

## **From the Field to Headquarters: Reflections on the CAP Rotation by Nicole Giles**

Stepping out of the daily rhythm of local project management and into the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Headquarters is a profound shift in perspective. Recently, I had the privilege of participating in the Career Assignment Program (CAP)—an immersive rotational experience that significantly broadened my understanding of our national enterprise and the Civil Works mission.

At the project level, our focus is naturally trained on local operations and stakeholder needs. Through the CAP rotation, however, I was able to see how HQ supports these vital field efforts from a macro level. During my time there, I participated in policy revision, experiencing firsthand the delicate balance required to draft national guidance that remains practical on the ground. I also observed the highly interconnected network linking our national teams and the Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs), gaining a deeper appreciation for how resources and expertise are mobilized across the entire organization.

This strategic perspective was further reinforced through my engagement with legislative processes. Collaborating with the HQ team to formulate congressional Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) reports clarified the legislative loop, illustrating exactly why accurate field data is so critical to shaping national policy.

Beyond these operational tasks, the rotation provided an exceptional environment for professional growth. Working alongside the talented HQ team allowed me to build invaluable relationships and offered a clear, unfiltered view of how USACE functions at its highest levels.

I return to my home projects not just with an expanded professional network, but with a renewed vision. Understanding the "why" behind national directives empowers me to lead my local teams with greater clarity, directly aligning our daily park operations with the broader trajectory of the USACE enterprise.

Of course, stepping away for a developmental opportunity of this magnitude requires an immense amount of trust and support from the team back home. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to Cathy St. Andre for seamlessly backfilling my Project Manager position at Buffumville Lake and Hodges Village Dam. Her leadership and dedication ensured that our parks remained fully operational, safe, and thriving in my absence. Her hard work afforded me the peace of mind to fully engage in this invaluable HQ experience, and for that, I am incredibly thankful.