



BRIDGING THE GAP

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About Bridging the Gap

"Bridging the Gap" is an electronic publication produced biannually by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC). The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information about the partnerships and volunteer programs around the country. For more information, or to submit stories for future editions, contact your PAC representative.

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National MOU: Kids in Parks

In May 2024, USACE and the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation (BRPF) signed a new national Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Kids in Parks program. The mission of the Kids in Parks program is to work together with partners throughout the country to promote children's health and the health of America's parks and public lands by increasing physical activity and engaging families in outdoor adventures that foster a meaningful connection to the natural and cultural world. Kids in Parks accomplishes its mission through the installation of interactive TRACK Trails - a series of networked hiking trails that provide brochure-led, self-guided adventures designed to turn an ordinary hike into a fun-filled adventure.

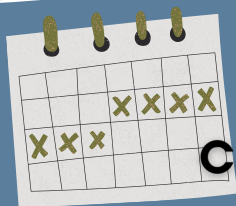
Under this MOU, USACE and BRPF strive to:

- Construct, install, and maintain interactive trails at USACE projects.
- Promote USACE interactive trails through various media outlets.
- Seek ways to integrate interactive trail systems with community projects and activities.

A few examples of interactive trail programs that have been established at USACE projects can be found on the [NRM Gateway](#). These have included disc golf trails, pump tracks, bikes skills areas, and nature TRACK Trails at W. Kerr Scott, Blue Marsh, McNary, and Raystown projects. ■



Photo above: TRACK Trail kiosk at McNary.



Mark Your Calendars



- **September 12:** Building Partnerships webinar, 1:30 pm Eastern
- **September 26:** CWBI-OPS Partnerships/Volunteers webinar, 11:00 am Eastern
- **September 28:** National Public Lands Day
- **September 30:** FY 25 Handshake applications due
- **October 1 – November 15:** CWBI-OPS Partnerships/Volunteer data entry period for field projects
- **October 15:** CWBI-OPS Partners/Volunteer webinar, 2:00 pm Eastern
- **October 17:** Excellence in Partnerships (EIP)/Volunteer of the Year (VOY) webinar, 1:00 Eastern
- **October 30:** EIP/VOY webinar, 1:00 Eastern
- **November 1:** CWBI-OPS Partners/Volunteer webinar, 12:00 pm Eastern
- **December 6:** EIP/VOY award applications due

Have you attended the PROSPECT Partnerships in NRM class yet? If not, sign up for one of our classes:



- **FY 25 Session 1:** Rend Lake, Benton, IL. Oct. 21-24, 2024
- **FY 25 Session 2:** Kansas City District Office, Kansas City, MO. Apr. 28 – May 1, 2025
- **FY 25 Session 3:** Raystown Lake, Hesston, PA. Jul. 21-24, 2025

Please visit <https://ulc.usace.army.mil/CrsScheduleNewFY.aspx> to enroll

Lucas Wicker and Jason Vanselow, Park Rangers, Beaver Lake, SWL

On April 12-14, 2024, USACE Beaver Lake Rangers, Lucas Wicker and Jay Vanselow, partnered with the Leave No Trace organization to educate the public on a variety of actions and principles to apply while enjoying the outdoors. Leave No Trace is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide education, research, and initiatives to help people respect and preserve the outdoors. Leave No Trace and USACE share the goal of outdoor recreation with minimal negative effects to the environment.

Leave No Trace promotes seven principles to be applied by anyone visiting the outdoors. The principles consist of (1) Planning Ahead and Prepare, (2) Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces, (3) Dispose of Waste Properly, (4) Leave What You Find, (5) Minimize Campfire Impacts, (6) Respect Wildlife, (7) Be Considerate of Others.



Photos above (left to right): Leave No Trace crew and USACE staff with litter picked up during the event. Leave No Trace check in and exhibitor booths.

Beaver Lake serves a large and diverse community, with over a million visitors each year. The environmental impacts of the growth of the Northwest Arkansas area and the upsurge of visitation to Beaver Lake can be seen through the increase in litter, vegetation damage, and other environmental issues. Beaver Lake was selected for this Spotlight Event by Leave No Trace to address the changing needs and environmental impacts that such growth has on an area.

