

INTRODUCTION TO THE NRM PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM



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2



The Partnership Philosophy

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plays a key role in shaping the future of our Nation's water resources. Our **partners are essential** in making this happen. We recognize that partnerships must **flow in both directions**. **Cooperation** and **collaboration** are the keys to innovative solutions to meet a diversity of need. When we put our heads together, we can find answers far better than anything we can think of ourselves.



Partnerships are a smart way of doing business.



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“Too often we think of a partnership as a handout instead of a handshake.”

–General Strock





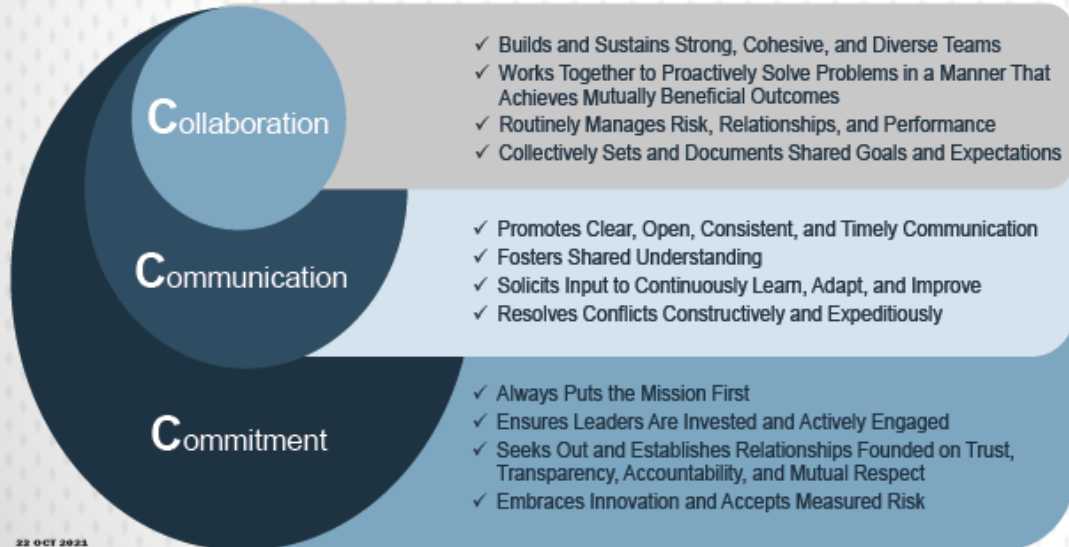
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Partnering Philosophy

“Committed to working together with partners to accomplish the mission and build enduring relationships through trust, transparency, and shared values.”

- Lt. Gen Scott Spellmon

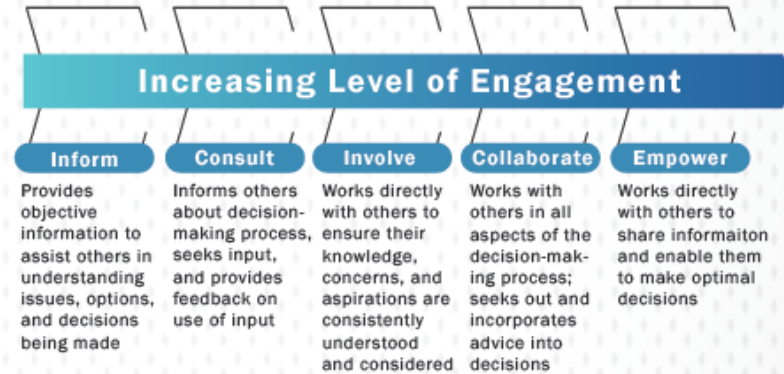
Sound partnerships require proactive engagement at all echelons of the organization and the embracement of a partnering mindset which embodies a set of behaviors rooted in three interdependent and mutually supportive elements: Commitment, Communication, and Collaboration.

3C's of Successful Partnering



Relationship Spectrum

Each partnering relationship is unique and exists along a spectrum with transactional relationships at one end and strategic relationships on the other. Where these relationships fall along that spectrum and the extent of collaboration are influenced by the type of partnership, maturity of the relationship, and commitment towards partnering.



“We must always strive to maximize partnering outcomes to enable the safe delivery of quality projects that are on time and within budget.”

- Lt. Gen Scott Spellmon



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5



Partnership Connection to the NRM Strategic Plan



NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

STRATEGIC PLAN

2021 - 2031

- Partnerships show up in three of the four Goals, with heavy focus in Goal 4 (Program Delivery)
- Communication: Engage stakeholders, elected officials, partners, and local communities at all levels to build awareness of the NRM program and achieve win-win opportunities.
- Resourcing: Explore opportunities to broaden partnering authorities and prioritize budget packages that utilize partnership contributions for gained efficiencies.
- Program Delivery: Foster Partnerships and Interdisciplinary Collaboration



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6



What is a Partnership?

- A mutually beneficial relationship where people work together to achieve goals
- Voluntary collaboration working toward a common objective related to the agency/partner's mission
- Builds consensus and broad-based community support
- Leverages funds and resources to meet challenges and improve opportunities



- They may be formal or informal 
- Can be as simple as a contribution of materials, services, or funds
- Appropriate legal authority, consistent with agency policies

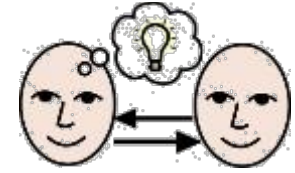


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What's the Big Deal About Partnerships?

- Avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and promote coordinated efforts to resolve common challenges
- Partnerships are not only important, but they are also a necessity!
- Agency culture needs to promote partnering as a part of the management model and encourage training for staff.
- FY 25 Recreation/Environmental Stewardship budget = ~\$411M. Without sustainable cost-effective partnerships => Decrease in services and amenities and degradation of natural resources
- FY 25 partnerships reported in CWBI-OPS: 4,196 with a total value of \$195.2 million (\$155.15 million in partner investment = 79%)
- 42,992 Corps volunteers contributed 1.9 million hours of work (equivalent to 917 FTE) with a value of \$66.36 million





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Annual Partnership and Volunteer Program Summary sheet

<https://corpslakes.erdcdren.mil/partners/ombil-annual.cfm>



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FY25 PARTNERSHIPS AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAM ANNUAL SUMMARY

Produced by the USACE Partnership Advisory Committee

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) understands that lasting impact in Natural Resources Management (NRM) begins at the local level. This past year's partnership summary celebrates the powerful synergy between our agency, our dedicated partners, and the passionate volunteers who are making a tangible difference in communities across the nation. We are extremely thankful for the collaboration with our amazing partners.

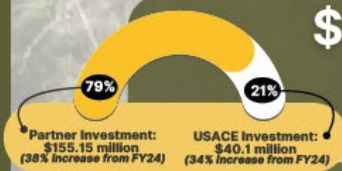
In 2025, we witnessed firsthand the positive outcomes of working hand-in-hand with local organizations and individuals. This report showcases the success of community-led conservation initiatives, educational programs that inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, and the transformative power of volunteerism. Thank you to the wonderful volunteers and partners for your expertise, enthusiasm, and commitment. Your efforts are vital to achieving our NRM goals and ensuring the health and vitality of our natural resources for years to come.



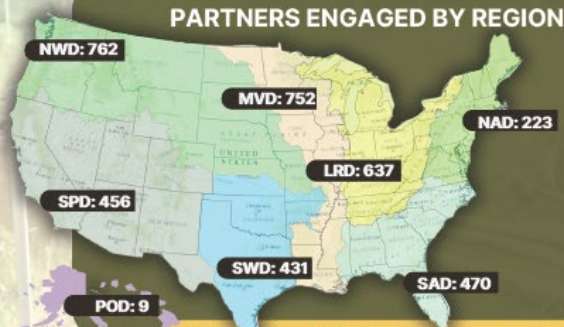
4,196
TOTAL PARTNERS



322 of 442
USACE PROJECTS WITH PARTNERSHIPS
(73% of USACE Projects)



\$195,226,979
TOTAL VALUE OF PARTNERSHIPS
(Increase of 37% from FY24)



National Organizations with MOUs: 240 USACE projects partnered with 37 organizations that have a national MOU in place, providing educational programs, health and safety, environmental and recreation improvements.

