



U.S. ARMY  
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# 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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## Leave No Trace Spotlight Event at John H. Kerr Reservoir



*Cassie Cross, Natural Resources Specialist, John H. Kerr Reservoir, SAW*

John H. Kerr Reservoir was honored as a 2025 Leave No Trace Spotlight (LNT) site – an initiative that brings together land managers, partners, and communities to promote a shared commitment to outdoor stewardship and responsible recreation. In partnership with LNT and the Southern Piedmont Master Naturalist Chapter, a 3-day Spotlight event was held from May 15-17, 2025. The event featured educational workshops, community outreach activities, and a volunteer stewardship project, all centered around Leave No Trace principles and preserving the natural beauty of public lands.

More than 75 people attended the various events, with many more exposed to LNT principles and outdoor ethics. The workshops offered valuable tools and guidance to help visitors enjoy the outdoors responsibly, ensuring these spaces remain healthy and accessible for future generations. The team at John H. Kerr Reservoir is grateful to partner organizations Leave No Trace and Southern Piedmont Master Naturalist Chapter for their dedication and months of preparation in making this Spotlight a success. ■



Left to Right: Participants learn LNT principles in an educational workshop; LNT Spotlight community outreach.



## Partnership and Volunteer Program Photo Contest



This is an excellent opportunity to showcase your photographic talent. Categories include Environmental Stewardship Partnerships, Recreation Partnerships, Volunteers in Action, and Special Events with Partners. The Corps Foundation is donating prizes for the contest. The Grand Prize winner will receive a metal or canvas print of their photograph. Each category winner will receive a matted and framed print of their photo. The top three winners in each category will also receive a one-year membership to the Corps Foundation. Visit the [Photo Contest NRM Gateway](#) page for more info.



## Meet Your PAC Team Members

**Heather Burke**

HQUSACE

**Cassie Cross**

SAD (John H. Kerr Reservoir)

**Jared Gagnon**

NAD (East Brimfield Lake)

**Mike McCoy**

LRD (Burnsville Lake)

**Phil Manhart**

MVD (Lake Shelbyville)

**Taylor Baughn - Chair**

SPD (San Francisco Bay Model)

**Keith Hyde**

NWD (Lucky Peak Lake)

**Vacant**

SWD

## 6th Annual Freedom Festival Draws Over 5,500 for a Day of Celebration

*Mike McCoy, Natural Resource Manager, Burnsville Lake, LRH*

On July 5, 2025, the Burnsville Freedom Festival lit up the community in more ways than one,

drawing over 5,500 people to Burnsville Lake for a spirited Independence Day celebration. Now in its sixth year, the event was a vibrant display of community pride, made possible through a strong partnership with the Town of Burnsville and Friends of Burnsville Lake.

Attendees enjoyed a full day packed with family-friendly activities—including a kids' fishing tournament, inflatables, a 30-foot climbing wall, mechanical bull rides, a cornhole tournament, and a festive boat decorating contest and parade on the lake. Local food trucks, vendors, and live music kept the energy high, all building to a grand finale: a spectacular fireworks display over the water.



*Fireworks display.*

The success of the festival was made possible by the dedication of 35 volunteers and numerous community partners, who collectively contributed over 1,000 hours of service. Their time, effort, and enthusiasm turned this event into a standout celebration for the entire region. A heartfelt thank you to every volunteer, sponsor, and partner who helped bring this unforgettable day to life! ■



*Community partners and organizations gather for the festival.*

## First Marathon in Years Uses Grant Funded Pedestrian Bridge

*Jesse Brownlee, Natural Resource Specialist, Lost Creek Lake, NWP*

In 2019, the 130-foot-long gabion bridge at Lost Creek Lake was taken out of service following a series of structural failures. Its closure severed a vital access point to hundreds of acres of USACE-managed wilderness in Oregon—affecting recreation, emergency response, and maintenance efforts in this remote region.

For years, the Rogue River Basin Project Natural Resource Management staff, alongside the Portland District, worked tirelessly to find a solution.



*Article continued on next page.*

## Pedestrian Bridge Continued

Their persistence led to a successful partnership with the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA), resulting in \$1.6 million in grant funding to replace the failed bridge and restore access for recreation and environmental stewardship.

