

HANDSHAKE PARTNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY-LED RECREATION FUNDING PROGRAMS



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of Engineers®



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Handshake Program History/Purpose

- Program originated in 2004
- HQUSACE dedicated funding set aside as an incentive for field sites to develop partnerships and use partnership authorities to the maximum extent.
- Awardees of the Handshake funding are selected through a competitive process.
- Encourages community engagement
- Promotes mutually beneficial activities
- Requires a formal Challenge Partnership Agreement to achieve a mutually beneficial project (not just two people informally shaking hands)



Falls Lake

Note: This is an internal partnership incentive program, not a grant program.



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Program Changes for FY 27

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- Expanding program to proactively advance the goals of the “Sustaining Access to Recreation Facilities”(SARF) program and the “Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork” (BINP) initiative.
- Focus is on implementing durable, cost-effective management solutions that limit the growth of our program liabilities.
- Prioritizes proposals that delegate some management to others, leverages cost-sharing agreements and utilizes hiring flexibility to reduce long-term staffing and operational costs.
- TWO types of funding available via competitive process:
 - **Handshake funding:** Used for recreation backlog needs or environmental stewardship projects that demonstrate a measurable reduction in overall liabilities and operations and maintenance (O&M) costs, with an emphasis on improved efficiency.
 - **Community Led Recreation funding:** Supports the transition of recreation areas to external partners through outgrants or leases.



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Handshake Program Eligibility

- The authority for the challenge partnership program provides opportunities for private nonprofit and non-Federal public entities to contribute to and participate in the operation and/or management of RECREATION FACILITIES and NATURAL RESOURCES at USACE water resource development projects.
- ER 1130-2-500, Chapter 11
- Must include at least one of the following:
 - Challenge cost-sharing cooperative management partner
 - Conservation corps (such as SCA)
 - Army Career Skills/DoW SkillBridge participant
- AND
 - At least one other non-federal public or nonprofit entity.
- All Handshake Partnerships must have a Challenge Partnership Agreement, but not all Challenge Partnership Agreements are part of the Handshake Program.





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Challenge Partnership and the Handshake Program

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Challenge Partnership
aka "Papa Bear"

Handshake Partnerships
aka "Baby Bear"



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Handshake Basics

- USACE facilities and resources maintained at USACE expense
- FY 27: Handshake project must involve a challenge cost sharing cooperative management partner, youth conservation corps, or Army Career Skills/DoW SkillBridge participant to carry out the partnership project
- Challenge Partnership Agreement (CPA) must be executed with the additional partner(s) and the CCSCMA partner (if applicable). *Conservation corps participants and ACS/DoW SkillBridge participants are not required to be signatories; however, their roles must be clearly described in the project narrative of the CPA.*
- Funds must be used for recreation backlog needs or environmental stewardship projects that demonstrate a measurable reduction in overall liabilities and O&M costs, with an emphasis on improved efficiency. Projects that result in increased or unchanged O&M costs will not be considered. There must be no net increase in program liabilities or O&M costs.
- FY 27 funding amount = \$250,000
- **\$50,000 maximum individual project request**





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Investment (FY 04 – FY26)

Handshake Funds: \$ 3,946,640
(230 project recipients)

USACE Offices: \$ 3,566,208

Partners: \$ 10,742,688

Total : \$ 18,252,036

59% has been contributed by 798 total partners



Burnsville Lake



Arcadia Lake



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Project Examples: Trails

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- Orange Oswald climber access trail (LRH - Summersville 2019)
- Trail improvements (NAB – Raystown 2020)
- Highlander mountain bike/hike trail (LRL – Barren River 2021)
- Environmental adventure trail (MVS - Mark Twain 2021)
- Multi-user trail (MVS – Rend 2024)
- Wetland loop trail and viewing area (LRH – Clendening 2022)
- Equestrian trailhead enhancements (SWT – Big Hill 2017)
- Water trail mile markers (LRP – Loyalhanna 2016)
- Interpretive trail rehab (LRH – Beech Fork 2016)