Cooperating Associations: 54 USACE projects benefited from the assistance of 60 nonprofit cooperating associations which supported special events, interpretive activities, exhibits and programs, operated bookstores, and bolstered volunteer programs.

Other: 27

State Agency: 220

Nonprofit or Community Organization: 924

Native American Tribe: 9

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Business: 293

Educational Institute: 103

Federal Agency: 159

Local Government Agency: 198

Military: 9

PARTNERSHIP GROWTH



corpslakes.erdcdren.mil/partners/partners.cfm

OUR USACE VOLUNTEERS

In 2025, volunteers played a valuable role in helping care for the environment and providing high quality recreation opportunities.



42,992
Total Volunteers
(Increase of 13% from FY24)



1,907,476
Total Volunteer Hours Served
(Equivalent to 917 FTEs)



\$66.36
Million
Total Value of Volunteer Hours



329
Projects Using Volunteers



42
USACE Annual Passes Issued To Volunteers for 100 Hours of Service



267
America the Beautiful Volunteer Passes Issued To Volunteers for 250 Hours of Service



61
Volunteer Excellence Coins Issued

NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY



4,383
Volunteers and

242
Partner organizations that provided

\$852K
in service and

42
USACE lakes resulted in

94,297
pounds of litter removed

99
Work projects at

USACE National Public Lands Day Efforts



FY25 PARTNERSHIPS AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAM ANNUAL SUMMARY



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9



Building the Partnership Paradigm

- Be proactive. Don't wait until you need something from someone.
- Attend local community events and make personal invitations to potential partners.
- Partnerships are not “free.” They take time and effort to cultivate, and require a foundation built on trust to be successful.
- Where there is a will, there is a way.
- Partnerships are about getting to yes and finding ways to get things done.
- Partnerships should be treated like a marriage.





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10



Principles for Success

- Establish clear expectations of roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the relationships to avoid future trials and tribulations.
- Get to know your partners as people 1st. Build that into the process.
- Use processes such as master plan development as an opportunity to collaborate.
- Engage partners in budget decisions such as park closures, reduced services, etc. Run the scenarios and see how they can help before the final decisions are made.



- Never pass up a good catalyst.

- Don't reinvent the wheel. Use the Gateway, the Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC) team, and your fellow classmates to find out if someone has done what you'd like to do.
- Share the resources and rewards.
- For a successful partnership, think of volunteers and partners as investors who expect a return on the value they provide.



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Partnering Authorities/Guidance

11



- **Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2016: Sec 1155, WRRDA 2014: Sec 1047d, WRDA 1992: Sec 203 (33 USC 2325) and Sec 225 (33 USC 2328), PL 98-63 (33 USC 569c), WRDA 2022: Sec 8124, WRDA 2024: Sec 1112 and 1153;** Authority to accept contributions, volunteers, set up Challenge Partnership, Challenge Cost-Share Cooperative Management Agreements, and accept Reserve troop training services
- **31 USC 1535, 41 USC 501, 31 USC 6301, 7 USC 2814, WRDA 2000: Sec 213 (33 USC 2339), WRRDA 2014: Sec 1031(b), 10 USC 2358:** Authorities to enter into agreements for services with other federal agencies (Economy Act), cooperative agreements for noxious weed management, education/training, research & development with universities, and agreements with Indian tribes
- **ER 1130-2-500**, Partners and Support, Chapter 8 (Cooperating Associations), Chapter 9 (Volunteers), Chapter 10 (Contributions), Chapter 11 (Challenge Partnerships), Chapter 14 (Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management)

*****Updated by WRDA 2024 Sec 1112 and 1153 Guidance Memo on 20 January 2026***

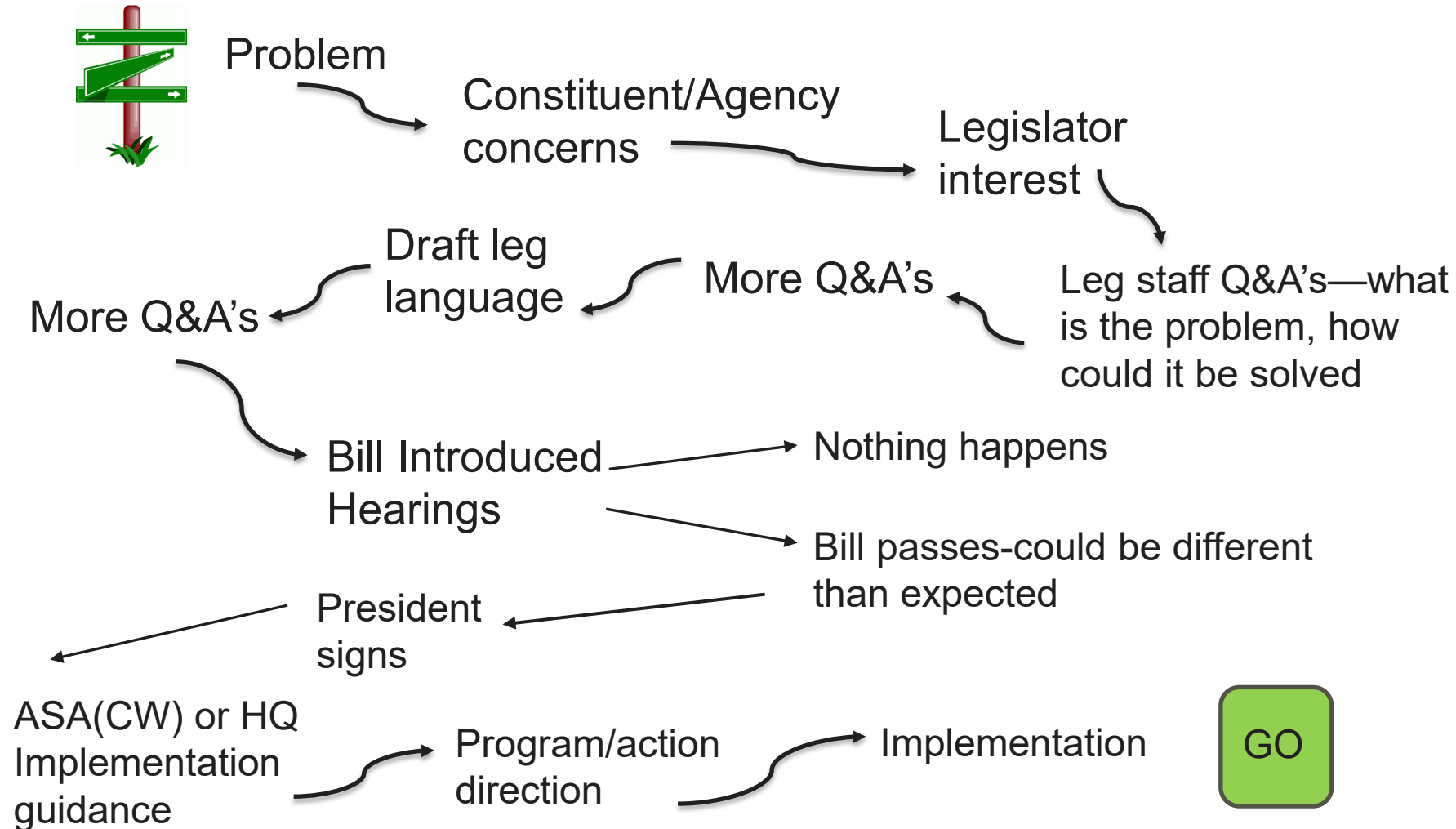


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How Do We Get New Laws and Authorities for Programs?

It's a tortuous path—sometimes with unintended consequences





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Authorized NRM Partnership Types: Choosing the Right Tool for the Job

NOTE: Sometimes, more than one type of agreement will work for your partnership.