Construction was completed in late 2024—just in time for local running group Woodlands Running Co. to bring back the beloved Lost Creek Lake Trail Run. The 34-mile trail is one of the few single-track loops in the region capable of hosting 5k, 10k, 30k, and 50k races, all starting and finishing at the same location. The trail also features ideal spots for aid stations and critical emergency response access to help keep runners safe.

Building on the successful partnership with FHWA, efforts are now underway to establish a 171-mile formal nonmotorized transportation corridor. This visionary route will connect Gold Hill, OR, pass through Lost Creek Lake, continue to Crater Lake and Diamond Lake, and ultimately reach Roseburg, OR. The corridor aims to promote sustainable recreation, improve access to public lands, and support ecotourism throughout southern Oregon.



Left to right: First racers in years crossing the new bridge; Lost Creek Trail Run racers.

## Building Trails and Communities

Ron Woodall, Park Ranger, West Hill Dam, NAE

Over the past nine years, the mountain bike program at West Hill Dam has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from a handful of informal trails into a regional destination for riders of all ages and skill levels. This growth has been driven by a strong, ongoing partnership with the Blackstone Valley chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association (BV NEMBA).

Together with BV NEMBA, the trail network has expanded to 15 miles, offering a diverse mix of terrain that accommodates beginners while providing ample challenge and flow for experienced riders. Each trail has been thoughtfully designed and is carefully maintained to balance an exceptional rider experience with environmental stewardship—an achievement made possible by BV NEMBA's technical expertise and dedicated volunteers.

Recent additions, including a mountain bike skills park and pump track, have further enhanced the park's accessibility and appeal. The skills park offers a safe and welcoming space for new riders to build confidence, while the pump track delivers a dynamic and enjoyable experience for riders of all ages.

*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 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 USACE?
- Did the volunteer or group help 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 sent to your [Division PAC team representative](#) to request a coin.





## Mark Your Calendars

- **September 25:** Excellence in Partnerships (EIP)/National Volunteer of the Year (NVOY) webinar, 1:00 pm Eastern
- **September 27:** National Public Lands Day
- **September 29:** CWBI-OPS Partnerships/Volunteers webinar, 1:00 pm Eastern
- **October 1-November 14:** CWBI-OPS Partnerships/Volunteers data entry period for field projects
- **October 15:** EIP/NVOY webinar, 1:00 pm Eastern
- **October 23:** CWBI-OPS Partnerships/Volunteers webinar, 11:00 am Eastern
- **October 29:** Student Conservation Association (SCA) webinar, 11:00 am Eastern
- **November 7:** CWBI-OPS Partnerships/Volunteers webinar, 12:00 pm Eastern
- **December 5:** EIP/VOY award applications due
- **January 31:** Partnership/Volunteer Photo Contest entries due

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

- **FY26 Session 1:** San Francisco Bay Model, CA. April 13-16, 2026
- **FY26 Session 2:** New England District Office, MA. July 6-9, 2026

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



## Building Trails Continued

A highlight of the mountain biking culture at West Hill Dam is the annual Best Dam Ride festival. Since its inception in 2019 with approximately 150 riders, the event has grown to attract over 400 participants each October. More than just a ride, it is a celebration of the sport, the season, and the vibrant community behind it. The event features crisp fall air, stunning foliage, live music, delicious food, and, of course, plenty of bikes—creating an energetic and joyful atmosphere that has made it a cornerstone of the fall calendar.

What truly sets this partnership apart is the shared commitment to creating a space where people can connect with nature, develop their skills, and find a sense of belonging. BV NEMBA contributes not only trail-building expertise but also a community spirit that embodies the best of public lands stewardship. Through regular trail workdays, group rides, and ongoing collaboration, BV NEMBA has become an integral part of the West Hill Dam story. ■



*Left to right: Bringing the next generation into the sport of mountain biking; a cyclist enjoying the trails at West Hill Dam.*

## A Unique and Growing Partnership with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

*Matthew Buchacker, Natural Resource Specialist, Leech Lake, MVP*

The partnership between Leech Lake Recreation Area, located in Minnesota, and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) stands out as a unique and valuable collaboration. Situated on the edge of the Leech Lake Reservation, the recreation area offers opportunities to work closely with LLBO on multiple levels.