Clendening Lake





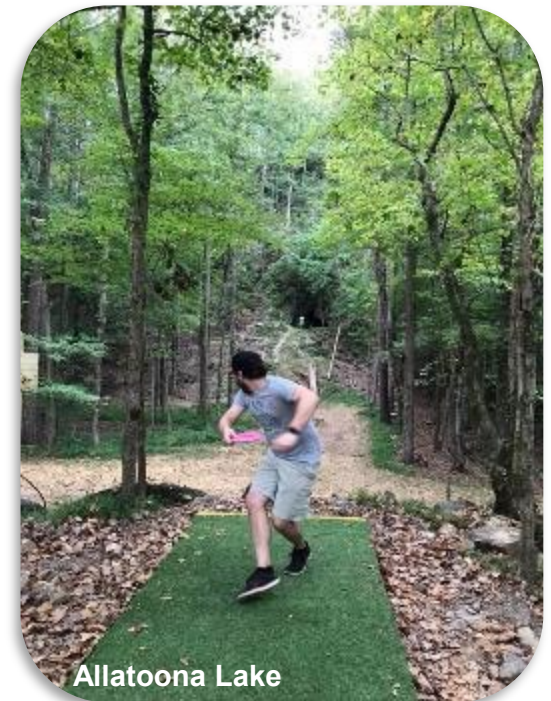
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Project Examples: Recreation

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- Roadside park (NWK – Truman 2023)
- Fishing tournament center (SAW - Philpott 2011)
- All access paddle craft launch ramp (LRH – Burnsville 2024)
- Natural playscape (MVR - Red Rock 2014)
- ORV park improvements (NWK - Milford 2016)
- Community picnic shelter, ADA improvements (LRE - Soo Locks 2018)
- Archery range (MVR - Saylorville 2019)
- Mtn bike skills park (NAP - Blue Marsh 2020)
- Tailwater access (LRP – Berlin 2021)
- Disc golf course (SWF – Wright Patman 2022)





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Raystown Lake Disc Golf Course Partnership:

<https://fb.watch/Babhedp3BG/>

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look forward to doing that in
the future. We truly prove that

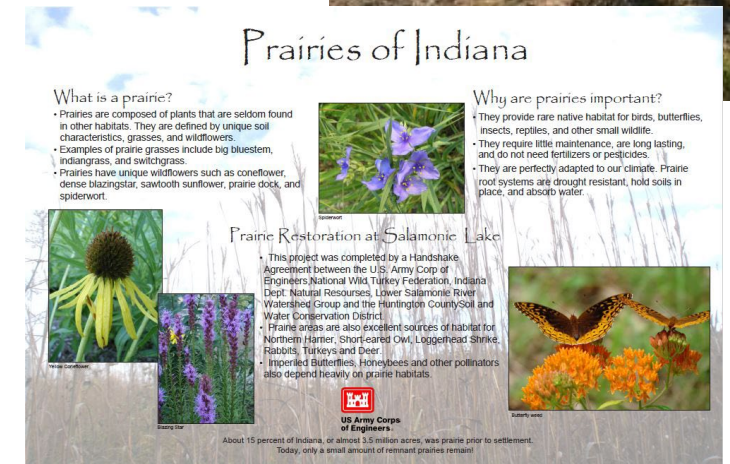
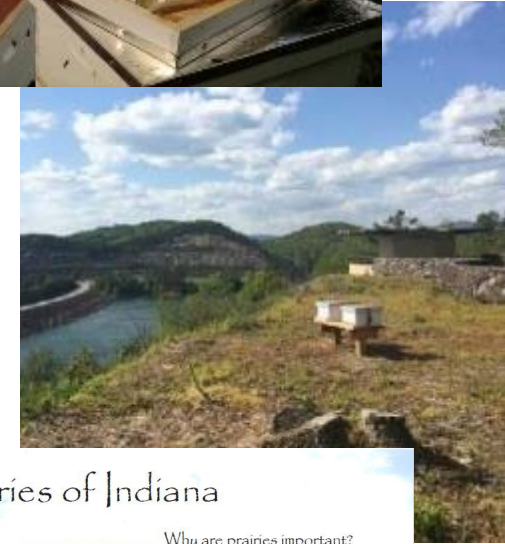


