

# HOT SPOT

## ANALYSIS





## HOT SPOT ANALYSIS

**Team:** Becca and Luke McGraw  
**Location:** Summersville Lake, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
2,700 acres, 600,000+ yearly visitors  
Summersville, West Virginia  
**Dates:** 08/10 - 08/15  
**Year:** 2022  
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### NARRATIVE

In 1966 when Summersville Dam was completed and dedicated, the resulting lake was primarily conceptualized as a flood prevention strategy, but this soon changed when its enormous potential for outdoor recreation was realized. Its deep, clear waters and immense size (it is the largest lake in West Virginia) made it the perfect haven for boaters, paddlers, scuba divers, and swimmers. The thickly wooded shores quickly became a refuge for campers, hikers, and picnickers. Rock climbers also began to flock to the area, enticed by the bullet-hard cliffs which surround most of the lake. The construction of the dam also had the unforeseen consequence of making the Gauley River one of the best rafting rivers in the world. In light of this huge influx of recreators, the Army Corps of Engineers adjusted its mandate at the lake to include recreation management and conservation.

This is fortunate since such high use has brought its share of negative impacts. Litter from picnickers, anglers, and partiers washes up all around the lake. Social trails beneath popular climbing routes and undesignated campsites on remote beaches have caused harmful erosion, and improper disposal of human waste in these areas presents a real threat to water quality. With over 600,000 people visiting the lake each year, these impacts have the potential to get out of control and damage this beautiful place.

The implementation of Leave No Trace will provide the Army Corps with an accessible framework which will empower visitors to become stewards of the lake. This will ease the strain on Army Corps resources and ensure that Summersville Lake will remain a beautiful place to recreate for generations to come.

## **SECTION 1: SITE/AGENCY BACKGROUND**

### **Visitors**

Visitors to Summersville Lake do not fall into one specific category. Many users come directly from the local area while another large portion of visitors are more regional, hailing from surrounding states. Since the designation of nearby New River Gorge as a National Park, the lake has also received more visitors from more distant parts of the U.S. as well as a growing number of international visitors.

Summersville Lake has a long history of recreational use by a variety of groups. It is a popular spot for boating, picnicking, fishing, and camping, and with over 500 climbing routes, the lake is considered a world class climbing destination. It also serves as a secondary attraction for rafters who flock to the area during white water season in the fall.

### **Impacts**

#### Litter

Litter is perhaps the most obvious and immediate issue. Popular picnic areas and shorelines must be frequently cleaned to avoid rapid accumulation. This issue has been long-standing and has increased in recent years as use has continued to rise. Trash bag dispensers were placed in popular picnic spots, but this has not achieved the desired result, because visitors frequently fill the trash bag and leave it on the shore leading to wildlife impacts as well.

#### Erosion

Erosion is also a pressing concern with undesignated campsites in remote areas and numerous social trails in fragile riparian areas beneath popular climbing crags. Since crags are located directly adjacent to the shore, vegetation loss in these areas has been significant with serious consequences for the shoreline. This necessitated the construction of several, large gabions under the most iconic climbing spot at the lake (The Coliseum). Previous attempts to utilize trail closures were unsuccessful in large part due to the habitual use of these areas.

#### Human Waste

Improper human waste disposal in more remote areas also presents a threat to water quality. Most climbing areas are in remote, riparian areas with no access to bathrooms which has led to growing waste issues. The same issues are also present in undesignated campsites and trails. Efforts are in progress to install WAG bag dispensers in climbing areas, but this project is currently in the funding stage.

### **Management Frameworks**

The Army Corps utilizes its own management framework which relies on long-term resource monitoring and community input. Every two years members of the recreating public are asked for feedback concerning their experience at the lake, and every twenty-five years the Army Corps undertakes an in-depth review of the state of the lake. Leave No Trace is currently not a part of this framework.

