation and environmental management of the 12 million acres of Corps lands and waters. The group was convened by the American Recreation Coalition and participating organizations are listed in the appendix.

Purpose of the Group: Provide Commanding General Van Antwerp with recommendations for managing the Corps recreation programs to integrate fully the Corps Recreation & Environmental Stewardship programs into the overall mission of the Corps and the US Army. The Group does not propose a new mission, but a new forward-looking strategy to achieve that mission.

Drivers for Change

- **32% of potential Army recruits don't meet the required fitness standards**
- **Harvard Medical School reports that life expectancies may be cut by 2-5 years for the next generation due to unfit lifestyles**
- **Obesity, diabetes, heart disease, depression, ADHD, and sedentary lifestyles are the key factors**
- **Enormous social and economic losses from shortened life expectancies and unprecedented health care costs**

There is a crisis in America related to the fitness and health of our children and adults and that it needs immediate and significant attention.

Equally important is the potential for adverse impacts on military readiness, retention, quality of life of personnel and their families. The crisis is also affecting recruitment because of the growing number of young people not capable of serving in our Armed Forces without large expenditures and time commitments on fitness programs.

Why A New Strategy?

Corps lakes and waterways are significant places for public physical activities and public outdoor recreation, which contribute to improved health and well-being of millions of Americans, including potential Army recruits, soldiers and their families.

Armed Forces significantly benefit from Corps recreation places and programs

- *Army soldiers and their families are significant users of Corps land for recreation.*

February 11, 2008

- 12 Military installations access Corps lakes, providing a broad range recreation opportunities for personnel and families
- Army Family, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs are essential for maintaining positive soldier and family support of their mission and personal health

There is a *need for increased recognition within the Defense agencies* of the Corps as a support to Army values and mission.

The Corps is the *single largest recreation provider in the nation* – nearly 400 million visitor days annually. The Corps is a hidden giant among federal and state agencies! No other federal recreation provider reaches millions of people within 50 miles of major metropolitan areas.

Corps lakes and waterways are significant economic engines for countless local communities and states.

- \$8 billion spent by visitors in local communities supporting 105,000 jobs and generating \$3.9 billion income.
- \$5 billion spent by visitors on durable goods such as boats and camping equipment.
- \$41 million in volunteer labor contributions in FY 07,
- Loss of recreation capacity, degraded facilities and reduce visitation threatens the economic contributions to local, state and national recreation and tourism economies

Partnerships with state and local governments are significant, augment Corps resources, and add to availability of public services and recreation opportunities. 1348 areas on Corps lands are managed by other federal, state, and local agencies.

Funding for Corps recreation and environmental stewardship programs is significantly declining, resulting in degraded facilities, reduced safety and health conditions, and negative visitor experiences and public opinion.

The Corps cannot attract increased legislative, financial and other support for its recreation programs because they are not widely recognized publicly or politically.

Benefits of the New Strategy

- Improved public awareness and support for the Corps overall
- New constituencies who will support the Corps mission
- Increased positive economic benefits for state and local communities
- Enhanced financial and human resources for recreation and stewardship
- Improved support to Military readiness, retention, quality of life of military personnel and their families
- Increased support for expansion of Corps legislative authorities to better achieve recreation and environmental mission and program objectives

Proposed Recreation Strategy Objectives:

- **Encourage healthy lifestyles supporting reduced health care costs and maintenance of life expectancy rates**
- **Support Active, Retired and Reserve military/veterans and their families**
- **Support Army's efforts to grow and sustain a healthy workforce**
- **Maintain and improve the natural resources on Corps lands to sustain healthy and productive lands and waters**
- **Sustain the economic viability of local and state economies**

High Priority Proposed Actions:

1. Expand the Corps Communications Plans for the Recreation Program

Finding: The lack of public awareness about the scope and values of the Corps recreation program is a handicap in achieving support in the budget and public policy arena for resources essential to serving the health, safety, educational and economic benefits American should derive from Corps-administered sites. State, local, and private partners are also often unaware of the problems facing the Corps, even when they are lessees or working directly on Corps projects.

Solutions: Immediately augment communications assets and undertake a creative and cost-effective effort to significantly increase public awareness and visibility.

This can be done with a minimal increase in staffing and expenditures through the following strategies:

A) Increase public awareness of Corps recreation programs, including the increased awareness by Department of Defense and Armed Forces Commands:

- Develop materials to expose and gain support of military commanders and base personnel to the benefits and opportunities Corps recreation provides for soldiers and their families.
- Develop and distribute articles for every key enthusiast and stakeholder publication reaching audiences to whom the agency is relevant. Implement methods to measure changes in public awareness before and after publication. (The BLM did this for their 50th anniversary with remarkable results).
 - Work with leading publications such as BoatUS, Tread Lightly, Sportman's magazines and Highways (Good Sam Club) whose publications reach millions of households.
 - A realistic target would be to reach 10 million household by the end of 2008 and to increase public awareness of the role the Corps plays in

February 11, 2008

providing recreation opportunities across the nation by no less than 5 points from current levels.