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Project Examples: Environmental Stewardship

- Slough restoration (SAM – Seminole 2024)
- Pine barren restoration (NAE – Mansfield Hollow 2023)
- Wildlife habitat enhancement (NAB – Tioga Hammond 2024)
- American Chestnut reintroduction (LRL – Patoka 2024)
- Tamarisk removal/habitat restoration (SPA - John Martin 2022)
- Honeybee hives and pollinator garden (SAM - Carters 2018)
- Reef ball shoreline erosion control (LRL – Nolin River 2021)
- Goat grazing of eastern red cedar (NWO – Fort Randall 2021)
- Invasive species portable wash station (NAP - Beltzville 2022)





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Project Examples: Accessibility

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- Playground accessibility improvements (LRN – Barkley 2024)
- ADA trail for all (LRH – Alum Creek 2023)
- Wheelchair access to waterfall (NAE - Tully 2010)
- Island Creek disabled veterans boat dock (SAW - JH Kerr 2010)
- ADA pond and pier (MVK - Ouachita 2013)
- ADA fishing pier, boat dock, duck blind (MVS - Kaskaskia 2015)
- Accessible hunting blinds (MVS - Wappapello 2015)
- ADA accessible fishing pier relocation (SAS – Thurmond 2021)
- ADA fishing dock and fish habitat (NWK – Perry 2022)





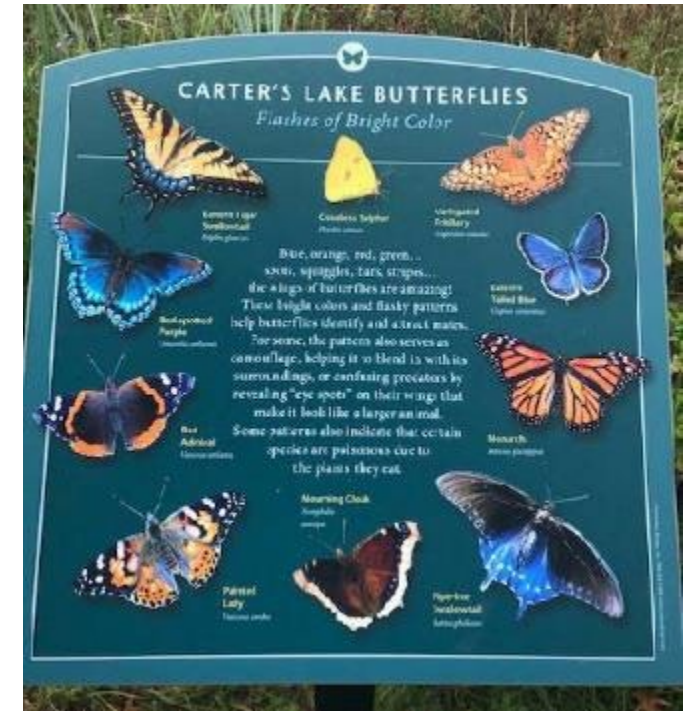
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Project Examples: Interpretation

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- NW Discovery water trail guide (NWP/NWW 2004)
- Environmental education center (SAW - W Kerr Scott 2010)
- Russian River coho salmon documentary (SPN - Sonoma 2011)
- Eagle nest project (SWF - Waco 2013)
- Interpretive gardens (MVP - Cross Lake 2015)
- Outdoor education area (NWK - Stockton 2016)
- Outdoor classroom (MVS – Carlyle Lake 2020)
- Amphitheater (MVS – Rivers Project 2020)
- Modernizing interpretation through technology (SAM – Carters 2021)
- Lock model preserve the past, present the future (LRE – Soo Locks 2021)