The three-day partnership event consisted of an outreach event at the University of Arkansas, outreach/pop-up education event with local partners and a volunteer cleanup and stewardship project at Prairie Creek Park. During the outreach event at the University of Arkansas, the group spoke to students and educators about the principles of Leave No Trace and how they can be applied to outdoor areas, such as Beaver Lake. The pop-up education and outreach event at Prairie Creek Park included several local agencies including Arkansas Game and Fish, Beaver Watershed Alliance, City of Rogers Parks and Recreation, Hobbs State Park, and Ozark Society. Each group set up educational booths and talked with the public about their various organizations and the need to keep our public lands clean for all to enjoy. During the volunteer cleanup, volunteers and staff collected and properly disposed of litter on the shoreline and throughout the park.

The Leave No Trace Spotlight Event at Beaver Lake was a huge success. The lake is cleaner and hopefully stays that way through the implementation of Leave No Trace's principles by the lake's visitors. ■

Hood Park Receives ADA-Compliant Fishing Platforms from Union Sportsmen's Alliance

Brad Trumbo, Senior Natural Resource Specialist, NWW



In April 2024, the Walla Walla District, Tri-Rivers Natural Resources Management team developed a partnership with the Union Sportsmen's Alliance (USA) to enhance public recreation opportunities near the Tri-Cities metropolitan area in southeast Washington. USA initially approached Tri-Rivers with an idea for an archery range at the McNary Dam Wildlife Area; however, conversations led to Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant (ADA) fishing platforms for Hood Park in Burbank, WA.

Hood Park is a developed recreation area at the edge of the Tri-Cities and receives approximately 110,000 annual visits. The park provides day use and overnight camping, a boat launch, and a nature area with ponds, which the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) stocks with "catchable" rainbow trout each spring. Therefore, the Hood Park ponds provided a prime location to improve fishing access for all, meeting mutual USACE and USA recreation missions.

USA's Conservation Program Manager, Sam Phipps, connected Tri-Rivers Wildlife Biologist Brett Forge to their AccuDock partner in Pompano Beach, FL, and a quick conversation led to the platform design: a 6-foot-wide by 10-foot-long floating platform made from attractive, synthetic material, and a 4-foot-wide by 10-foot-long aluminum gangway tied into the shore with a concrete block. Consequently, a single platform was initially discussed, but the USA soon suggested a second dock, given the limited ADA access in the general area.



Photo above: USA volunteers and the new fishing platform.

USA and Tri-rivers installed the concrete anchor blocks in late April and the platforms on May 18th, which public anglers immediately christened. Overall, the USA-donated fishing platforms are valued at approximately \$23,000, and 19 volunteers representing six union trades donated 208 labor hours valued at \$11,000 for installation.

USA and USACE hosted a "Take Kids Fishing Day" on June 1st with more than 300 participants to celebrate this win. Youth participants of all ages and skill sets lined the ponds' shorelines and new fishing platforms, casting various baits beneath a perfectly cloudy sky with their snazzy new tackle and cobalt-blue fishing rods and tackle, courtesy of USA. USACE staff assisted with water safety and baiting hooks. *Article continued on next page.*

Recognize Your Valuable Volunteers with a Volunteer Excellence Coin

USACE, in partnership with the Corps Foundation created three styles of coins to recognize the extraordinary service provided by volunteers, draw attention to their vast skills and contributions, and encourage an attitude of stewardship and responsibility in caring for USACE lands, facilities, and resources.



Small Coin

Large Coin Version 1



Large Coin Version 2

Volunteers can be nominated for small and large coins at any time throughout the year to recognize outstanding achievements by filling out the form found on the [NRM Gateway](#).

When considering a volunteer or group of volunteers to receive a coin, be prepared to answer the following questions as a guide.

- How did this volunteer or volunteer group go beyond other volunteer's efforts?
- How did they work with partners to improve recreation, environmental conditions or visitor interpretive facilities?
- How did the volunteer or group contribute significantly to public understanding of the Corps?
- Did the volunteer or group help keep an area remain open that would have otherwise been closed?
- How did the volunteer or group contribute to natural resource conservation?

