

## MEMORADUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Visitor Center Initiative (VCI) Briefing to MG Griffin

1. Those in attendance include:

MG Robert Griffin, Director of Civil Works  
Bruce Thornton, VCI Team Leader  
Greg Miller, VCI Team  
George Tabb, CECW-ON  
Sondra Hafling, CECW-ON  
Steve Austin, CECW-ON  
Judy Rice, CECW-ON  
Larry Lang, Acting CECW-O  
Homer Perkins, Acting CECW-PAO

2. The briefing began with an introduction by George Tabb in which he discussed the background of the Visitor Center Initiative. Bruce Thornton gave an overview of the team's report including an evaluation of the current visitor center program, and a discussion of the team's findings in 5 prioritized categories. Mr. Thornton was followed by a presentation on the proposed Corps Story exhibit and design concept by Greg Miller. A lake specific interactive video exhibit was demonstrated. Finally, specific requests were presented to MG Griffin. These specifics are located within the attached PowerPoint presentation slides under captions "Where Do We Go From Here?"

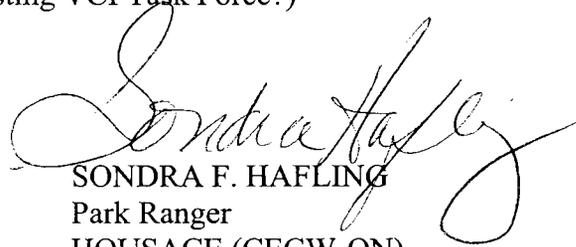
3. MG Griffin agreed that there needed to be consistency among visitor centers, VCs should be an integral part of the Corps Communication Strategy, and in telling the Corps Story. However, funding was an issue. "I totally agree that this is a great opportunity to tell the Corps story", stated Griffin. He further commented that this was a way to "capture the hearts and minds of the public" and "a step in the right direction". While showing interest in the program, he indicated a concern about what could be done if funding did not materialize. What programmatic actions can be taken to revitalize the program? He also questioned if there were some VCs that we should not be operating. The VCI team acknowledged that there were some that could be closed. Griffin asked, "With all these 'tanks' coming, which one do you 'attack' first". The overall answer from the group was the "Corps Story". Griffin asked that we pursue it, but with funding an issue, he would have to figure out how to make the production of the Corps Story happen. He did agree that other issues, listed in paragraph 4 below, could also be tackled.

4. The decision was made to follow up with a Decision Memo to MG Griffin to include five topics targeted for action:

- a) Pursue the Corps Story

- b) Update Visitor Center Standards. Define the Corps visitor center of the future and appropriate level of customer service. Establish benchmarks for future decision making.
- c) Conduct customer surveys in order to determine public needs and expectations. Use the standards and surveys to identify those centers that have the greatest potential to add value and are in need of modernization. Also identify those centers that significantly detract from the communication strategy and have the least potential to add value. They might be eliminated if modernization funds are not found—leave that job to “the team” to recommend either upgrade or elimination, understanding that some are just not worth the fight.
- d) Establish PDT for VC’s (re-charter existing VCI Task Force?)

Encl



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## ***The Visitor Center Initiative***

### ***"Visitor Centers of the Future"***

Evaluation, Analysis and  
Recommendations of the U.S. Army  
Corps of Engineers Visitor Center  
Program



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## ***Agenda***

- The Visitor Center Initiative
  1. Evaluation of the Current Visitor Center Program
  2. Telling the Corps Story
- Where Do We Go From Here?

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## ***Corps Visitor Center Background***

- Since the 1970's, 302 visitor centers established
  - 7-Type A Regional Visitor Center
  - 53-Type B Project Visitor Center
  - 242-Type C Visitor Information Center



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## ***Visitor Center Initiative Background***

- A DCG initiative; MG Fuhrman May 1999
- \$250K provided for assessment
- Multidiscipline field team established
- Study initiated May 2001
- Report completed Oct 2002

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## ***"The Bottom Line"***

*The Corps visitor centers should serve as an integral part of its communication strategy. Yet, they are in a state of decline and not kept up-to-date with current needs. This has resulted in a program of lost opportunities.*

*Conclusions, Evaluation and Analysis of  
the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Visitor Center Program, 2002*

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## ***Findings and Recommendations***

- 23 critical issues grouped into 5 prioritized categories
- Funding
  - Customer service
  - Administration
  - Regulation/policy
  - Message



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## Funding

- Findings
  - Flat or declining maintenance funding and stiff competition for special item funds
  - Large backlog of needed repairs and updates (50% or more of exhibits need updating).



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## Customer Service

- Findings
  - Lack of a process to measure customer satisfaction
  - Visitor centers locations determined without regard for customer needs

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## Administration

- Findings
  - Lack of information exchange and no established mechanism for sharing "lessons learned"
  - Shortage of in-house expertise in exhibit planning and design
  - Non-compliance with universal design standards

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## Regulation and Policy

- Findings
  - Partnering constraints present barriers
  - Visitor center types are defined by criteria unrelated to needs

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## Message

- Findings
  - Corps message is delivered inconsistently
  - Exhibits lack central or focused theme



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## The Corps Message

- "VCs lacked interactive displays with no focus on the overall role of the Corps,"  
MG Fuhrman May 1999
- Committee Findings
  - Static displays that do not provoke interest
  - Focus on history not present day missions
  - Existing information viewed as propaganda
  - Exhibits dated and worn out

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## The "Corps Story"

- Committee contracted for design of an interactive audiovisual display that can be easily adapted to a variety of venues and tailored to include local issues

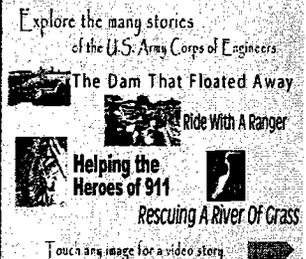
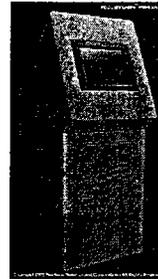


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## Sample of Corps Story Approach



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## Where Do We Go From Here?

- Revise the VC regulation through establishment of a Project Delivery Team
  - Integrate visitor center, interpretive services, cooperative associations and partnership functions
  - Implement visitor center surveys
  - Establish VC standards including criteria to assess demand for visitor facilities

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## Where Do We Go From Here?

- Fund renovation of visitor centers to meet revised standards
  - Submit visitor center modernization proposals which are ranked based on demand criteria and partnering involvement
  - Fund top ranked proposals to encourage VCs to meet revised standards (\$2.5 M over 5-years)
- Modify Grant/Coop Agreement Policy to attract new partners and take our commitment to the next level

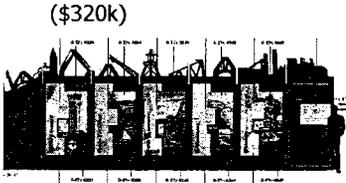
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## Where Do We Go From Here?

- As a part of watershed/riverbasin projects, partner with sponsors to develop VCs
- Fund to produce a Corps Story exhibit (\$320k)



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## The Future Proposed Vision, Mission, Strategy

### Vision

Provide visitor center facilities that engage the public in an entertaining and educational experience that encourages a broader understanding and appreciation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the project.

### Mission

Insure effective communication between the Corps and the visiting public through the Visitor Center Program. This is accomplished by presenting a focused story that provokes interest, relates to the mission, and reveals why the mission is important to the public.

### Strategy

Integrate visitor centers into Corps corporate communication strategy and serve local community needs through partnering.

*Either We Do It Right, or Don't Do It At All*

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## *Questions*

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