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Project Examples: Safety

- Severe weather warning system (MVS – Rend 2006)
- Regional life jacket loaner initiative (SAD - 2009)
- Lucky Peak mutual aid radio repeater (NWW - Lucky Peak 2010)
- Water trail mile marker signs (LRP - Loyalhanna 2016)
- Hiking trail emergency stations (LRN – Cordell Hull 2021)





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Applications



- Application - NRM Gateway Partnership Page
<https://corpslakes.erdcdren.mil/employees/handshake/handshake.cfm>
 - MS Word form
 - Example Applications
- May submit multiple applications but each lake project may receive funding for only one Handshake project
- Recipients are not required to sit out a year before applying again. However, must submit mandatory reports from previous year's funding and enter data in CWBI-OPS before eligible for current funds.



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FY 27 Timeline



Funds transmitted to District/Project via Funding Authorization Document (FAD)



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Start Early

Plan Ahead

- Partnerships take time
- July might seem like a way off, but it will come quickly.
- Determine your project
- Work with prospective partners
- Identify needs and each partner's contribution



Smithville Lake



Lake Okeechobee



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**It is very important when completing a
Handshake Application to
READ and FOLLOW
the application instructions.**

There are point deductions if not.

A good application includes a thorough description about:

- The partners
- The project
- The overall benefit of the partnership

AND



Clearly addresses each evaluation criteria in concise paragraphs.

It must tell us why the proposed project is valuable. Do not assume the evaluators already know.

Must include maps, plans, photos, conceptual drawings of the proposed project.



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Handshake Project Summary Statement

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- Describe the partnership and the work to accomplish
- The summary is limited to 1,500 characters. (The total written section of the application should be no longer than three pages.)
- Include the basic who, what, when, where, how.
- Outline concisely:
 - Who will accomplish each task
 - Are there...
 - New facilities
 - Renovations to existing facilities
 - Research
 - Visitor services
 - Educational or interpretive products created





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Handshake Funding Cost Breakdown

- Clearly spell out what the Handshake funding will be used for
- Detail materials, supplies, contracts, etc that will be purchased.





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Application Evaluation Criteria

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Specifically address how the project will meet the five evaluation criteria

- **O&M Impacts**
- **Partnership Value**
- **Recreational Benefit**
- **Environmental Stewardship Value**
- **Communication and Education Value**

Projects that can show benefits in multiple categories compete better.





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Scoring

- Each application is evaluated and scored 1 -10 for each criteria, then weighted.
 - O&M Impacts (15%)
 - Partnership Value (25%)
 - Recreational Benefit (25%)
 - Environmental Stewardship Value (25%)
 - Communication and Education Value (10%)





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Scoring (continued)

- Each PAC member evaluates all applications and submits scores to coordinator.
- Scores are combined to get total score (1,600 maximum)
- Bonus points (if applicable) are added.
- Points are deducted (not meeting the guidelines outlined in the instructions).
- Projects are ranked in the order of total score
- Funds are disbursed according to ranking and amount requested
- It is possible that the lowest ranked funded project will not receive all of its requested funds.





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Criteria #1: O&M Impacts

This partnership project will either result in overall Operations and Maintenance (O&M) cost savings or no net long-term O&M gain. It reduces program liabilities, consolidates or eliminates redundant/inefficient recreation assets or facilities.

- What is long term benefit of the project?
- How long do you estimate it will be around?
- What is long term cost?
- How will it improve efficiencies or be more sustainable?
- Will there be on-going maintenance required?
- By whom?
- Will the project be removed or closed if maintenance is required but not funded?
- **Longer term benefit and less O&M compete better**





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Criteria #2: Partnership Value

What is the significance of the partner's contribution to the project (e.g. critical partner, matching dollars, materials, in-kind services, etc.)?