- **Economy Act Agreements:** Agreements for services and/or supplies with other federal agencies
- **Cooperative Agreements:** Agreements where the Corps transfers money or a thing of value to a partner for services and/or supplies. Authority for cooperative agreements is limited to specific types.
- **Cooperating Associations:** Tax-exempt non-profit, free-standing corporate entities with boards of directors, set up through a cooperating association agreement
- **Challenge Partnerships:** Agreement with non-Federal public and private nonprofit entities on facilities and natural resources maintained at full Federal expense



NRM Partnership Types



- **Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management Agreement:** Agreement with non-Federal public and nonprofit entities to cooperatively manage and collect/retain fees on facilities and natural resources maintained at full Federal expense
- **Memorandums of Understanding/Agreement (MOU/MOA):** “Agreement to agree” but does not obligate funds. MOA establishes legal terms that will be included in a support agreement/reimbursable order to follow
- **Volunteer Agreements:** Allow the Corps to accept services of volunteers for a variety of natural resources work with the exception of law enforcement and policy-making
- **Contributions Program:** Simplest form of partnership. Acceptance of money, materials, or services from groups and individuals for environmental stewardship, restoration, and recreation



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Regulations and Policies

A partnership does not allow the Corps to circumvent applicable legal requirements in areas such as:

- Procurement
- Personnel or labor laws
- Printing, publishing or audiovisual production
- Issuance of special use permits
- Real estate licenses and leases
- Fiscal responsibility
- Environmental regulations

Bottom Line: Regulations and Policies
MUST BE FOLLOWED !



NOTE: It is just as important to build good relationships and trust with your internal partners/ support staff such as Office of Counsel, Resource Management, Contracting, Real Estate, etc. These staff members are essential to have on board when developing partnership agreements. Engage them early and often!



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Natural Resources Management Gateway

to the future . . .

Home Visitors Lake Discovery Recreation Env Compliance Env Stewardship Partners ?
News/Events People Forums Learning GETS Tools New Postings Submit Index/Search ?

How To Develop a Partnership

[Step 1](#)
[Assess Situational Needs](#)



[Step 2](#)
[What Kind of Partnership
is Right for You?](#)



[Step 3](#)
[Budget Development and
Financing](#)

Step 2 - What Kind of Partnership is Right for You?

[Back](#)

District Commanders are responsible for approval/execution of most partnering agreements. However, this authority can be delegated to the Chief of Operations or the Operations Project Manager through a delegation of [authority memo](#). The Corps of Engineers has a number of authorities and programs that allow it to provide work or funds or accept work or funds from Federal, State, Tribal, or non-Federal entities. The following list includes the partnership types within our authorities. [Click here for a Partnership Agreement Flow Chart](#)

[Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management Agreements](#) - The Corps may enter into agreements with non-Federal public entities for the purpose of cooperatively managing public recreation areas, where fees may be collected and retained by the partner for reinvestment at the site at which the fees are collected. ([ER 1130-2-500, Chapter 14](#))

[Challenge Partnerships](#) – The Corps can enter into agreements to accept funds, materials, and services from non-Federal public and private entities to provide for operation and/or management and development of recreation facilities and natural resources at water resource development projects, where such facilities are being maintained at full federal expense. This program allows the Corps to accept services or funds in the above circumstances; it does not permit the Corps to reimburse for services. The contributed resources are combined with regular project resources to accomplish work within current authorities and contained in the annual or five-year plan in the approved operational management plan. ([33 USC §2328, WRDA 1992, Sec 225; ER 1130-2-500, Chapter 12](#)).

[Cooperating Associations](#) – The Corps may enter into agreements with tax-exempt, non-profit organizations that volunteer services to the Corps. Cooperating associations are used to accomplish such broad goals as natural resource management, interpretation and visitor service activities at Corps civil works projects, fee-owned lands, and other areas for which the Corps has administrative and management responsibilities. ([33 USC §2328, WRDA 1992, Sec 225; ER 1130-2-500, Chapter 9](#)).

[Volunteers](#) – The Corps is authorized to accept the services of volunteers to carry out any Corps activity except policy-making or law enforcement. Volunteer agreements allow the Corps to accept the services of volunteers and to provide for their incidental expenses. ([33 U.S.C. §569c; ER 1130-2-500, Chapter 9](#)).

[Contributions Program](#) – The Corps is authorized to accept contributions of cash, funds, materials, and services from persons, including governmental entities but excluding the project sponsor, in connection with carrying out a water resources project for environmental protection, restoration or recreation. Contributions must be used for work items within current authorities and contained in an approved annual five-year operational management plan. A contributions plan serves as the agreement for this program. Note: Real estate cannot be accepted under this program. ([33 U.S.C. §2325, WRDA 1992, Sec 203; ER 1130-2-500, Chapter 11](#)).

[Memoranda of Understanding \(MOU\)/Memoranda of Agreement \(MOA\)](#) – These are “agreements to agree” which coordinate the Corps’ authorized activities with another entity. MOUs often state common goals and nothing more. Thus, MOUs do not contemplate funds transfers and should usually include language that states something similar to: “This is not a funds obligating document; by signing this agreement the parties are not bound to take any action or fund any initiative.” They may be used to run a program a certain way so that it functions better with the program of a sister agency, for example.

MOAs, on the other hand, often establish common legal terms that will be read into every Support for Others reimbursable order that follows. MOAs do not obligate any funds of themselves but they establish the terms for future service and cite one of the appropriate authorities to do so.

[Economy Act Agreements](#) – The Economy Act of 1932, ([31 U.S.C. 1535](#)), authorizes an agency to place orders for goods and services with another Federal agency (or a major organizational unit of an agency). It can be used when: 1) funds are available, 2) the head of the ordering agency determines that it is in the best interest of the government, and, 3) the head of the ordering agency decides that ordered goods or services cannot be provided as conveniently or cheaply by contract with commercial enterprise. These must be shown by a Determination and Findings (D&F), prepared by the ordering agency. The performing agency must be able to provide the goods or services in-house or by contract, and parties should verify under Part 8 of the FAR that the responsibility for this good or service is not assigned to another agency of the Federal government.

The Economy Act cannot be used for partnerships with non-federal entities, and is only used with federal agencies when another more specific transfer authority is not available. When entering into an Economy Act agreement with a non-DoD entity, the Corps must enter into an agreement by which the ordering agency agrees to pay all costs.

[Cooperative Agreements for Educational and Training Activities](#) – The Corps may enter into cooperative agreements with non-Federal public and nonprofit entities for natural resources conservation or recreation management work that furthers training and educational opportunities. ([33 U.S.C. §2339, WRDA 2000, Sec 213](#)).