You will need to provide a short write-up and some photos on the nomination form to your [Division PAC team representative](#) to request a coin.

St. Paul District Earth Day Partnerships

*Melanie Peterson, Public Affairs
Specialist, MVP*

St. Paul celebrated Earth Day planting trees with partners! Park Rangers and partners with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge, planted bareroot saplings at the McGregor Lake Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project near Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.

"It's a culmination of many years of work on the day we're supposed to be celebrating the Earth; we're seeing the fruits of our labor. Everyone here made this project happen," said John Henderson, project manager.

This project is part of the Upper Mississippi River Restoration program. The program ensures the coordinated development and enhancement of the Upper Mississippi River system with a primary emphasis on habitat restoration projects and resource monitoring. In the 36-year history of the program, more than 55 habitat projects benefiting approximately 100,000 acres from Minneapolis to St. Louis, have been completed.



Setting up the CCSCMA was not a quick process. Initial discussions began as early as January 2022 when the seed was planted with several partners' Parks and Recreation Directors. Initially, two of the three did not want to partner but were amenable to leasing the areas outright. We continued conversations throughout 2022 educating them on the pros and cons of both leases and partnerships. Ultimately, they agreed to further explore the partnership avenue. In March 2023, we supplied them with a plethora of information so they could continue to get comfortable and make an informed decision. This information included the required CCSCMA Template, Draft POPs complete with specific details on duties and responsibilities of USACE and the partner, the items identified in the Template Agreement and the implementation guidance, local information such as our approved fee schedule, Title 36 CFR, campground rules, and campground/campsite inventories. *Article continued on next page.*

Photo left: Earth Day partners and USACE employees celebrate a productive day.

Hood Park Continued

"The turnout was unbelievable for a first-time event," Phipps said. One key event takeaway was that many local participants were unaware that the ponds existed or were open to public fishing. Furthering the event's success was the WDFW's Tucannon and Lyons Ferry Hatcheries cooperating to stock 800 rainbow trout just days before the event.

"It was one of the coolest events we had in a long time. There were smiles and laughter everywhere," Forge said. Through this partnership, USA has agreed to assist Tri-Rivers with fishing platform maintenance, is seeking additional fishing platform opportunities, and continues to discuss the archery range idea for the McNary Wildlife Area. ■



Photo above: Kids enjoy fishing with gear donated by USA.

Lake Sidney Lanier Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management Agreements

Tim Rainey, Operations Project Manager, Lake Sidney Lanier, SAM

Last winter, Mobile District's Lake Sidney Lanier - Buford Dam Project, located in Georgia, executed three Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management Agreements (CCSCMA) for the cooperative management of eight recreation areas. These include five campgrounds, one multipurpose area, and two day-use parks. The agreements are with three local jurisdictions: Dawson County, Hall County, and Forsyth County. Generally, the partners are operating gatehouses, managing reservations, collecting fees, cleaning restrooms, removing trash, and mowing the grass. USACE provides maintenance services, natural resources management and pest control, pays the utility bills, and performs ranger patrols and visitor assistance duties. While the overall agreements are similar, the Partner Operations Plan (POP), jointly developed with each partner, identifies the specifics of each agreement, and contains minor differences. For example, one partner is removing all trash and placing it in the dumpsters but did not want to provide the dumpster service where another partner is providing the dumpster service.



Cooperative Management Continued



Over the next several months, many site visits and discussions occurred with the partners to educate them on what this information meant, what requirements were involved, and what flexibilities they would have. The partnership opportunities were advertised via a notice posted to the project website. Once proposals were received, they were evaluated, and a recommendation was provided to the Mobile District Commander for approval of the selected partners. When that approval was received, we continued meeting with the partners to tweak and finalize the CCSCMA Templates and the Draft POPs.

At this point, project staff became more involved in working with the partners to finalize the finer details (daily operations) to gain consistency between the three local jurisdictions and USACE. Topics included campground rules and regulations, communications processes, organization charts, staffing, daily responsibilities, sign standards, expectations, etc. User fees were included in this discussion and an "out of cycle" change was approved for user fees we previously did not charge but the partner wanted to charge.