- This category evaluates both the value of the partner and the value of their contributions.
- More partners compete better because there is a stronger partnering benefit and more potential contribution.
- The higher proportionately the value of the partner is to USACE, the more attractive the application.
- Higher % of partner contribution competes better
- Significance of partner to the project competes better





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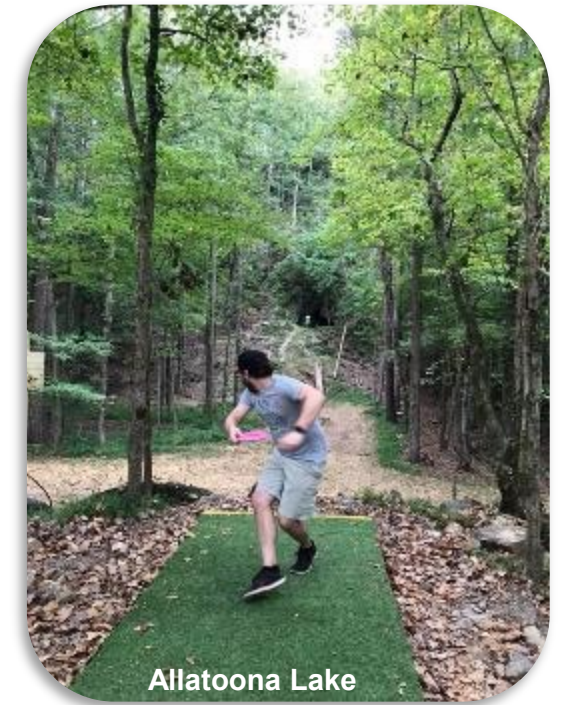
Criteria #3: Recreational Benefit

Does the project improve the overall recreation experience for the project's users? Does it provide opportunities for various user types?

- What experiences are created?
- Who benefits?
- Are there multiple user groups?
- The more diverse and multi-functioning the recreation experience can be, the better the application will score.



Cottage Grove Lake



Allatoona Lake



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Criteria #4: Environmental Stewardship Value

How does the project contribute to the natural world, and the improvement of USACE natural and/or cultural resources?

Topics that usually score well in this category:

- Pollinator projects
- Invasive species control
- Aquatic & fisheries habitat improvements
- Wildlife habitat improvements
- Trails
- Research
- Improvements to the natural environment usually score better





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Criteria #5: Communication and Education Value

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Does the project increase public understanding of USACE and its missions through interpretation, outreach, education and public information?

- It is important to show the effort in education
- It is important to show the impact of the efforts
- Is it interactive or is everything static?
- Explain how the benefits of the project are conveyed to the public and how the project improves the USACE image.





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Application Guidelines

Application Suggestions:

- Follow the instructions on length:
 - Max of 1,500 characters on summary statement
 - Max of 3 pages of narrative and
 - Max of 4 pages of drawings/ photos/ maps/ plans
- Provide the information in an easy to read, easy to find format.





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Program Basics

- No set required % matching contribution by partners (i.e. does not need to be 50/50)
- Partner's contributions = cash, volunteer services/labor, materials, supplies
 - Reference ER 1130-2-500 Ch 11
- Make sure to include all contributions made by partners on the application
- Proposals with higher % of partner contribution and participation usually compete better



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Program Basics

- Handshake funds must be spent via the same processes as any other appropriated funds; in accordance with contracting laws, Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation (DFAR), and Army Federal Acquisition Regulation (AFAR), and all other regulations.
- Projects must consider National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements that may be necessary prior to beginning work on the Handshake project
- Cannot “Give” Handshake Funds to partners
 - USACE does not have granting authority
- Handshake funds cannot be spent to fund permanent USACE positions (labor) or travel