- Work with other organizations that support on-line initiatives, such as the Recreation Boating and Fishing Foundation's takemefishing.org and the marine industry's sites, including discoverboating.org, which attract millions of unique website visits per year.
- Create tools to increase awareness of the Corps recreation and environmental attributes and their relevancy to the public.
 - Corps attributes such as miles of shoreline, miles of trails, number of state- and world-record catches from Corps lakes are very impressive. Expand public awareness through (a) retailers serving site visitors (such as Bass Pro) and through reality shows ranging from Amazing Race to Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?

B) Establish an alliance with National Geographic Society (NGS) through a new book in spring 2009 -- a Guide to America's Scenic Waterways and Water Places.

The new Guide complements the NGS "Guide to America's Scenic Highways and Byways" which is now in its third edition and is a top seller for NGS. NGS has plans to proceed with the book but will need partners to aid on content, sponsorships and/or advance purchases of the book, as the Federal Highway Administration did for the byways book. The National Marine Manufacturers Association and several state tourism organizations have expressed a willingness to work with USACE on this project.

C) Identify and seek support from celebrity Corps site users who can create media and public interest. We know of several prominent elected officials, including U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln, who are regular visitors and value time at Corps facilities. Similarly, there are top musicians, key sports figures, and widely-recognized outdoor sportsmen who are visitors, make their livelihood, or own homes along Corps managed waters.

D) Increase and expand the visibility of Corps partner and volunteer efforts:

An example is the contributions of volunteers and partners at Lake Quachita who leveraged \$10,000 of Corps funds to get \$800,000 of partner contributions to build a trail.

E) Promote Corps-developed GoogleEarth applications and other innovative technology for the public to get recreation information.

Collaborate with other Recreation groups to integrate Corps information into their internet efforts and promote public awareness of Corps lakes.

Update Division/District/Project websites with connections to Rec.gov.

2. Corps Plan for Enhanced Partnerships

Finding: The Corps has less robust and strategic relationships with key partners (stakeholders) interested in its recreation mission than many other federal agencies, which use a variety of advisory committees, foundations and other mechanisms to communicate and coordinate with constituencies. The Corps has made credible efforts in this area, including conducting listening sessions for stakeholders. Stronger regional and national partnerships between the agency and key groups are needed. The Corps has signed an MOU with the Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation, but its function and focus needs to be further developed.

Solutions: The new Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation should play a central role in an inventory of current and potential stakeholders, and identifying opportunities for cooperative actions. These activities should not require significant additional funds, but would require them to be of high priority.

A) Periodic Summit with Stakeholders:

- We recommend a periodic summit of senior Corps officials and key constituent groups in the recreation, tourism, public health and economic development arenas. It should be fundamentally different from past listening sessions: the agenda would be developed collaboratively through the new Foundation; focus on key future opportunities and concerns; highlight innovative partnerships, and; provide recommendations for improvements and change.
- Importantly, the participants in the Summit would not merely attend to be educated and informed – they would participate and engage in collaborative problem-solving with the agency.

B) Strengthen Communications with Allies and Partners: The agency should (1) seek out and improve opportunities for interaction through existing venues, like state tourism conferences, stakeholder conferences and meetings, and local community events, 2) develop tools in cooperation with the Foundation measure the results of partnership efforts.

3. Corps Participation in National “Children in Nature” Initiatives

Finding: Other federal agencies have publicly announced national commitments to support a variety of initiatives related to “children in nature”. There is ample evidence, that an entire generation of children will soon be separated from beneficial connections to nature and the outdoors with many resulting negative impacts to individuals and to society at large. The Corps lakes currently provide for local programs and initiatives that will get children outdoors, but more can and should be done at national and local levels.

Solutions: The Corps should play a meaningful role in the national movement to reconnect children and youth to nature and the outdoors. Corps facilities, lakes, and programs offer unique opportunities to families, organized groups,

intergenerational initiatives, and local and state governmental partners to get kids reconnected with nature.