USACE staff and LLBO members regularly collaborate on a variety of projects and community events, fostering a partnership rooted in mutual respect and shared goals. This collaboration extends across both USACE and Tribal lands, emphasizing community outreach and cultural exchange.

Each year, USACE participates in key LLBO events such as Earth Day, Leech Lake Days, Wild Rice workshops, and movie nights in the park. In return, LLBO volunteers play a crucial role in the recreation area's annual Kids Fishing Derby, assisting with registration, prize distribution, and donating fishing equipment valued at approximately \$800 annually.

*Article continued on next page.*



## Partnership Continued

This partnership bridges the gap between the Federal Government and Tribal communities, promoting greater understanding and respect. Collaborative efforts include plans to expand interpretive signage that highlights Tribal history and culture, as well as coordinated water management practices to support the wild rice beds found on Tribal lands around Leech Lake and downstream rivers.

Leech Lake Recreation Area staff remain dedicated to growing this partnership by increasing interpretive displays, enhancing involvement in Tribal events, hosting more activities on USACE lands, and deepening collaborative planning efforts. ■



Tribal youth participate in an Earth Day event.

## Lake Mendocino Volunteer Camp Host

*Sadie Parker, Administrative Officer, Lake Mendocino, SPN*

This summer, the Lake Mendocino team welcomed volunteer camp host Mike Monroe, whose arrival brought much-needed support to the busy campground season. A recent retiree with a strong background in volunteer service with both USACE and the National Park Service, Mike joined the team midsummer with his two enthusiastic travel companions—Sparky and Sadie, his energetic dogs. Now embracing life on the road, Mike enjoys exploring new places, taking in breathtaking landscapes, and connecting with people from all walks of life.

His presence at Lake Mendocino couldn't have come at a better time. With only one park ranger on staff to handle the high demand of the summer season, Mike quickly became an invaluable part of the operation. Serving as the "eyes and ears" of the campground, he took initiative in assisting visitors, maintaining a helpful presence, and communicating important updates.

Mike's dedication, proactive spirit, and willingness to go above and beyond have made a significant difference. The team is deeply grateful for his service—and proud to have him as part of the Lake Mendocino family. ■



Volunteer Mike Monroe

## Volunteer.gov Improvement: Team Member Portal

Volunteer coordinators at the project level are now able to access the Salesforce administrative website for Volunteer.gov as "Team Members." Team Members will be able to perform most of the administrative functions that a licensed District volunteer coordinator can do, with the exception of creating and posting new opportunities.

Functions accessible to Team Members include accessing applications and updating their status, onboarding new volunteers, and electronically signing OF301a Volunteer Service Agreement forms online. If you're a project level volunteer coordinator and would like access, reach out to your District Volunteer Coordinator to submit your request.



## Friends of Reservoirs Grants

Two USACE projects were selected for funding from the Bass Pro Shops Outdoor Fund—Beyond the Pond grant program.

- Beaver Lake—Fishing access improvement will take place at Hickory Creek Park on Beaver Lake and plans are to construct a fish cleaning station at this heavily used lake access.
- Woodcock Creek Lake—This project will create an access road for the installation of over 200 Reef Balls on the west side of the lake. The Reef Balls will provide long lasting and high quality aquatic habitat at the lake, which is lacking due to winter draw downs. The reef balls will be supplemented with trees and other brush periodically to improve all types of habitat for aquatic organisms.

A complete article regarding the Bass Pro Shops Outdoor Fund is provided by Friends of Reservoirs at the link below.

[https://www.friendsofreservoirs.org/grants/national-fish-habitat-partnership-funds-five-additional-reservoir-priority-projects-through-bass-pro-shops-outdoor-fund/?utm\\_source=mailpoet&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source\\_platform=mailpoet&utm\\_campaign=friends-of-reservoirs-news-newsletterposttitle-62](https://www.friendsofreservoirs.org/grants/national-fish-habitat-partnership-funds-five-additional-reservoir-priority-projects-through-bass-pro-shops-outdoor-fund/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_source_platform=mailpoet&utm_campaign=friends-of-reservoirs-news-newsletterposttitle-62)