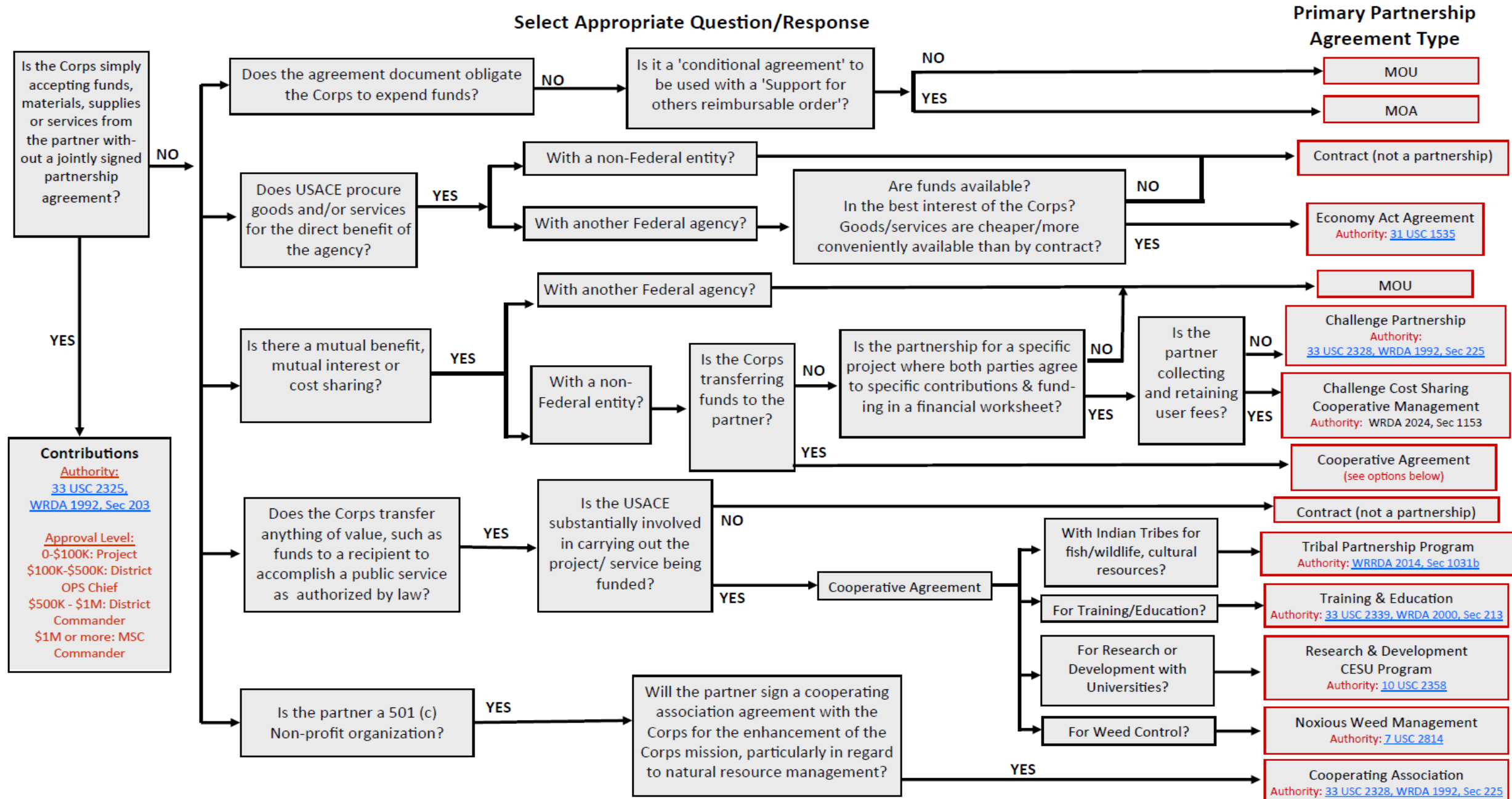
[Cooperative Agreements for Management of Undesirable Plants on Federal Lands](#) - The Corps may enter into cooperative agreements with State agencies to coordinate the management of undesirable plant species on Federal lands. This integrated management system can include education, preventative measures, physical or mechanical methods, biological agents, herbicide methods, cultural methods, and general land management practices such as manipulation of livestock or wildlife grazing strategies or improving wildlife or livestock habitat. ([7 USC 2814](#))

[Cooperative Agreements with Indian Tribes](#) - The Secretary may enter into a cooperative agreement with an Indian tribe (or a designated representative of an Indian tribe) to carry out authorized activities of the Corps of Engineers to protect fish, wildlife, water quality, and cultural resources. ([WRRDA 2014 1031\(b\)](#))

[Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units \(CESU\)](#) - The CESU Network provides opportunities for federal agencies, NGO’s and Universities to collaborate on research, technical assistance and education in the biological, physical, social and cultural sciences needed to address natural and cultural resource management issues at multiple scales and in an ecosystem context. CESU cooperative agreements allow the Corps to efficiently transfer funds and duty station employees to university partners while maintaining responsibility for agency-sponsored activities within CESU’s. ([10 USC 2358](#))

USACE NRM Partnership Agreement Decision Tree

(for Recreation and Environmental Stewardship Partnerships)



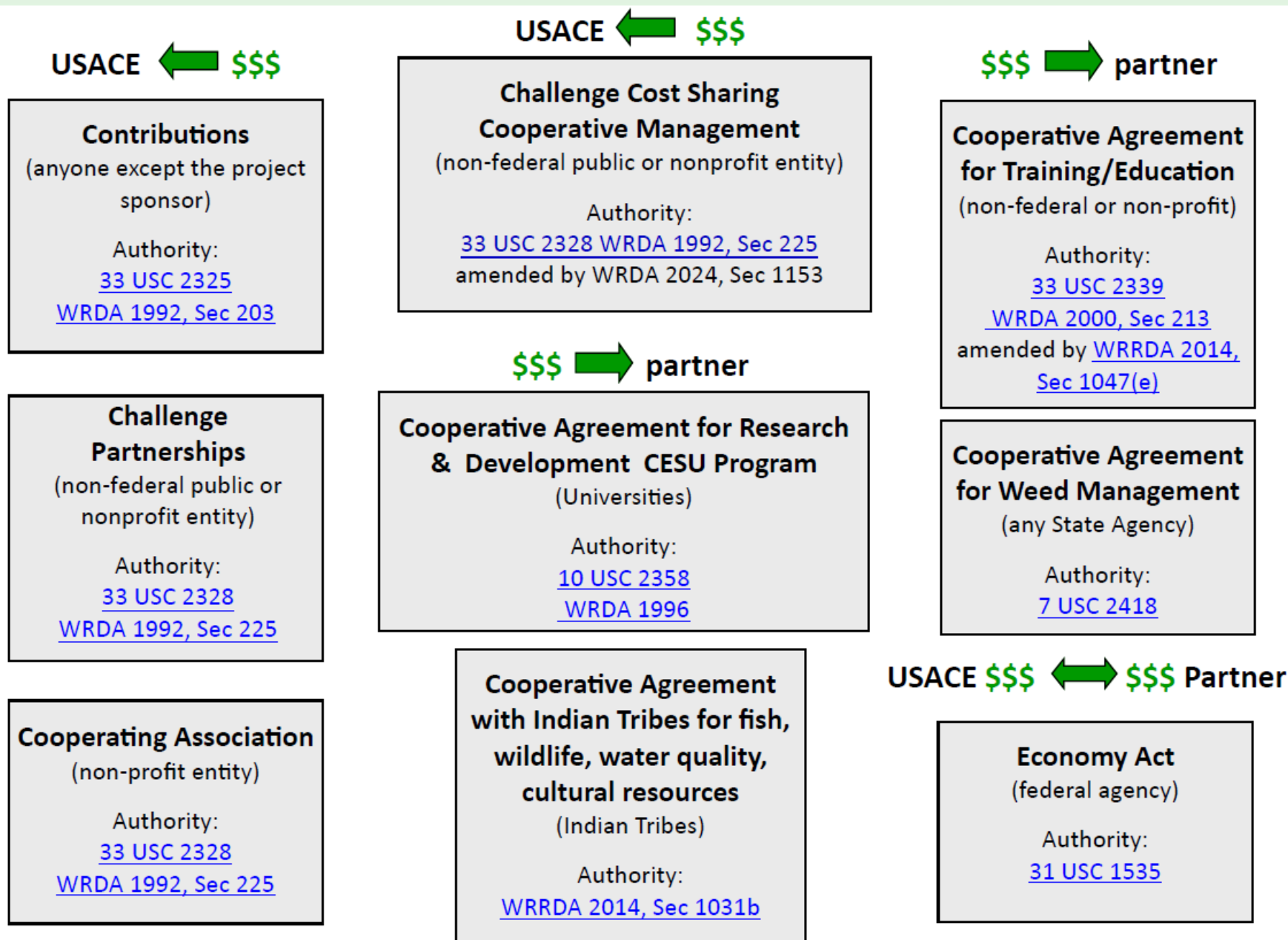


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USACE NRM Partnership Agreements - Flow of Money/Contributions

(for Recreation and Environmental Stewardship Partnerships)

19





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NRM Partnership Agreement Approval Levels

This document is intended to provide a brief overview of available partnership authorities and approval requirements.
Corps personnel should coordinate all proposed agreements with their Office of Counsel.