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Managing Expectations

Fiscal Year	# Applications	Selected	Selection Rate
FY 26	10	6	60%
FY 25	7	6	86%
FY 24	8	6	75%
FY 23	11	7	64%
FY 22	17	6	35%
FY 21	22	13	59%
FY 20	16	9	56%



Prior to applying, discuss with partners what you will do if project is not selected

- Go ahead with project using more local office and/or partner funds
- Agree on a scaled down version
- Identify funding from other sources, i.e., Corps Foundation grants
- Try a different project
- Cancel project



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Submitting Application

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Application Deadline:

Close of Business 31 July 2026

Application packages must be coordinated with District and Division offices prior to being submitted and must be sent from the Division coordinator via e-mail to:

Jared Gagnon

jared.s.gagnon@usace.army.mil

(978) 318-8027



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Reporting Requirements

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If you are selected as a Handshake funding recipient, please note that there are quarterly updates and final reporting requirements.

	A	B	C
1	Facility Name:	Mark Twain Lake	
2	Project Title:	Environmental Adventure Trail	
3	Funding Year:	FY2021	
4	Date Funding Received:	17-Jun-21	
5	Amount of Funding Received:	\$19,000.00	
6	Handshake Funds Spent:	\$0.00	
7			
8	Due date	Funds Remaining	Status description:
9	4/15/2021	\$19,000.00	Currently coordinating the development of the Challenged Partnership Agreement with partners. Anticipated completion and submission will be June 1, 2021
10	6/15/2021	\$19,000.00	Received program funds from HQ. Site survey on-going
11	9/15/2021		
12	1/15/2022		
13	4/15/2022		
14	6/15/2022		Environmental Compliance requirements completed November 2021.
15			Trees designated within corridor felled by March 1, 2022.
16			Stumps and tree debris removed (75% of total) by July 1, 2022.
17			Task Order for site grading and tread placement currently being prepared. Awaiting RFP from contractor. Will execute \$19,000 funding.
18			Coordinated with partners for site amenities and interpretive features. Reviewing plans.
19			Stockpiling materials for tread surface in August 2022.
20			Anticipate beginning of task order execution by September 1, 2022.
21			
22	9/15/2022		Site survey performed for placement of drainage structures completed.
23			Stockpiling of materials for tread surface on-going
24			Task Order issued for the site grading and tread placement.
25			Anticipate execution in the Fall of 2022. \$19,000 obligated.

Handshake Partnership Program

Final Project Close-Out Report

1. Fiscal Year Selected as Winning Project:
2. Name of Corps Project/Lake:
3. District / Division of Corps Project/Lake:
4. Handshake Project Name:
5. Amount of Handshake Funds remaining: \$
6. What has been accomplished? Please provide photographs; before, during, and after!:

Total	
Handshake Program Funding Amount	\$
Local Corps Office Funds (total expended on labor, materials, contracts, etc.)?	\$
Partner's Contributions (total value of funds, goods, services, volunteer hours, etc.)	
Partners Name	Total Value of Contributions
1	\$
2	\$
3	\$
4	\$
5	\$
6	\$
7	\$
8	\$
9	\$
10	\$

6. Handshake Program Recipient Feedback

Please take this opportunity to provide feedback on all aspects of the Handshake Program and the Challenge Partnership Agreement authority. Your productive comments are important to the ongoing improvement of the program. Make sure to let us know how the Handshake funds have benefited your efforts to initiate and/or strengthen your partnerships.

7. Handshake Summary:

Please also include a separate newspaper type article describing the project and the benefit to the Corps of Engineers and to the public as a result of this partnership project. Examples can be found on the gateway under [Handshake Success Stories](#).