## **SECTION 2: LEAVE NO TRACE ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

*For this section, please reference the In Every Park Assessment found on the last page of this analysis.*

### **Staff**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 4*

#### Current Conditions

Staff at Summersville Lake are largely unfamiliar with Leave No Trace. No staff members have received training at either the Trainer or Master Educator level.

#### Recommendations

In order to accomplish the recommendations outlined in this analysis and perpetuate the efforts of the Hot Spot, it is important to ensure knowledge of the Leave No Trace curriculum and practices is institutionalized. The best way to do this is to have multiple staff formally trained at a high level. These staff can then lead the efforts to incorporate Leave No Trace into other aspects of programming and messaging at the lake, as well as provide in-house training to other staff, volunteers, and partners.

Leave No Trace recommends that all staff members at Summersville Lake take the [Online Awareness Workshop](https://lnt.org/courses/online_awareness_take_action_html5/#/) (https://lnt.org/courses/online\_awareness\_take\_action\_html5/#/) to gain general familiarity with Leave No Trace. Additionally, multiple staff should be formally trained in Leave No Trace at the Trainer (16-hour) level. To perpetuate these trainings and make them a regular part of staff development, Leave No Trace also recommends that at least one staff member be trained at the Master Educator (5-day) level to then be able to run in-house courses and continue annual training events.

### **Volunteers**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 1*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

#### Current Status

Summersville Lake is fortunate to have an active volunteer network with a variety of sources. Some volunteers work directly with the Army Corps, accompanying rangers during their shifts and undertaking Army Corps-directed service projects (i.e. clean-ups and trail maintenance). Various other organizations (i.e. The Access Fund and NRAC) also coordinate volunteer efforts at the lake. With the exception of one joint event held annually, all of the volunteer efforts are run independently with little coordination between groups.

#### Recommendations

Leave No Trace recommends that the volunteer program at Summersville Lake be expanded. An increase in volunteer numbers would ease the burden on the few rangers and instill more community participation in the stewardship of Summersville Lake. Providing more opportunities to volunteer would help to involve more community members in the program and would make a tangible difference in the integrity of the lake. All of these goals would be

facilitated by increased coordination among all the organizations running volunteer efforts at Summersville Lake. Such cooperation would focus volunteer efforts and result in more efficient and strategic volunteer programming.

Leave No Trace recommends that the Army Corps ask that all of their volunteers take the Leave No Trace Online Awareness Course as part of their training. We also recommend that some of these volunteers be focused primarily on education, either at popular trail heads, or other high profile spots like Pirate's Cove or Salmon Run. This would be especially impactful during high-use times such as weekends and holidays in the same way pop-up education is utilized by the Access Fund's Climbing Stewards. Their approach is very effective in reaching the climbing community and could be adapted beyond exclusively climbing focused education for use with all visitors to the area. Research has shown that contact with a uniformed volunteer or staff member is one of the most valuable types of visitor interactions (Hendricks, 1999; Hendricks et al., 2001; Kidd et al, 2015; Oliver, et al., 1985; Stewart, et al., 2000; Widner & Roggenbuck, 2000).

### **Training Opportunities**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 1*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 1*

### Current Status

Currently no Leave No Trace training is offered to staff or volunteers at Summersville Lake. Trainings are primarily geared towards water safety.

### Recommendations

We recommend that the Army Corps make Leave No Trace a regular component of annual training for both full-time and seasonal staff. This will give staff the tools to discuss impacts and incorporate Leave No Trace into their work effectively and consistently. While in-person training would be most effective, this can also be done using online courses.

In order to foster more collaboration and ensure a shared knowledge of Leave No Trace, we recommend that the Army Corps host an annual training and invite representatives from the businesses who operate on the lake as well as from the city of Summersville and other key partner organizations to attend. This would not only provide various stakeholders with the opportunity to become familiar with Leave No Trace at a high level, but would present the chance to build working relationships and shared understanding of the issues Summersville Lake is facing.