A) Actively seek opportunities to encourage the use of Corps facilities, lands and water by children, youth and young adults. The Corps can do this by:

- Strategically plan how to engage youth and their parents in nature and environmental stewardship activities on Corps facilities, land and waters. Coordinate messaging with other agencies and organizations;
- Establish partnerships with organizations like the National Youth Marine Alliance which serves as an umbrella organization that supports a host of national and local organizations in their mission of growing the participation of youths in water-based activities;
- Capitalize on the unique opportunities Corps lakes provide for a variety of inexpensive, simple, safe and healthful nature discovery for children and youth, such as wildlife viewing and volunteer stewardship activities;
- With local and state government agency partners, lessees of Corps land and facilities, and qualified non-governmental organizations, engage hard to reach teens through adventure recreation, conservation, and environmental stewardship opportunities.

E) Participate actively in interagency efforts to develop an umbrella agreement for Children in Nature agency programs at Headquarters level.

F) Work with the Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation to identify complementary programs that meet the needs of both military families and the recreating public, thereby conserving scarce financial resources, especially at those lakes that have nearby military installations.

G) Forest use by Active, Retired and Reserve military/veterans and their families to sustain a healthy workforce and families.

4. Community Sustainability

Finding: The impact of Corps recreation sites on gateway communities is substantial, both economically and on quality of life, and will influence the sustainability of many communities impacted by changes in manufacturing, mining, agriculture and other basic industries. Elements of current project plans could boost the positive influence of the Corps on these communities and millions they serve. Yet, potential contributions to these communities are limited by Corps budgets for recreation infrastructure, management and communications. New tools which supplement appropriations are needed, from fees to partnership authorities. Many of the tools are successfully used by other federal agencies, including other DOD offices and programs.

Solutions: The Corps should aggressively explore use of existing authorities for innovative development and operation of recreation and visitor service infrastructure, including pilot efforts involving Non-Appropriated Funding Instrumentalities, Challenge Cost-Share Agreements and leasing, and should outline clearly to the Administration and Congress the improvements possible through expanded fee and concessions authorities which incorporate fee retention.

- A) The Corps should request and obtain a legal opinion regarding the authority to use **Non-Appropriated Funding Instrumentalities (NAFIs)** on lands it manages and, if determined to be applicable, designate not fewer than four sites for pilot efforts for this program.
- B) The Corps should elevate its request for inclusion in the **Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act** in its FY09 budget meetings and stress the likely consequences of recreation facility closures if such fee authority, parallel to that now enjoyed by all other major federal recreation facility operators, is not provided.
- C) The Corps should convene a meeting with local government officials, business and tourism industry leaders in one or more districts to discuss innovative ways to expand the benefits of Corps facilities to local communities. Among the possible outgrowths of the meeting would be local consideration of cost-sharing with local governments to build, maintain and expand Corps recreation based on innovative approaches by the local governments to fund their share.
- D) Enhance websites interconnectivity between the Corps and local government and local tourism entities, from shared webcams to information bases. State tourism agencies now spend \$300 million+ promoting visitation; the Corps should encourage an appropriate portion of these funds is used to highlight and promote Corps facilities.

5. Research Needs

Finding: The Corps needs to enhance research capability to effectively monitor and respond to changes in demographics and other factors that affecting recreation demand at Corps Lakes.

Solutions: Assess the role of Corps Lakes in supporting key recreation industries and delivering benefits to the American public.

- A) Work with program partners such as Reserve America, Recreation Boating and Fishing Foundation, National Marine Manufacturers Association, State Tourism Offices, and others to assess the impact of Corps lakes on the demand for boating, camping and fishing in key states where the Corps is a significant provider of outdoor recreation opportunities.

February 11, 2008

B) Identify the “return on investment” of facility modernization and other improvements in terms of recruiting new participants in key outdoor recreation pursuits and retaining active participants.

C) Work with universities and other research institutions to identify the benefits recreation opportunities Corps lakes provide to the individual, communities, the economy and environment.

D) Develop methods to use data and information on new technology platforms (podcasts, You Tube, Garmin, etc.)

E) Develop methods to measure increases in public awareness of the Corps (See Action #1.A)

The Corps of Engineers has a great history and future potential for meeting the needs of Americans for stress relief, healthier lifestyles, contacts with nature, and environmental stewardship.

We think the Corps needs help in growing support and tools to better meet the future challenges for America. Our group is committed to helping in whatever ways it can.

February 11, 2008

Appendix A

Participating Organizations in the Recreation Strategy Group

American Recreation Coalition

National Marine Manufacturers Association

National Parks and Recreation Association

National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds

Recreation Vehicle Industry Association

Association of Marina Industries

National Association of State Parks Directors

American Sport Fishing Association

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Professional Paddle Sports Association

Recreation Boating & Fishing Foundation

Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation

Boat US

Outdoor Alliance

American Hiking Society

Reserve America