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The Corps Foundation Promotes Recreation, Visitor Safety and Visitor Education at USACE Sites

By [Amanda Keith](#) posted 9 days ago

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages 5,000 recreation areas at 403 lakes and rivers across the country.

In September 2006, a group of retired U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) employees and leaders from the

private sector came together to create a nonprofit that would support lakes and waterways across the country.

An official nonprofit partner of the USACE, The Corps Foundation (Foundation) developed out of a growing concern for decreases in federal funds for USACE sites and with an interest in supporting these programs and facilities to keep these treasured resources vibrant.

The nonprofit now operates as a volunteer-run organization with a mission to support USACE lakes and waterways, promote visitor education, visitor safety, engage partners to rebuild aging infrastructure and improve outdoor recreation opportunities at USACE sites.

Restoring Locks and Enhancing a Fish Ladder View Room in Seattle

The Foundation has partnered with Discover Your Northwest (DYNW) and the USACE to restore and enhance Hiram M. Chittenden Locks (Ballard Locks) in downtown Seattle.

Rich Deline, a Founding Director of the Foundation, said Ballard Locks is a “wonderland” in an urban environment but that its critical maintenance needs are in the range of \$40 to \$50 million.

“It’s a unique place to escape from the city but, beneath the surface, the locks system is crumbling. The visitor

areas are also outdated and they need major upgrades,” Rich said.

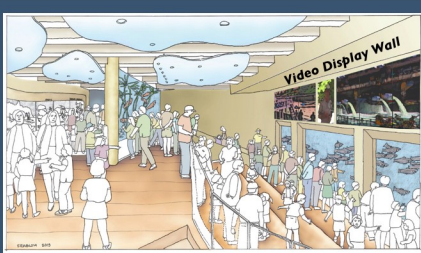
Each year, over a million people visit the lock’s underground fish ladder viewing room to watch salmon from Puget Sound swim up the ladders and through the locks to Salmon Bay. The viewing room includes large windows that show the fish ladders underwater. On a typical summer day, the room can hold up to 400 people.

The Foundation wants to educate the public about the purpose of the fish ladders and provide a better educational experience.

Fish Ladder Viewing Room - **Phase I**

World Class Year Round **STREAM**[™] Educational Center

- S** - Salmon & Science
- T** - Technology
- R** - Resource Management
- E** - Engineering & Environment
- A** - American Indian Arts & Cultures
- M** - Marine Industry & Mammals



Phase I (Starting Winter 2017-18)

- Improve entrance, lighting, use of space and acoustics
- Modern accurate interpretive displays
- Digitally updatable information to educate visitors on all relevant subjects connected to the Locks:

Plans for the new fish ladder viewing room include a video wall, improved interpretive displays and better lighting.

In partnership with DYNW, The Foundation has committed to a long-term project to raise at least two million dollars for the space over a multi-year timeframe.

“Discover Your Northwest has been key to getting this whole project off the ground by providing base funding,” Rich said.

As a nonprofit cooperating association that partners with land management agencies, DYNW operates onsite educational bookstores on public lands and uses proceeds from sales to fund public land events and programs.

Since 2012, DYNW has provided funding to create a Master Plan that will totally rejuvenate the viewing area.

Jim Adams, Executive Director of DYNW explained how partnering with The Foundation has been an effective way to raise funds for Ballard Locks:

“The Corps Foundation brings a national scope along with contacts and credibility to the USACE. At Discover Your Northwest, we bring the local contacts and the robust fiscal management skills needed for a joint capitol campaign of this size. Having both of our nonprofits listed on grant applications and fundraising letters delivers an effective 1-2 punch for this project,” Jim said.

Now with a plan in place, The Foundation and DYNW have gained support from local tribes and the state of Washington. To date, they have raised close to \$1 million.

Rich explained that in addition to repairing the viewing room, they also hope to raise funds to rebuild the visitor center and fund repairs for the botanical garden.

“We’re focusing our efforts on improving the visitor experience and educating the public because they are the key to this site’s success and to the conservation of our natural resources,” Rich said.

The Corps Foundation’s Focus on Water Safety

Since 2015, the Foundation has received four different grants totaling \$700,000 from the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, administered by the U.S. Coast Guard, to develop, enhance, and promote a multi-year campaign entitled, “Life Jackets Worn...Nobody Mourns.”

The campaign primarily targets adult men, ages 20 – 60 years old because, based on USACE statistical trends, 86% of those who drown on USACE lakes and waterways are men and 88% were not wearing life jackets at the time of the incidents.

Rachel Garren, Special Programs Director for the Foundation who manages these grants said that people are surprised when they hear those statistics.

“Most people don’t know how common drowning incidents are,” she said.

Through the campaign, the Foundation has developed fifteen video public service announcements (PSAs), audio PSAs, posters, vinyl banners, blog posts, tailgate wraps for USACE trucks, and two mobile games called

"Lake Guard" and "LJ vs The Lake." These informational materials and games are available and made free to the public at PleaseWearIt.com. In addition, the Foundation has taken the campaign to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and are giving away campaign t-shirts and inflatable life jackets as part of a Life Jacket Challenge.

According to Rachel, this campaign would not have been possible without the USACE National Operations Center for Water Safety who originally requested the Foundation's help in seeking additional funds through a grant that only nonprofits are eligible to receive.



USACE staff and volunteers pose with campaign banner purchased by the Foundation.

Rachel also explained that men often do not wear life jackets because they typically find them uncomfortable to wear.

“We have done several focus groups with men who say that if they are not required by law to wear the life jackets, then they probably are not going to wear them. However, when they hear the statistics and common causes of drownings, they become much more interested in what kinds of life jackets exist for different types of water-based activities,” Rachel said.

In recent blogposts, the campaign has focused on educating the public about different styles of life jackets, including belt-type inflatable life jackets that are less constricting.

“We’re trying to spread the message that life jackets save lives,” Rachel said, “Wearing a life jacket on a boat or swimming in a lake is just as important as wearing a seatbelt in a car.”

Volunteers Make an Impact at USACE Sites

As a national partner to a federal agency that manages more than 5,000 recreation areas at 403 lakes and rivers, USACE relies heavily on volunteers to help maintain and protect the lakes and parks they operate.

The Foundation, recognizing the importance of volunteers and the exceptional contributions they make, has been the proud sponsor of their Enduring Service Award and Volunteer Excellence coin, which recognize

volunteers who have done exceptional work to support USACE.



USACE volunteers provide visitors with information on the lake's recreation facilities.

Greg Miller, Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Foundation, explained that volunteers are critical because of the large scope of USACE sites and

because the agency does not have the funds to carry out all of the recreation activities the public desires.

“There is a large economic component to these sites with 90% of USACE lakes and waterways accessible to a metro area. That means there is a lot of opportunity, a lot of year-round recreation and a huge need to support those activities,” Greg said.

Each year, visitors spend an estimated \$10.7 billion at USACE sites but the USACE budget for recreation is only about \$250 million, he explained.

“Over 45,000 volunteers donated over 1.5 million hours of service annually to help USACE meet its recreation and stewardship goals,” Greg said. “That’s why it’s so important that our Foundation celebrates them.”

To learn more about The Corps Foundation and their efforts to promote visitor enjoyment and celebrate volunteers at USACE sites, visit their website at <http://corpsfoundation.org>.

Permalink

<http://www.publiclandsalliance.org/blogs/amanda-keith/2018/07/18/corps-foundation-promotes>