While the above was in progress, the partners were working the CCSCMA Template agreements through their official chains for approval. They each had their internal processes to satisfy such as legal review, budget development, and formal approval from their Board of Commissioners.

Finally, the CCSCMAs were signed by the Partners and the Mobile District Commander, and the POPs were signed by the appropriate Parks and Recreation Directors and the Lake Sidney Lanier Operations Project Manager. The facilities were opened for the 2024 recreation season under the CCSCMAs. Communications continue to occur almost daily between the partners and USACE staff and a "midseason review" was conducted between project management and the senior leaders of the partners. "Growing pains" and lessons learned continue to be identified, and resolved; however, the consensus between the parties is that it is successful, and all are pleased.

Quote from Dawson County Parks and Recreation Director Matt Payne as published in Lakeside on Lanier Newspaper: *"Dawson County is very excited to be in this unique partnership with the Corps of Engineers. This cooperative agreement allows Dawson County and the Corps to both have a hand in keeping these beautiful parks operational and maintained," said Matt Payne, director of Dawson County Parks and Recreation.*

Quote from Hall County Board of Commissioners Chairperson Richard Higgins as published in Hall County Magazine: *"A great deal of work went into this process, and we're proud of the efforts it took to bring it to fruition. This alleviates some of the pressure on the Corps of Engineers for operating their parks and allows us to work together to ensure residents and visitors continue to have a great experience when they visit," said Richard Higgins, Hall County Board of Commissioners Chairperson.*



Photos above (left to right): Hall County Commissioner Billy Powell, Lake Sidney Lanier Operations Project Manager Tim Rainey, Hall County Parks and Leisure Services Director Brent Holloway at the signing of the agreement. Entrance sign acknowledging the jointly managed campground. Erosion control at Sawnee Campground, one of multiple park improvement projects completed through the agreement.

While it was somewhat of a long and involved process and determining how to accomplish the actions required in the implementation guidance was a bit of a challenge, the outcome is well worth it. All the time involved in getting to this point has resulted in a significantly better understanding of USACE and the partners organizations. One big factor for the partners was the ability to have the POPs signed at the local level and the ability for changes to the POP to be made at the local level. This provided them a reasonable assurance of flexibility. While we already had good relationships with the local governments, going through this process has improved our relationships. ■

Meet Your PAC Team Members



Patoka Lake: 2023 Handshake Award Winner



James Merkley, Natural Resources Specialist, Patoka Lake, LRL

A project vision has come to fruition at USACE's Patoka Lake in Dubois, Indiana - The Patoka Lake American Chestnut Regeneration Study Orchard. This project not only revives history but also embodies the spirit of community collaboration and environmental stewardship.

Together, a multi-agency team of volunteers has planted nearly 300 American Chestnut trees at Patoka Lake with a collective aim to plant blight-resistant American Chestnut trees, allowing all to witness and study the historic return of this native tree species.

The project began with a simple yet profound goal - to reintroduce the first stand of American Chestnuts to USACE properties in Indiana. The staff at Patoka Lake envisioned a sustainable future for a plot of land near the project office by partnering with organizations like The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF), the Boy Scouts of America, Northeast Dubois High School, the Dubois Ruritan Club and Dubois Rural Electric Cooperative.

"The community has been really excited about working on this project," said Merkley. "It is a great feeling to help bring a tree that is 'functionally extinct' back to its native range for public viewing and future study." According to the ACF, the American Chestnut was once a dominant species throughout the Eastern United States. The American Chestnut played a vital role in both ecosystems and human livelihoods; however, the devastating effects of the chestnut blight brought it to the brink of extinction. Now, through dedicated research and conservation efforts, Patoka Lake is proud to be part of the historic endeavor to restore this iconic tree.

Heather Burke
HQUSACE

Francis Ferrell - Chair
SAD (Falls Lake)

Jared Gagnon
NAD (East Brimfield Lake)

Mike McCoy
LRD (Huntington District Office)

Phil Manhart
MVD (Lake Shelbyville)

Taylor Baughn
SPD (San Francisco Bay Model)

Keith Hyde
NWD (Lucky Peak Lake)

Jennifer Linde
SWD (Fort Worth District Office)



The team reached out to current and future partners to gauge interest in the potential project, including participation in the Partnership Handshake webinar last fall, then subsequently applying for a Handshake Award. The Patoka Lake American Chestnut Regeneration Study Orchard project was one of six selected throughout all USACE to receive the Handshake Award. The award fully funded the supplies and materials needed for the project.