20



Agreement Type	Authority	Special Considerations	\$ Value	Signature*
Contribution	33 USC 2325, Sec 203 of WRDA 1992	Acceptance level based on \$ value	< \$2,500: Any staff member \$2,500 to < \$100K: District NRM Chief/ OPM/ Park Manager \$100K to < \$500K: District Ops Chief \$500K to \$1M: District Commander >\$1M: Division Commander	No agreement to sign. District Contributions Plan provides authorization. *Reference: ER 1130-2-500, Ch 10, April 2025
Challenge Partnership	33 USC 2328, Sec 225 of WRDA 1992		< \$100K: District NRM Chief/ OPM/ Park Manager \$100K to < \$500K: District Ops Chief \$500K to \$1M: District Commander >\$1M: Division Commander	Signature based on \$ value *Reference: ER 1130-2-500, Ch 11, April 2025
Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management	WRDA 2016, Sec 1155		N/A	District Commander *Reference: ER 1130-2-500, Ch 14, April 2025
Cooperating Association	33 USC 2328, Sec 225 of WRDA 1992		N/A	District Commander
Economy Act	31 USC 1535		N/A	District Commander
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	No explicit authority required. MOUs are non-binding agreements that do not commit either party to do anything. However, the Corps must have authority to perform the activities or carry out the intentions referenced in an MOU.	Level of signature depends on complexity of agreement and level of partner signature	N/A	OPM, Operations Chief, District Commander or higher official - depends on which authority is cited (if any) and/or level of signature at partner organization. Agreements with regional or national implications should be coordinated with affected MSCs and HQUSACE.
Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)	Authorities vary. MOAs are used to document binding agreements between parties based on specific statutory authority (e.g., Economy Act agreements).	Depends on authority	Depends on authority	Depends on authority
Volunteer	33 USC 569c		N/A	Designated volunteer coordinators *Reference: ER 1130-2-500, Ch 9, April 2025
Cooperative Agreement - Noxious Weed Management	7 USC 2814			District Commander has authority to enter into the agreement once approved by HQUSACE. Grants Officer signs the agreement.
Cooperative Agreement Educational/Training Activities	33 USC 2339, Sec 213 of WRDA 2000 as amended by Sec 1047(e) of WRRDA 2014			District Commander has authority to enter into the agreement. Grants Officer signs the agreement. *Reference 31 Aug 2015 CECW-CO Memo: Implementation Guidance for Section 1047(e) Training and Educational



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Resources: NRM Gateway

<https://corpslakes.erdc.dren.mil/partners/partners.cfm>

Partnerships

[Headquarters POC](#)

[Partnerships Pages Quick-finder Index](#)

In today's financial environment PARTNERING is an essential tool that allows the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to effectively manage recreation and environmental resources. In order to successfully meet our recreation and stewardship missions, and to foster shared values, vision, and a sense of ownership it is imperative that we work together with state governments, Native American tribes, private/public organizations, local communities, and other partners to maintain or advance programs from wildlife protection and habitat improvement to recreational facility enhancements.

Partnering helps to pool scarce resources, to promote coordinated, focused, and consistent mutual efforts to resolve common problems and missions, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. The NRM Program has embraced this reality and is committed to fully exploring the potential development of new public-private partnerships to leverage limited appropriated funds and human resources.

This page will help you determine the [right tools for your partnerships](#), [find the right training to expand your knowledge](#), and [learn from the successful efforts of your peers](#). You will find answers to longstanding questions and discover how to effectively utilize important partners such as the [Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation](#). The bottom line: **partnering is smart business**.

[Start here: Partnership Agreement Decision Tool](#)

Partnership Types: [Which is right for you?](#)

- [Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management Program](#)
- [Contributions Program](#)
- [Cooperating Associations Program](#)
- [Handshake Partnerships Program](#)
- [Volunteer Program](#)
- [Challenge Partnerships Program](#)
- [Cooperative Agreements](#)
- [Economy Act Agreements](#)
- [Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement \(MOU/MOA\)](#)

Program Information/References:

- [Bureau of Economic Analysis \(BEA\) Outdoor Recreation Economy Data](#)
- [CWBI-OPS: Partnerships and Volunteers Module](#)
- [FAQs](#)
- [Grants/Alternative Funding Sources](#)
- [NRM Partnership Agreement Signature/Approval Levels](#)
- [Policy & Procedures](#)
- [Training](#)
- [Division & District POCs](#) 
- [Good Enough to Share](#)
- [News / Current Issues](#)
- [Partnership Advisory Committee](#)
- [Power BI App - Partnerships/Volunteers Data Visualization Tool](#) 
- [USACE NRM Partnership Agreements - Flow of Money/Contributions](#)

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Partnership Opportunities

Connecting with the Corps

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) manages some of the most cherished lakes, rivers and lands near your cities and towns. Communities are proud of their special places in our parks. Great family memories are made while boating, fishing, camping, or after a quiet day of hiking or biking on one of our many trail systems. These experiences are important in strengthening families and organizations. Our parks also have significant economic impact, with 260 million visits per year supporting 210,000 jobs in communities near USACE lakes.

With you by our side, we can provide more services to the public.

Benefits of Partnering with the Corps

We believe in the power of partnerships to transform the experiences of our visiting public and enhance the sustainability of our public lands and waters.



National Exposure

Partnering with a federal agency such as USACE offers the opportunity for national exposure. USACE manages more than 400 lake and river projects on more than 12 million acres of land and water in 43 states.



Variety of Opportunities

The diverse missions of the Corps provide a variety of partnering opportunities. USACE provides over 4,700 recreation sites with more than 94,000 campsites, 3,700 boat ramps, and 7,400 miles of trails.



Economic Impact

Our parks have significant economic impact, with visitors spending upwards of \$16.8 billion annually on trip expenses and strengthening the environmental, social, and economic health of local communities.

90%

more than
of our lakes are within 50 miles of a
metropolitan area



To find out more about partnering with USACE please visit:
<https://corpslakes.ercd.dren.mil/visitors/partners.cfm>



Mohave Dam, CA

Los Angeles District, CA



W. Kerr Scott Lake, NC



Alum Creek Lake, OH

Shelbyville Lake, IL

Partner Spotlight

The Corps Foundation assists by partnering with a wide range of organizations including local Friends groups, private individuals and businesses to support educational activities which enhance our visitor's experiences. The Corps Foundation also advocates for policy changes to increase opportunities for partnering and leverage public-private resources. To learn how you can work with the Corps Foundation, visit the website: <http://corpsfoundation.org>

Connecting with Communities

New River Alliance of Climbers (NRAC) Summersville Lake

USACE has benefited in many ways since formally partnering with NRAC. NRAC has contributed \$60K in funding, provided \$50K in volunteer services and generated over \$100,000 in environmental stewardship value to Summersville Lake. The mission of the partnership between Summersville Lake and NRAC is to work together to create a sustainable use and continued access to the climbing opportunities along the stunning sandstone cliffs. NRAC became an unstoppable force to get things done. They constructed a 20-foot metal staircase for improved emergency evacuation and saw hundreds of volunteers packing natural stone to protect the shoreline that will ensure climbing opportunities for future generations. The partnership efforts of NRAC have triggered the launch of a multi-lateral partnership between local and national non-profits, federal and state entities, as well as the local community on getting involved with other initiatives. This outstanding partner won the National Excellence in Partnerships Award.

Summersville Lake, WV



Allatoona Lake, GA



Westville Lake, MA

Who are our Partners?

USACE is proud to partner with a broad spectrum of businesses, agencies, and organizations across the nation. Through partnership authorities, we are authorized to partner with federal, state, and local agencies, non-profits, corporations, small businesses, universities, individual volunteers and more!

Through these formal and informal relationships, we are able to accomplish incredible projects together both big, and small. Whether it is building birdhouses for native birds, donating life jackets for our boat ramps, to more enduring endeavors such as visitor center improvements and invasive species mitigation, our partners are who help make our public lands shine.

3,600

On average, more than 3,600 federal, state, and local agencies along with Tribes, businesses, educational institutes, and non-profit organizations partner with USACE annually.



Final Note

In a time of decreasing federal funding, America's lakes and waterways are at risk of reduced access, eliminated programs, and park closures. By partnering and working together, we can help maintain and improve programs and facilities and keep these treasured resources healthy and vibrant.