Leave No Trace also recommends continued training and workshops for volunteers, camp hosts, and park staff on the Authority of the Resource technique in particular. Regular training in this communication tactic creates the opportunity to workshop Summersville-specific talking points (i.e. cliff jumping or undesignated camp site use), to coach participants away from an injunctive approach, and to practice this technique in role play activities. In addition, an area-specific list of talking points that convey vital rules, regulations, and recommendations, as well as a quick stewardship message, can be helpful for staff and

volunteers. A hard copy of these talking points could be kept with the staff and volunteer supplies and be continually updated to address current issues and impacts.

### **On-Site Messaging**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

#### Current Status

On-site messaging at Summersville Lake is currently limited. Existing signage focuses primarily on safety regulations, and many popular trails and recreation areas are not marked by signage at all. Leave No Trace is referenced on one trash bag dispenser, but this is the extent of current messaging implementation.

#### Recommendations

Leave No Trace recommends that signage at Summersville Lake be updated and expanded to incorporate site-specific Leave No Trace guidance. Installing new trailhead and recreation area kiosks would provide an important messaging touchpoint to visitors. These should include the most important information for visiting the area and practicing Leave No Trace. Because of the growing number of international visitors, major kiosks should work to incorporate visual signage whenever possible. To allow for multiple translations, the sign should include a QR code that links to the information in other languages, and any other helpful information. Because Summersville is located predominantly within cell service, utilizing QR codes and online information will allow the Army Corps to easily update things, and allow visitors to take this information with them.

Additionally, more signage is needed in problem areas. The installation of permanent signage at popular cliff jumping sites would help to address this ongoing issue. Warning visitors of the risks and consequences of cliff jumping as they are considering jumping would act as a strong deterrent. Additional signage is also recommended in high traffic climbing areas. Currently, many of these areas are only accessible via unmarked trails. Installing signage at these trailheads would improve accessibility and limit further undesigned trail proliferation.

Furthermore, To help visitors understand what trails are undesigned and not supposed to be used, the Army Corps should install temporary signage marking these areas. Ideally, these should be used in conjunction with volunteer projects that brush in and disguise these undesigned trails. Potential messages could include:

- Not a Trail: Give plants a chance. Area closed for rehabilitation.
- Not a Trail: Prevent erosion and keep areas open by staying on trail.

## **Educational Materials**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

### Current Status

Current educational materials at Summersville Lake are primarily geared towards informing visitors of rules and regulations as well as water safety instructions. Informational materials are available at some of the most popular trailheads, but Leave No Trace is not yet incorporated into these materials. Since there is no central visitor center at Summersville Lake, visitors often seek information at campgrounds and gateway businesses, but as yet, no materials which include Leave No Trace have been developed for distribution in these locations.

### Recommendations

Leave No Trace recommends that the Army Corps work to incorporate more direct reference to site specific Leave No Trace information upon their next printing of educational materials such as the lake map, trail maps, water safety pamphlets and other handouts. We also recommend that the Army Corps explore what other educational materials may be helpful to visitors. Materials such as activity-specific handouts that can be downloaded on the website or shared at campgrounds and gateway businesses could provide valuable information in a clear and easy to understand format. As new resources are created, they should be built to include site specific Leave No Trace information in tandem.

While the 7 Principles are helpful and provide a consistent message, it is also important to make things easy for visitors to understand and implement. The Army Corps should think about the need-to-knows for their visitors and work to include these messages whenever Leave No Trace is mentioned. By incorporating more interpretation into educational materials and focusing on the why and the how for protecting the lake, visitors will be more empowered to not only learn and recognize the 7 Principles of Leave No Trace, but put them into action at Summersville Lake.

## **Online Information**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 1*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 1*

### Current Status

Leave No Trace has not yet been incorporated into the majority of online information regarding Summersville Lake. The Army Corps web page contains little information about the lake and includes no reference to Leave No Trace. Some Leave No Trace guidance is available to the climbing community through Army Corps partners like the Access Fund. The Army Corps does have a presence on Facebook, but according to nation-wide policy, this is the only platform permitted for official use.