Protected by seven-and-a-half-foot tall deer exclusion fences, the plot of land measures half an acre is now home to nearly 300 American Chestnut trees. While expectations are tempered by the experimental nature of the project, the goal is for 50-75 percent of the trees to reach full maturity, paving the way for even more blight resistant trees in the future.

For the team at Patoka Lake, the most rewarding aspect of the project is the opportunity to educate and inspire future generations. "Our favorite part of the project has been educating our partners, high school agriculture students and Boy Scouts. Seeing the excitement when people realize how important their work is, not only for today, but for their children and grandchildren in the future. We also look forward to introducing and educating the public through programs, open houses, and tours for years to come." ■

Photo above: Volunteers prep the ground for planting.

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Having a Ball at Ball Mountain Lake

Valerie Franklin, Natural Resources Specialist, Ball Mountain and Townshend Lakes, NAE

Ball Mountain Lake has partnered with Jamaica Area Mountain Bike Alliance (JAMBA) to develop two, one-half mile single track trails for hiking and biking. A Challenge Partnership Agreement was executed in June 2022 with JAMBA, who broke ground in September 2022 for the "Having a Ball" trail, completing it one month later. Having a Ball officially opened June 2, 2023, and was JAMBA's first official trail for their chapter. It is a hand-built intermediate level trail that incorporates sustainable design concepts to mitigate erosion and integrate it into the landscape. It is rideable in both directions and has good sightlines to allow all users to navigate it safely.

In May 2023 work began on the second trail, "Hard Corps". The trail was completed in June, two weeks before Ball Mountain Lake recorded its second highest pool elevation. JAMBA cleared silt and debris but otherwise found the new trails relatively unharmed, much to everyone's relief! JAMBA was instrumental in trail cleanup, spending over 40 hours between August and October removing silt and flood debris, ensuring our trails were safe for other visitors. Without their help we would still be trying to clear Ball Mountain's trail system for use.

Due to the flooding, the official opening of "Hard Corps" was pushed back and the ribbon cutting ceremony was held June 15, 2024. Hard Corps is also an intermediate level trail, constructed by hand, and with its completion, bikers and hikers can now access the boat launch parking area without traveling on pavement. These new trails have enhanced the recreational opportunities offered to our visiting public.



New Corps Lakes Gateway - Partnerships Webpage & Partnering with the Corps Handout

Have you checked out the updated public [Corps Lakes webpages](#)? The partnership page is a great resource to share with potential partner organizations to provide examples of successful partnerships, links to all issues of Bridging the Gap newsletters, and an interactive map to drive users to your lakes to set up new partnerships. In addition to the webpage, a [new flier](#) has been developed by the PAC team to help initiate discussions about partnership opportunities with USACE.



Photos left: Hard Corps Trail ribbon cutting, Hard Corps Trail JAMBA volunteers and USACE rangers.



NRM Gateway Spotlight: CWBI-OPS

Visit the CWBI-OPS: Partnerships and Volunteers Module page to find training resources, reports, and FAQs on entering annual data. The data entry period for Partnerships and Volunteers will be from October 1 - November 15 for field projects. Districts/MSCs will have until December 13 to review and correct data.



CWBI-Ops: Partnerships and Volunteers Module

The Civil Works Business Intelligence-Operations (CWBI-OPS) modules were developed to provide a location for data required to operate and manage the Operations function of the Corps. CWBI-OPS contains 4 modules: Common, Hydropower, NRM, and Water Supply where data are entered each year. Within NRM, there are submodules for Citations, Environmental Stewardship, NRM, PSA, Partnerships and Volunteers, and Annual Update Status.

Annual fiscal data entry for the CWBI-OPS Partnerships and Volunteers module opens each year October 1 - November 15 to enter data for the prior fiscal year.

- [Annual Reports](#)
- [Training Resources](#)
- [FAQs](#)

Partnerships