WHY PARTNER WITH JOHN H. KERR RESERVOIR?

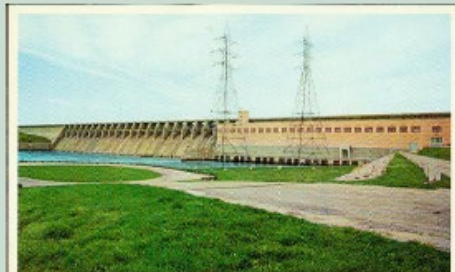
Benefits of Partnering

- Potential for national exposure by partnering with a federal agency
- Variety of partnering opportunities because of the Corps' diverse missions
- Potential market branding to reach out to new customers
- One of nation's leading federal providers of recreation
- At Kerr Reservoir millions of visitors each year enjoy Corps managed campgrounds (x4), boat ramps (x16), day use areas (x15), wildlife management areas (x26), trails (x2), environmental education center, and cultural resource sites
- Kerr Reservoir is located within 90 minutes of major metropolitan areas

Connecting with Kerr Reservoir

In the 1950's, Kerr Reservoir, also called Buggs Island Lake, was constructed for flood control, hydropower generation, recreation, fish and wildlife conservation, and local water supply. The 800 miles of wooded shoreline stretch across three counties in Virginia and three in North Carolina. Along this shoreline great memories are made while camping, boating, fishing, swimming, picnicking, hiking, and hunting.

These experiences are important in strengthening families and organizations. Our parks also have significant economic impact, with approximately 4 million visitors per year spending on trip expenses, strengthening the environmental, social, and economic health of communities.



John H. Kerr Dam, Buggs Island Lake
Old postcard image taken from downstream side of Kerr Dam.

With the help of our partners, we provide more service to the public than without them by our side.

To find out more about partnering with John H. Kerr:
Call: (434) 738-6143
Email: JHKerr@usace.army.mil



PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:

The Corps Foundation assists by partnering with a wide range of organizations including local Friends groups, private individuals and businesses to support educational activities which enhance our visitor's experiences. To learn how you can work with our national foundation, visit the Corps Foundation website: <http://corpsfoundation.org>

DISC GOLF COURSE IN NORTH BEND PARK

In 2019, a disc golf course was established in North Bend Park. The course is designed for all ages and levels of experience. You can visit our North Bend Day Use Area Gatehouse to sign-out discs and enjoy the course! Thank you to our partners including the Southside Virginia Disc Golf Association, Roanoke River Basin Association, and Dominion Power for their work on this project.



ISLAND CREEK ACCESSIBLE FISHING PIER

Through a handshake agreement with Veterans of Foreign Affairs and American Legion this partnership built Veterans Park at Island Creek Recreation Area by installing an accessible fishing dock, picnic shelter, and portable toilet. Construction of the facilities was provided by military personal, SEABEES, and other military affiliated groups. Other partners on this project include: NASCAR's Jeff Burton and Paralyzed Veterans of America. This partnership helped increase access to recreational opportunities by supporting the right for all citizens to recreate on public land.

NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY CONTRIBUTIONS

In 2021, park rangers and volunteers gathered at five locations around Kerr Reservoir to participate. Cleanup efforts across the Lake improved safety for our visitors, aesthetics at each site, and the health of the ecosystem by removing plastic, broken glass, and other trash from public lands. This event was possible through our partnership with Skanska and Cleveland Construction. They provided t-shirts, first aid kits, gloves, trash bags, water, and snacks for volunteers.





Partnership Newsletter:

Page 4

(A great way to find out more about our outstanding partners and volunteers!)

We need your stories!



BRIDGING THE GAP

Volume 9

Issue 2

September 2025

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.



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.

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.

In This Issue

- First Marathon in Years Uses Grant Funded Pedestrian Bridge 2
- Building Trails and Communities 3
- A Unique and Growing Partnership with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe 4
- Lake Mendocino Volunteer Camp Host 5

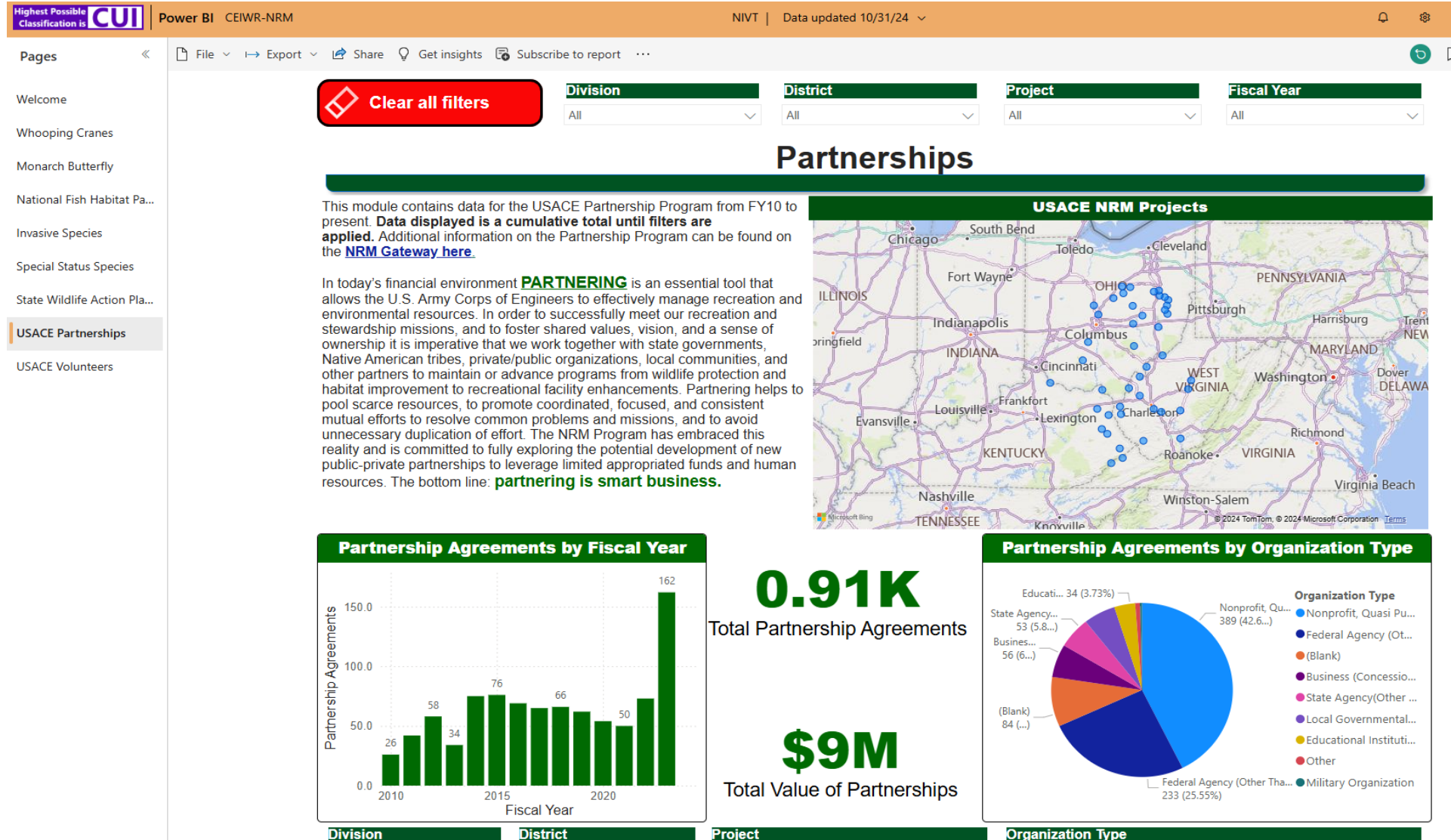


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Resources: Power BI Data Visualization

<https://app.mil.powerbigov.us/groups/me/reports/b08c657c-556f-478b-a8a1-8f585b2ad321/ReportSection21917e4d45d817ed9141?ctid=fc4d76ba-f17c-4c50-b9a7-8f3163d27582&bookmarkGuid=76033dcf-1083-445c-ad57-be142a545225>

25





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Resources: Bureau of Economic Analysis for Outdoor Recreation

<https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

Outdoor Recreation Industry
contributes \$1.3 TRILLION
(2.4% of GDP) to the economy
and 3.2% of all jobs!