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Example Closeout SITREP



HANDSHAKE PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS STORY (PART 1 OF 3)

LITTLE ROCK DISTRICT, SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION



WHO: USACE, Little Rock District, Operations Division; Pulaski County Public Works (PCPW); Quail Forever; and the University of Arkansas Corporate Extension Service

WHAT: Handshake Partnership Agreement

WHEN: March 2020 - Present

WHERE: David D Terry - Damsite 6 West Park

WHY:

- Installation of new restroom
- Restoration of pollinator habitat
- Improvement of wildlife habitat

WHAT'S NEXT: Later in the spring and summer, another survey will be done to see which plants regenerate and the team can determine the level of restoration that will be required to complete the pollinator portion of this partnership agreement.



Summary:

On 15 February 2022, the installation of a \$53,000 restroom began at David D Terry - Damsite 6 West Park. The cost of the new restroom was a split between SWL and Pulaski County Public Works (PCPW) with PCPW funding \$27K. This is the result of a Handshake Partnership agreement between SWL, Pulaski County Public Works, Quail Forever and the University of Arkansas Corporate Extension Service. This mission was undertaken by Natural Resource Specialist, Brittany Seidel, who initiated the conversation with the partners and completed the partnership application during the application period in September 2019. She received notification that her application was funded for \$25,000 in March 2020 and work got off the ground. This partnership also includes restoration of pollinator habitat and improvement of wildlife habitat (continued on next slide).



Q/A From Previous Classes

- *What happens if your project is selected, but your partner can't come up with their funding?*
You can find a new partner to complete the project with, or the handshake funds are returned and likely offered to the next highest scoring applicant.
- *What if cost of project is less than expected?*
The unused funds are returned. Handshake funding can only be used for the stated project.
- *How long do you have to obligate your funding?* 1 year
- *Can the USACE project contribution consist of labor only?* Yes
- *Can you use a different partner if your original partner falls through?* Yes
- *Where can the funds be spent?*
Only on lands and waters operated and maintained by USACE
- *Can I give the Handshake funds to the partner to spend?*
No, only USACE can use the Handshake funds



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Handshake Program Gateway Page

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Handshake Program

Headquarters Partnership POC

The Handshake Program offers a source of seed money to Corps installations for worthwhile partnership projects. The intent of this program is to initiate new, or enhance existing recreation and natural resources management opportunities. The objective is to provide an incentive to Corps projects to utilize partnering initiatives to their fullest potential. In addition, this funding is intended to encourage local organizations to partner with the Corps to construct, operate, and/or maintain local partnering projects. The Handshake Program is a way for the Corps to demonstrate our recognition that partnerships flow in both directions (i.e. partnerships are a "handshake," not a handout). Corps leadership has demonstrated their commitment to a partnership culture by establishing this program.

PLEASE NOTE: At this time, USACE has no authority or mechanism to give a non-federal partner funds. Contact your district partnering POC or division Partnership PDT member if you have questions concerning this issue.

Questions about this program should be directed to Jared Gagnon, Handshake Program POC at (978) 318-8027 or jared.s.gagnon@usace.army.mil

- [FY26 Recipient Announcement Memo](#)
- [FY 27 Handshake and Community Led Recreation Program Request for Nominations Memo, April 2027](#)
- [FY 27 Handshake application instructions](#)
- [FY 27 Handshake application](#)
- [FY 27 Community Led Recreation application instructions](#)
- [FY 27 Community Led Recreation application](#)

- | | |
|--|--|
| ● Challenge Partnership Agreement Template | ● Final Report Form Template |
| ● Handshake Fund Execution | ● News/Current Issues |
| ● Applications and Agreements | ● FAQs |
| ● Success Stories | |

Handshake Program Recipients

- | | |
|--|--|
| ● Spreadsheet of Handshake Recipients 2004 - Current | ● Recipient Memos 2004 - Current |
|--|--|

