

## Corps Foundation Volunteer Excellence Coin Nomination

### Nominees:

The following volunteers have supported The Dalles Dam Eagle Watch since it began in 2011: (NOTE: when Linda Turner retired, Bambi took over the Raptor Education programming).

1. Carolyn Purcell, Executive Director of the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center and Museum (2011-present)\*
2. Linda Turner, U.S. Forest Service retired park ranger (2011-2014)
3. Bambi Foy, Raptor Education Coordinator for the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center and Museum (2015-present)
4. Linda Davis, Volunteer in the raptor education department of the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center and Museum (2011-present)
5. Dr. Jean Cypher, D.V.M., Director of Rowena Wildlife Clinic (2011-present)\*
6. Ron Kikel, Information Assistant, U.S. Forest Service (2011-present)

### Summary:

Since 2011, Corps park rangers at The Dalles Lock and Dam have partnered with volunteers (listed above) from the U.S. Forest Service Mount Hood Ranger District, the Rowena Wildlife Clinic, and The Dalles Discovery Center to provide conservation and environmental education to the surrounding local communities. The platform for this partnership is an annual special event, the Eagle Watch, hosted at The Dalles Dam Visitor Center. The Eagle Watch is a unique winter recreation opportunity for people to witness bald eagles in the wild and learn about their role and importance in the ecosystem. In addition to seeing Bald Eagles, our volunteers bring live raptors for show and tell. Visitors can see a Great Horned Owl, American Kestrel and Red-Tailed Hawk, among others, and have a chance to ask questions and learn more about them. This combination is a special experience for anyone. Our dedicated volunteers were and are instrumental in making this event possible by providing creative, interpretive, live raptor education and staff support year after year.

### Background:

As the population of winter roosting eagles to the green space below The Dalles Dam has grown, so have the number of visitors. This is the densest population of wintering bald eagles along the Lower Columbia River. As such, Corps park rangers and volunteers from the partnering agencies saw it as an opportunity to reach visitors.

The result is a very popular annual event that provides an off-season boost to our local tourism economy and an increase in visitation to our visitor center, nearby parks and The Discovery Center. Thus far, an estimated 4,600 people have attended the yearly, one day event. However, eagles can be seen mid-December through mid-February, so our overall visitation has increased

during that time frame. This can be attributed to the hard work our volunteers have put in, to promote not just the event but **seasonal** wildlife watching opportunities as well.

Volunteers promote internally, through social media, newsletters and e-blasts and externally through local media, live face book posts and radio interviews. Consequently, an extension of hours to The Dalles Dam Visitor Center took effect this year, with doors open on weekends during the month of January to meet demand. It is anticipated that winter hours will continue to be the norm in the future.

Furthermore, each agency representative (volunteer) is knowledgeable in Corps missions and local history. They are the boots on the ground resource for information, able to relay key messages and answers to visitor's questions while performing roving interpretation. This helps contribute to public understanding of Corps missions, particularly in the area of natural resource protection, conservation and restoration.

Additionally, these same volunteers are working with the Corps to expand similar environment education and recreation opportunities to our local schools by implementing a new Bonkers to Birds pilot program, (modeled after a successful program on the Mississippi River). This program will include a new partner, the Columbia Gorge Ecology Institute. It combines classroom education with eagle watching field trips to The Dalles Dam Visitor Center and The Discovery Center and will target 4<sup>th</sup> graders as part of the Every Kid in a Park initiative. It will also include a field project, to be executed by the students, such as installation of eagle perches at Westrick Park or construction and installation of bird and duck boxes.

What volunteers began as a one-time event for our agencies has snowballed into an annual expectation by the community. It continues to grow, thanks to our excellent volunteers.