Outdoor Recreation

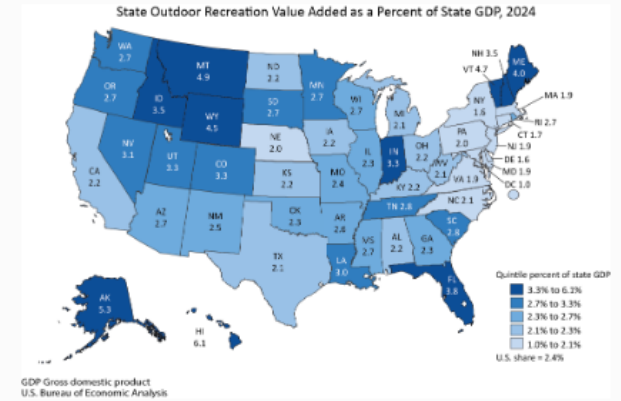
Outdoor Recreation Economic Statistics, U.S. and States, 2024

The value added of the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 2.4 percent (\$696.7 billion) of current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP) for the nation in 2024. Across states and the District of Columbia, value added for outdoor recreation as a share of state GDP ranged from 6.1 percent in Hawaii to 1.0 percent in the District of Columbia.

 Current Release

Current Release: March 05, 2026

Next Release: Fall, 2026



Current Release

Outdoor Recreation Economic Statistics, U.S. and States, 2024

[Full Release & Tables \(PDF\)](#)

[Tables - National Level \(Excel\)](#)

[Tables - State Level \(Excel\)](#)

[Interactive State Tables](#)

[Additional Information](#)

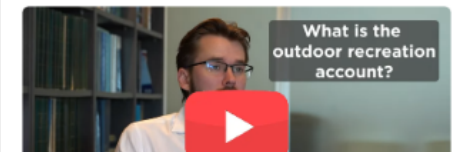
What are the Outdoor Recreation Economic Statistics?

These statistics measure the economic activity as well as the sales or receipts generated by outdoor recreational activities, such as fishing and RVing. These statistics also measure each industry's production of outdoor goods and services and its contribution to U.S. GDP. Industry breakdowns of outdoor employment and compensation are also included.

[Learn More](#)

Get an overview of outdoor recreation economic activity across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

[Browse the Map](#)



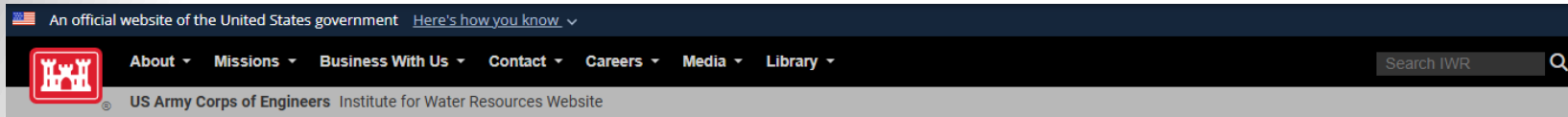


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Resources: Value to the Nation

<https://www.iwr.usace.army.mil/Missions/Value-to-the-Nation/Recreation/>

27



Home / Missions / Value to the Nation / Recreation



Value to the Nation

Value to the Nation Home

Capital Stock

Fast Facts

Coasts

Emergencies

Environment

Flood Risk Management

Hydropower

Navigation

Recreation

Regulatory

Water Supply

Value to the Nation: Recreation

USACE Lake and River Projects at Play



269M
visits per year

EVERY YEAR...there are about 269 million visits to the [more than 400 USACE lake and river projects](#) where visitors exercise, spend time with their families or just enjoy a lazy afternoon. Most of them will have driven an hour or less from a major city to reach their favorite USACE lake or river project. The fortunate Americans who experience a USACE lake or river project benefit from the fresh air and exercise, and these hours of recreation are often a highlight of their week. USACE is continually working to maintain and improve the parks surrounding these lake and river projects, including adding new recreational features, usually in partnership with local governments or private recreation organizations.

USACE Lake and River Projects at Work



\$13.6B
in annual visitor
spending

EVERY DAY...210,000 Americans work at jobs supporting visitors to USACE lake and river projects, at restaurants, hotels, marinas and other businesses related to tourism. These jobs play an important role in the local economy and generate annual visitor spending of about \$13.6 billion. USACE lake and river projects attract residents and businesses to the area resulting in investments to take advantage of the sporting and tourism opportunities the lake or river project offers. USACE lake and river projects are powerful generators of [economic development](#), often located in areas that are in need of steady jobs.

USACE Lake and River Projects and the Environment



10M
acres of natural
environment
managed

EVERY DAY...USACE [protects and manages](#) 10 million acres of natural environment in and around its lake and river projects through projects that protect and reestablish healthy ecosystems like planting new stands of the near-extinct Eastern chestnut trees, establishing fish hatcheries and controlling the threats posed by invasive species.

USACE Recreation Fast Facts

Natural and recreational resources at the more than 400 USACE lake and river projects provide social, economic and environmental benefits for all Americans. The Recreation Fast Facts reports highlight some of the benefits related to USACE's role in managing natural and recreational resources in the U.S.



USACE partners with a wide range of organizations to undertake environmental lake and river projects, develop recreational activities, and educate visitors. USACE also enlists thousands of individual volunteers annually to assist with its training and education activities.

Recreation Fast Facts Reports

Recreation Fast Facts Reports can be selected by national, state and lake, watershed, USACE Division, or USACE District level. Select 2023 Recreation Fast Facts Reports from the USACE Digital Library collections:

Select a National Report

Select a Lake/River Report

Select a State and Lake Collection

Select a USACE Division

Select a USACE District

Select a Watershed

You can select a collection of reports, or go to an individual report.

For a list of everything in a collection, for example, for the state of Alaska, select "Alaska State and Lake Reports". For all reports in the USACE Digital Library, select "All Reports".

- It is important to make yourself familiar with your relevant stats from the VTN site.
- This makes a great elevator speech when trying to explain that we are not just providing fun, 'nice to do' kinds things, but rather play a vital role in the local and national economy.



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Resources: Corps Lakes Photo Album

<https://corpslakes.erd.c.dren.mil/visitors/album.cfm?Option=View&Id=0&Activity=Volunteers>

28





US Army Corps
of Engineers

Corps Lakes Photo Album

Take a virtual trip of our lakes!

[Corps Lakes Gateway](#) > [Corps Photo Album - How to get photos added?](#)

Volunteers

Select a Corps of Engineers Lake

Select an Activity



Photo by: Mary Margaret Lewis

USACE Volunteers in Action- 1st Place



Photo by: Eric Haskell

USACE Volunteers in Action- 2nd place



Photo by: Robert Carr

USACE Volunteers in Action- Honorable Mention



Photo by: Mindy Cory

Volunteers in Action - 2nd place



Bardwell Lake



Bardwell Lake



US Army Corps
of Engineers

Corps Lakes Gateway
Your gateway to fun at Corps Lakes!