Superb water quality and sheer sandstone cliffs make Summersville Lake a unique place to visit. West Virginia's largest lake; Summersville Lake has over 2,800 acres of water and 60 miles of shoreline. Boating, water-skiing, swimming, fishing for large- and smallmouth bass, walleye, panfish, and catfish, (trout are stocked below the dam in the spring and fall) scuba diving, picnicking, hunting, and biking are the favorite activities enjoyed by nearly one million visitors annually. Technical rock climbing and whitewater rafting are available year round, with scheduled whitewater releases below the dam on the world class Gauley River in September and October. Adjacent to the lake is Mountain Lake Campground, with cabins, camping & RV hookups and many other conveniences for guests. Sarge's Dive Shop and the lake's marina are located on the lake with grocery stores, restaurants, and service stations located nearby in Summersville.



Related Links:

[Check out some fast facts about Summersville Lake](#)

<https://www.summersvillewv.org/summersville-lake/>

[https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g59565-d12832322-Reviews-Summersville\\_Lake-Summersville\\_West\\_Virginia.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g59565-d12832322-Reviews-Summersville_Lake-Summersville_West_Virginia.html)

<https://www.recreation.gov/camping/gateways/333>

### Recommendations

Providing visitors with information before they recreate is key in minimizing impacts. One way to do this is to increase online communication regarding Leave No Trace and recreation impacts. By utilizing the Army Corps website and Facebook page, as well as identifying other online communication opportunities, the Army Corps can create more opportunities for visitors to gather information before their trip.

The Army Corps' web page should include robust information concerning site-specific Leave No Trace guidance, and it should provide visitors with sufficient information to plan their trip to the lake. The Army Corp should work to fill these gaps on their website to ensure that visitors have access to the most important information regarding recreation impacts at Summersville Lake and how to avoid them using Leave No Trace.

As staff time allows, it would be worth reaching out to prominent websites that talk about Summersville Lake with Leave No Trace information for the area. Since the lake is heavily promoted by a variety of sources (i.e. specific activity group pages and West Virginia tourism initiatives on the local and state level), promoting Leave No Trace through these sources would have an enormous reach.

The Army Corps should work Leave No Trace education specific posts into regular rotation on Facebook to create awareness and a culture of Leave No Trace. Interacting with other



popular Facebook pages in the area and providing them with Leave No Trace information would help to solidify Leave No Trace as a crucial part of visiting Summersville Lake.

We also recommend that the Army Corps encourage other stakeholders and partners to include more Leave No Trace information on their websites by providing some language that could be included. This information should be site specific and relevant to the partner's group.

## **Programs**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 3*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 3*

### Current Status

Army Corps programming at Summersville Lake is predominantly geared towards water safety and does not include Leave No Trace information or interpretive information about the lake itself. The Access Fund does run very consistent weekly climber outreach coffee events at popular trailheads which do include Leave No Trace information in the form of a general introduction to the Seven Principles and climbing specific Leave No Trace guidance.

### Recommendations

It is highly recommended that the Army Corps expand programming at Summersville Lake to include more interpretive program opportunities. Many impacts stem from visitors' lack of knowledge concerning both the ecology of the lake and the consequences of their actions. By filling these gaps in understanding, the Army Corps would proactively address impacts and empower visitors to become educated stewards of this resource.

In order to best utilize staff time, the Army Corps should focus programs on the most popular days and times, and expand programming over time utilizing volunteers whenever possible. There could be long term potential for utilizing trained volunteers as part of interpretive programming as well.

Leave No Trace information should also be implemented in all existing water safety programs. This will help create a culture of Leave No Trace and create opportunities for visitor education. Focusing on relevant impacts will ensure the effectiveness of this education. Activities and resources that were modeled in the Effective Communication of Leave No Trace Workshop during the activation week can be utilized during any type of program to build Leave No Trace into the work the Army Corps is already doing. Volunteer projects, special events, and other types of programs should also be included in this.

