

## A Farewell from Steve Austin – after 45 years of service ...

### *...and 33 years overseeing the USACE Park Ranger program*

The Natural Resources Management Program was recently celebrated by many USACE leaders, including Mr. Alvin Lee, Director of Civil Works, who said *“When you go to our recreation areas, the park rangers are the face to the Corps, providing essential services to the public, and that’s very important.”* Mr. Thomas Smith, Chief of Operations and Readiness Division, commented, in reference to the 250 million annual visitors, *“all they want to do is come to a beautiful place and have an enjoyable experience ... and they are doing that under the architect and framework provided by our park rangers.”* Mr. Mike Ensich, former Chief of Operations and Readiness, said, in relation to the early park ranger surveys, *“he put his heart and soul and drew the conscience of the field into the findings of those surveys,”* Mr. Jeff Krause, Chief of Natural Resources Management (NRM), who does an incredible job in supporting the NRM program, provided the platform, upon which to recognize both “he” and our program.

Granted these statements were made during my May 2021 retirement ceremony and I appreciate all the kind words that our leaders and others have said, but as I emphasized during my speech and by showing that *“It’s All About Me”* sign (and then quickly showing the red backslash “no” symbol sign) – it’s about ALL OF US!

You, as a member of our NRM team, deserve a big thank you by meeting and exceeding our legislative authority of managing *“the natural cultural and developed resources of each project in the public interest, providing the public with safe and healthful recreation opportunities while protecting and enhancing these resources.”* You do a great job in exceeding our mission objectives every day.

Many believe our modern professional NRM program began with the passage of the Flood Control Act of 1970. I have been blessed to have been part of this program for 45 of the 50 years as Park Technician at Carlyle Lake, Park Ranger at Mark Twain Lake, Outdoor Recreation Planner in the Omaha District, and Natural Resource Manager at HQ, overseeing the USACE Park Ranger program for 33 years. Why did I stay so long? Well, if you had the best job in HQ supporting the best collective workforce in the USACE you would have stayed too - even in DC! I want to thank you for your service, past or present, and recognize that although you have a great job, it’s often challenging and sometimes dangerous. Those who have been injured in the line of duty deserve a special hero recognition including Ranger Opal James who was murdered by two escaped convicts in 1977 at Blue Mountain Lake, Arkansas. We will always remember these heroes. Please remember the protection of resources and enforcement of Title 36 will always be secondary to your safety.

The future of our program is very bright. Our leaders clearly support the NRM program and I can attest that everyone in HQ has your back. You’ve heard many times that our USACE park rangers are such great ambassadors for the agency, as coined in 1979 by former Chief of Engineers LTG John Morris, who said the park rangers are the *“Corps Face to The Nation,”* and our face shines brighter each and every day because of you. Keep up the great work – the difference you make in people lives is, as they say, “priceless”.

Thank you for your dedicated service and, as I said above, for being part of the best collective workforce in our agency – the Corps Park Rangers. Yes, the future is bright!

Stephen Austin

Senior Policy Advisor for Park Ranger Activities

U.S Army Corps of Engineers

*Note: The Gateway Team asked Steve to write this farewell article before his official retirement date. Steve’s service is much appreciated, and he is wished all the best.*