Handshake Program Applications and Agreements

Trails

- 2011:**
- BWT [Application/Agreement](#) - Alabama birding trail development, brochure, website
 - Carlyle [Application/Agreement](#) - River walk 1.5 mile multi-use trail with accessible fishing pier
 - DeGray [Application/Agreement](#) - One-mile Interpretive geology trek and multi-use trail
 - Ouachita [Application/Agreement](#) - 16 mile extension of Vista Trail
- 2012:**
- Hartwell Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Mountain bike trail facility improvements
 - Lost Creek Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Nature trail signs
 - Rathbun Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Trail rehabilitation
 - Stockton Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Multi-use trail (1.6 mile)/ parking lot construction
- 2013:**
- Caesar Creek Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Fitness trail
 - Mark Twain Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Campground/VC connector trail construction

Environmental Stewardship

- 2011:**
- Allatoona [Application/Agreement](#) - American chestnut restoration
 - Shenango River [Application/Agreement](#) - American chestnut re-introduction
 - Francis E Walter [Application/Agreement](#) - Borrow area habitat restoration
- 2012:**
- Gull Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Invasive species wash station
- 2013:**
- Fort Peck Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Aquatic invasive species prevention
 - Lake Red Rock [Application/Agreement](#) - Fish habitat improvement rearing pond construction
 - Raystown Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Wildlife and Bird Watering/Pond rehabilitation
 - Smithville Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Aquatic habitat enhancement/fish structures
- 2014:**
- New Hogan [Application/Agreement](#) - Recycling program development
 - Allatoona Lake [Application/Agreement](#) - Osprey platform construction
 - Kaw Reservoir [Application/Agreement](#) - Archaeological research project
 - Carr Creek Lake [Application/Agreement](#)



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Community Led Recreation (CLR) Program Basics

- Funding to support the transition of recreation areas to external partners through outgrants or leases. (*Supports the goals of the Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork (BINP) and the FY 26 Sustaining Access to Recreation Facilities (SARF) to outgrant at least 50 PSAs*)
- Proposal MUST include an outgrant partner that will assume O&M responsibility for a USACE recreation area.
- This program is designed to reduce the government's financial footprint by transferring operational control and associated costs.
- Funding may also be used for one-time improvements to make a site viable for a partner and to cover the administrative costs of the property transfer, thereby creating self-sustaining recreation areas at lower long-term costs for the taxpayer.
- **FY 27 funding amount = \$1 million**
- **\$200,000 maximum individual project request**



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FY 27 Timeline



Funds transmitted to District/Project via Funding Authorization Document (FAD)



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Community Led Recreation Summary Statement

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- Describe the work to accomplish
- The summary is limited to 1,500 characters. (The total written section of the application should be no longer than three pages.)
- Include the basic who, what, when, where, how.
- Outline concisely:
 - Who will accomplish each task
 - Are there...
 - New facilities
 - Renovations to existing facilities





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CLR Funding Cost Breakdown

- Clearly spell out what the CLR funding will be used for
- Include any costs for facility improvements prior to transfer, labor costs for Real Estate to process the outgrants and transfer the O&M responsibility.





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CLR Application Evaluation/Scoring

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Specifically address how the project will meet the three evaluation criteria

- **Facility improvements prior to transfer**
- **Annual cost-savings value**
- **Recreational benefit**

Each application is evaluated and scored 1 -10 for each criteria, then weighted.

- Facility Improvements (25%)
- Annual cost-savings value (60%)
- Recreational benefit (15%)

Criteria #1: Facility Improvements Prior to Transfer

Explain or describe any facility improvements that will be made to the PSA(s) to encourage potential partner interest in the transfer of O&M responsibilities.

- How will the upgrades improve efficiencies or be more sustainable?
- Will old/outdated facilities be removed or replaced through this funding, resulting in reduced O&M costs?



Criteria #2: Annual Cost-Savings Value

How much money will outgranting the PSA(s) save USACE on an annual basis, based on historical expenditures?

- Include long-term annual administrative oversight costs, including Real Estate labor, in the cost-savings totals.





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Criteria #3: Recreational Benefit

How does the project improve the overall recreation experience for the project's users? Does it provide opportunities for various user types?

- What experiences are created?
- Who benefits?
- Are there multiple user groups?