Leave No Trace recommends that the Army Corps put together basic Leave No Trace talking points to be included in all public programs, with the potential for more to be included as needed. This could be as simple as having all program leaders go through the 7 Principles hand signals. This helps to make Leave No Trace a part of any and all ranger led activities visitors may do. It is also recommended that this practice be expanded to include all partner and volunteer projects as well.

## **Youth Focus**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

### Current Status

Youth programming at Summersville Lake takes the form of a partnership program with local schools. Currently 12 schools have formally joined this program. As part of the partnership, a ranger visits each school and teaches a water safety lesson. Leave No Trace is not yet a part of this program.

### Recommendations

Leave No Trace recommends that the Army Corps further incorporate Leave No Trace into all current and future youth focused programs through the use of activities and resources that were shared during the Introductory Workshop. Resources such as Bigfoot's Playbook should be utilized to create dedicated Leave No Trace lessons and incorporate into other youth programs like the school visits and junior ranger program. Teaching youth Leave No Trace directly empowers them to become stewards and share the information with their families, so it is recommended that the Army Corps develop more youth specific programming to reach this crucial audience.

## **Partnerships**

*Pre-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

*Post-Hot Spot Rubric Score: 2*

### Current Status

Summersville Lake is fortunate to have a wide variety of partnerships with other organizations dedicated to the protection of the lake. These take the form of activity specific groups like NRAC and the Access Fund as well as more general recreation NGOs like Active Southern West Virginia. The Army Corps also manages beneficial partnerships with local businesses who operate on the lake.

### Recommendations

A high level of Leave No Trace implementation should be required of all Army Corps partners who work within the protected area of Summersville Lake. Partners who lead climbing or water based activities should also attend Leave No Trace training and work minimum impact education into their programs to spread information to visitors. This would primarily include information on sticking to durable surfaces, disposing of all waste appropriately, and being considerate of the many user groups in this busy area.

The Army Corps should also work to expand partnerships with local businesses and hotels. Providing these spaces with Leave No Trace information, QR codes, or signs would be a powerful way to reach many visitors to the area. These businesses have a vested interest in minimizing impacts to the lake and making sure visitors to the area have an enjoyable visit.

Because of the high emphasis on promoting tourism in West Virginia as a whole, it would be extremely beneficial to formalize partnerships with local and state tourism boards to ensure consistent Leave No Trace messaging. This would provide a powerful opportunity to reach the growing number of non-local visitors with Leave No Trace guidance before they arrive.

Throughout the Hot Spot activation week, the Army Corps of Engineers and many of its partners had the opportunity to have discussions about visitor created impacts, challenges, and ideas for addressing them. These discussions were incredibly valuable, and the work detailed in this analysis will take continued collaboration.

Leave No Trace recommends that stakeholders at Summersville Lake continue these conversations by forming a Leave No Trace steering committee with representatives from a variety of partner organizations and businesses. This committee could meet as needed to continue discussions about visitor created impacts and work to create unified messaging and education. By sharing resources and workload, all interested entities would be much better equipped to address impacts, and by utilizing a unified approach, visitors' responses will be improved.

### **Hot Spot Metrics**

Total number of events: 6

Impressions: 7015

Touchpoints (number of individuals with whom the Hot Spot reached directly): 137

Volunteer hours: 24

Number of Volunteers: 8

Measures of service:

- Pounds of trash removed: 30
- Number of campfire rings dismantled: 1

### **Photos:**

<https://www.flickr.com/gp/77476952@N04/4YUdvdY3ri>

## References

Hendricks, W. W. (1999). Persuasive Communication And Grade Level Effects On Behavioral Intentions Within A Wilderness Education Program. *International Journal Of Wilderness*, 5(2), 21-25.

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Kidd, A. M., Monz, C., D'Antonio, A., Manning, R. E., Reigner, N., Goonan, K. A., & Jacobi, C. (2015). The effect of minimum impact education on visitor spatial behavior in parks and protected areas: An experimental investigation using GPS-based tracking. *Journal of environmental management*, 162, 53-62.