Select a State ▼

Select a Corps of Engineers Lake ▼



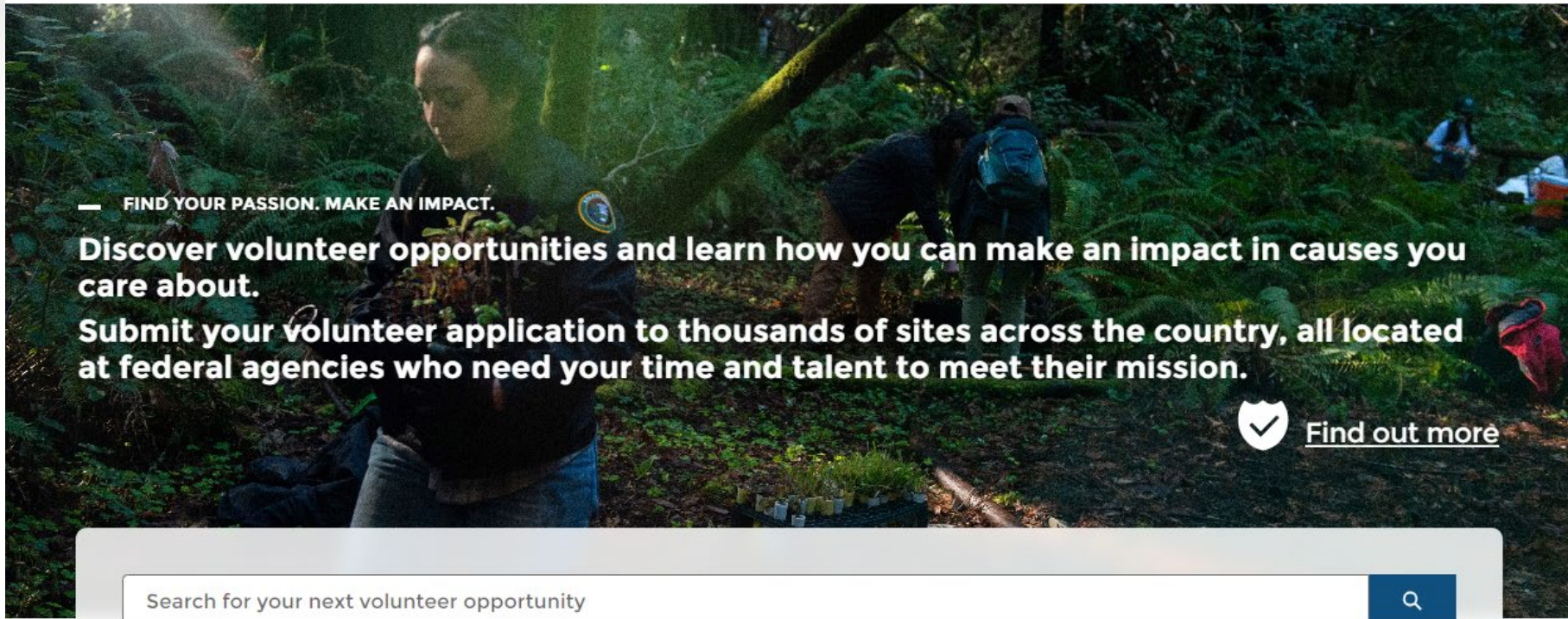
Natural Resources Management Partnerships

The US Army Corps of Engineers is a federal agency responsible for a wide range of activities, including civil works, recreation, natural resource management, and environmental stewardship missions. The USACE has a long history of working with partners to manage natural resources and lakes. These partnerships help USACE to achieve its mission of providing safe, secure, and environmentally sustainable water resources for the American people.





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— FIND YOUR PASSION. MAKE AN IMPACT.

Discover volunteer opportunities and learn how you can make an impact in causes you care about.

Submit your volunteer application to thousands of sites across the country, all located at federal agencies who need your time and talent to meet their mission.

 [Find out more](#)



Latest Opportunities



National Park Service



Forest Service



Forest Service

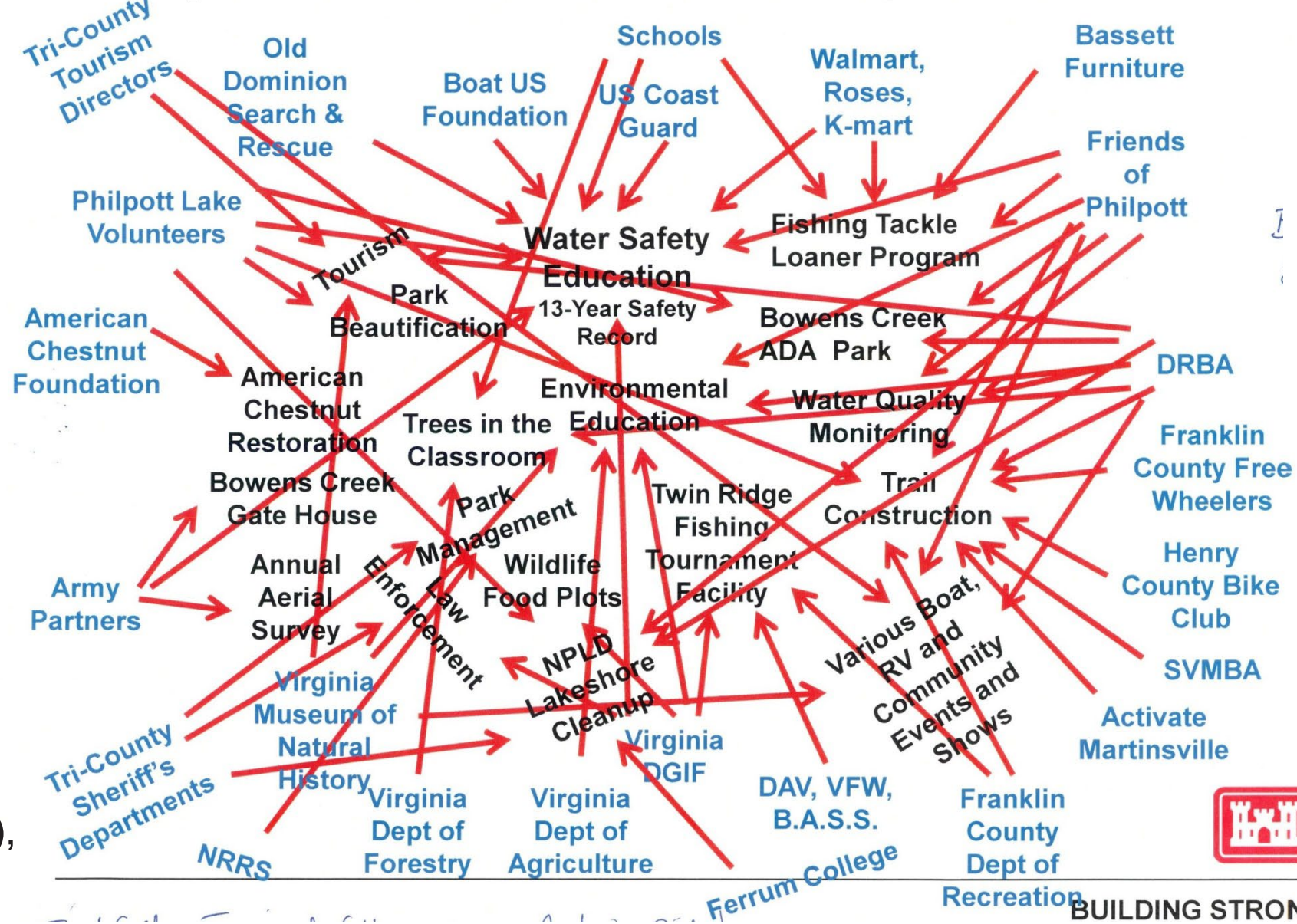
Resources:
www.Volunteer.gov



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Philpott Lake Partnership Flow Chart



Wilmington District (SAW), Virginia





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32



Philpott Lake Partnership Success



Twin Ridge Park Fishing Tournament Facility

- \$50,000 from local tourism council
- Led to selection by FLW for college fishing tournament
- Estimated value to local economy = \$500,000 return on investment





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Philpott Lake Partnership Success

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGAQaREwD_o

33





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Review

- Partnerships are all about relationships, trust, and communication.
- They take an investment of time and commitment and require flexibility to adapt to change.
- Types of partnerships used by the Corps NRM program:
Contributions, MOU/MOAs, Challenge Partnerships,
Challenge Cost Sharing Cooperative Management Agreements,
Economy Act, Cooperative Agreements, Cooperating Associations, Volunteers
- Although leases, licenses, and contracts may be used as instruments in addition to a partnership agreement type covered in this class, they are NOT partnerships themselves.
- You probably have more partnerships than you realize.

