

# ***RECREATION BUSINESS LINE*** ***Visitation Estimation & Reporting System***

## ***Follow-up Briefing to MG Grisoli***

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US Army Corps of Engineers  
**BUILDING STRONG®**



# ***History of Visitation Monitoring and Reporting***

*Visitation monitoring at individual projects began in 1940's*

*National reporting of visitation started ~1950*

- *Consisted of upward reporting of visitation as determined by the individual projects*

*Process of obtaining visitation estimates is decentralized*

- *Early years (through 1950's)*
  - ▶ *Projects recognized the value of automatic traffic counters*
  - ▶ *What comprised visitation and how traffic counts were translated into visitation estimates were determined separately by each project*
- *Middle years (1960's -1980's)*
  - ▶ *S. D. 97 (1962) and PL 89-72 (1965) elevated recreation to a project purpose*
  - ▶ *Several attempts to standardize the survey component of Corps visitation procedures*
- *Recent Years (since 1990)*
  - ▶ *Visitation Estimation and Reporting System (VERS)*
    - *Standardized tools and procedures provided by the national program*
    - *Implemented separately by each project*
  - ▶ *Produced best level of consistency to date*



# ***Evolution of Visitation Estimation and Reporting***

**1944** The Flood Control Act of 1944 gave USACE authority “to construct, maintain, and operate public park and recreation facilities in reservoir areas”.

**1950** 117 projects and 12M visits.

**1960** 195 projects and 85M visits.

**1962-** Recreation elevated to a project purpose with Senate Document 97 of 1962 and PL 89-72  
**1965** (Federal Water Projects Recreation Act) of 1965.

**1963** Standardized visitation survey methodology introduced at projects Corps-wide at the direction of Chief of Engineers.

**1969** Plan Formulation and Evaluation Studies (Recreation) described visitation estimation based on traffic meters and demonstrated use of standard survey practices.

In the Preface to a draft of one of these reports, Dale Crane recommended creation of a recreation research program aimed primarily at improving visitation estimation.

**1970** 332 projects and 216M visits.

**1978** Consulting firm report provided updated survey instrument and other improvements.

**1990** USACE introduced standardized data collection tools, survey practices, and reporting procedure, collectively known as VERS. 451 projects and 396M visits.

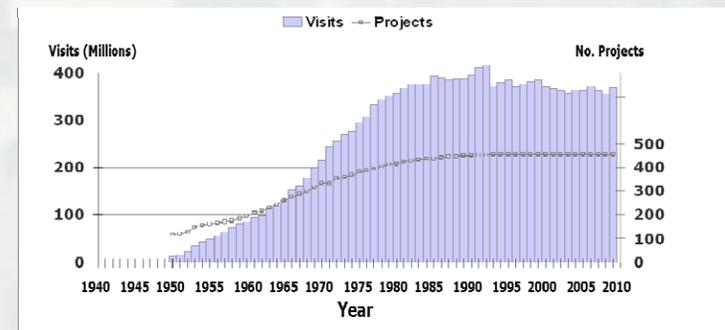


# Status of Visitation Monitoring and Reporting

## 2009 Project Visits

- Corps-managed recreation areas 148 Million
  - Outgrant partner-managed recreation areas 113 Million
  - Dispersed-use 108 Million
- 369 Million

Visits – a visit is defined as the entry by one person to a Corps project for recreation purposes for any length of time – 15 minutes to 14 days



## Issues

- **Effectiveness of monitoring program has probably declined**
  - Perceived low priority of visitation monitoring
  - Stagnant staffing / budgets and increased project responsibilities
  - Physical changes at recreation areas, but not in monitoring configurations
  - Loss of VERS knowledge at projects
- **Performance budgeting has renewed the interest in visitation**
  - Greatest at Corps-managed areas
  - Where budget and other management decisions are most greatly impacted by visitation
- **Lack of consistency from project to project remains an issue**
  - Both perception and reality
- **Better alignment needed between VERS and OMBIL**
  - OMBIL PSA's identify VERS visitation reporting targets (i.e., recreation areas)
  - Lack of consistency and stability in OMBIL PSA's adversely affects VERS Modernization
    - Stable PSA's needed before Next Generation VERS is implemented
    - OMBIL PDT currently evaluating needed OMBIL refinements
  - Dual data entry options (OMBIL and VERS) causes confusion and reporting inconsistencies



# The Way Ahead - VERS Program

*Continue our decentralized monitoring process*

- *Projects remain responsible for monitoring their own visitation*

*Further standardize methods to improve consistency*

- *Monitoring / metering practices at recreation areas*
- *Count visitation only where we have Title 36 authority*

*Focus primarily on visitation monitoring at Corps-managed recreation areas*

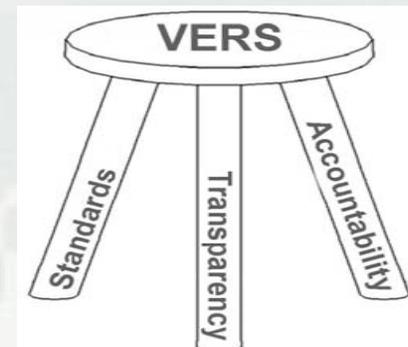
*Create an institutional framework to help achieve and sustain more consistent visitation estimates*

- **Transparency:** *Make current monitoring practices known to all.*
- **Standards:** *Clarify the procedures and practices everyone should follow.*
- **Accountability:** *Ensure procedures and practices adhere to standards.*

**VERS Area / Meter Inventory**

**Best Practices**

**VERS-CATT**  
(Coach, Assist and Train Team)



Institutional supports for VERS

*Invest in new visitation surveys to calibrate automatic traffic counts*



# ***Recommendations- VERS Program***

*Encourage support of VERS Modernization effort among Ops Chiefs in Divisions and Districts*

*Maintain access to the economical field survey personnel available through the Student Conservation Association (SCA) intern program*

*Incorporate visitation monitoring program into the Command inspection process*



# Talking Points- USACE Visitation

- USACE recreation projects are readily accessible to people
  - ▶ >90% of recreation projects are located within 50 mi of a Metropolitan Statistical Area
  
- USACE leads all federal agencies in reported visitation (2009)
  - ▶ USACE 369 M
  - ▶ National Park Service (NPS) 286 M
  - ▶ US Forest Service 174 M
  
- USACE visitors can choose between opportunities offered by different recreation providers
  - ▶ Corps-managed recreation areas 40% of visits
  - ▶ Outgrant-partner-managed recreation areas 31% of visits
  - ▶ Dispersed-use on USACE lands and waters 29% of visits
  
- How USACE visitation methods compare with those of other agencies
  - ▶ USACE & NPS – both employ traffic counters and calibration load-factors
    - USACE coordination less centralized - project based
    - NPS coordination more centralized - headquarters based
  - ▶ US Forest Service - based mainly on statistical visitation surveys



# ***Questions or Comments***

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