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# In Every Park Assessment

Site Name: Summersville Lake

Agency:

Date:

	Criteria				Pts.
	4	3	2	1	
<b>STAFF</b>	Multiple full-time staff who are a combination of Leave No Trace Master Educators and Leave No Trace Trainers	At least one full-time staff member who is a Leave No Trace Master Educator or a Leave No Trace Trainer	At least one full-time or part-time staff member who is Leave No Trace-trained (Leave No Trace Awareness, Trainer or Master Educator)	No staff formally trained in Leave No Trace	(x2) 4
<b>VOLUNTEERS</b>	Volunteer organization(s) working with agency has multiple members who are a combination of Leave No Trace Master Educators and Trainers	Volunteer organization(s) working with agency has at least one Leave No Trace Master Educator or a Leave No Trace Trainer able to provide education	Volunteer organization(s) working with agency has at least one volunteer trained in Leave No Trace and is able to provide education to public	Volunteer organization(s) working with agency has no members formally trained in Leave No Trace	1 2
<b>TRAINING OPPS</b>	Site facilitates or makes available annual Leave No Trace Trainer Courses and Awareness Workshops for staff and/or volunteers	Site facilitates or makes available annual Leave No Trace Awareness Workshops for staff and/or volunteers	Site occasionally facilitates or makes available Leave No Trace training opportunities for staff and/or volunteers	Site provides no formal Leave No Trace training opportunities for staff or volunteers	1
<b>ON SITE MESSAGING</b>	Site has multiple kiosks, signs, videos, and other on-site messaging that include locally tailored Leave No Trace content	Site has robust standard Leave No Trace content on multiple kiosks, signs, and other locations on-site	Site has limited Leave No Trace messaging on-site	Site has no Leave No Trace messaging on-site	2
<b>EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS</b>	Site has multiple pamphlets, brochures, stickers, and other items distributed to public that include locally tailored Leave No Trace content	Site has multiple pamphlets, brochures, stickers, and other items distributed to public that include standard Leave No Trace content	Site has limited Leave No Trace information available to be distributed to the public	Site has no Leave No Trace related information available to the public	2
<b>ONLINE INFORMATION</b>	Site has robust and locally tailored Leave No Trace information available on its website	Site has robust standard Leave No Trace information available on its website	Site has very little Leave No Trace-related content available on website	Site has no Leave No Trace messaging on website	1
<b>PROGRAMS</b>	Leave No Trace information is presented throughout multiple interpretive programs, trail outings, campfire talks, and other facilitated offerings	Leave No Trace is used in a limited number of interpretive programs, trail outings, campfire talks, and other staff or volunteer facilitated offerings	There is some minimum impact messaging incorporated into various programmatic offerings, but not Leave No Trace-specific	There is no minimum impact messaging incorporated into interpretive programs, trail outings, campfire talks, or other related program offerings	3
<b>YOUTH FOCUS</b>	Agency and volunteers utilize Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics provided youth curriculum in addition to other locally developed youth education tools at the site	Agency and volunteers disseminate Leave No Trace to youth through Junior Ranger programs and other locally developed tools at the site	Agency and/or volunteer organizations include limited Leave No Trace messaging in their youth programming efforts at the site	Leave No Trace is not a component of youth education and outreach at the site	2
<b>PARTNERSHIPS</b>	Agency requires partner organizations to include Leave No Trace outreach, education or training into their scope of work at the site	Agency encourages partner organizations to include Leave No Trace education, outreach or training in their programmatic efforts at the site	One or more partner organizations utilize Leave No Trace in their efforts at the site	Partner organizations do not include Leave No Trace in their efforts at the site	2
Please fill out online at <a href="https://leavenotrace.gov/quantrics.com/iform/sv_54qEUnhsrlPzRr">https://leavenotrace.gov/quantrics.com/iform/sv_54qEUnhsrlPzRr</a>					<b>SCORE:</b> 16
					19