

August 7, 2008

A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE RECREATION MISSION OF THE US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

FY 08 and FY 09 Recommended Actions

Presented by Supporters of the Corps Recreation Program (SCRP)

In February 2008, Supporters of the Corps Recreation Program (SCRP) (see Appendix) presented a new Strategy for the Recreation Mission of the Corps of Engineers to the Chief of Engineers, LTG Van Antwerp, to the Director of Civil Works, and to the Chief of Operations—Civil Works. The Strategy identified program goals and five major program areas for addressing the Corps current and future role in recreation for the American public. The February Strategy identifies a number of potential actions the Corps and others could take to achieve the identified goals.

LTG Van Antwerp expressed appreciation for the Strategy and acknowledged its value to the Corps, but invited SCRCP to recommend a small number of high priority actions that could be undertaken and accomplished within the two years. *The group's recommended high priority actions are presented here.* These actions can be accomplished within existing resources available to the Corps and can effectively engage and involve stakeholders in the implementation.

The following are the benefits of both the Strategy and the recommended actions:

- Improved public awareness and support for the Corps of Engineers overall
- Enhanced financial and human resources
- Improved support to Military readiness, retention, and quality of life of military personnel and their families
- Increased support for expansion of Corps legislative authorities to better achieve recreation and environmental mission and program objectives

The organizations that have participated in this effort have offered their support and their assistance in implementation of the recommended actions. Through collaboration and cooperation, relationships will be greatly strengthened and future actions can go even further in achieving the benefits above.

EXPAND THE CORPS COMMUNICATIONS

Finding: The lack of public awareness about the scope and benefits of the Corps recreation program is a handicap in achieving support in the budget and public policy arena for resources essential to serving the health, safety, educational and economic benefits Americans should derive from Corps-administered sites. State, local, and private partners are often unaware of the recreation-related opportunities and issues facing the Corps, and as a result, they are unable to provide support when needed.

Solutions: Immediately focus communications assets and undertake a creative and cost-effective effort to significantly increase public awareness and visibility.

High Priority Actions:

1. New National Geographic Society (NGS) Book—"America's Top 100 Waterway Destinations."
 - Work with the NGS and other organizations to design and produce this new book, modeled after the very popular "NG Guide to America's Scenic Highways and Byways," a top selling book now in a third edition.
 - Work with NGS to include a number of waterways—lakes and rivers—managed by the Corps, which will provide enhanced public visibility and recognition of Corps recreation resources and efforts.
2. Actively participate with tourism organizations and agencies, including the Southeast Tourism Society, the National Association of State Park Directors and the Western States Tourism Policy Council, to highlight Corps recreation, explore new options for cooperation, build new and strengthen relationships, and provide on-going information about the program challenges.

FEES, PERMITS, AND AUTHORITIES

Finding: New tools, authorities, and funding sources are needed, including recreation fee retention, expanded partnership authorities and fiscal authorities. Many of the tools are successfully used by other federal agencies, including other DOD offices and programs.

Solutions: The Corps should aggressively explore use of existing authorities for innovative development and operation of recreation and visitor service infrastructure, including pilot efforts involving Non-Appropriated Funding Instrumentalities (NAFI's), Challenge Cost-Share Agreements, and real estate leasing. The Corps should communicate to the Administration and Congress the improvements that are possible through expanded fee and concessions authorities which incorporate fee retention.

High Priority Actions:

3. Seek inclusion under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). Pending legislation would provide authority and fee retention power comparable to that of NPS, FS, BLM, FWS and BoR and this inclusion is supported by SCRP.
4. Seek legal counsel on the USACE current and potential authorities to use NAFI's and/or other instruments to continue operations of Corps facilities that may be at risk of closure and cut-backs. Explore other authorities to return portions of revenues from real estate and concession fees as incentives for high quality operations of recreation areas locally.
5. Explore with Department of Defense's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation offices opportunities to cooperate in recreation programs at certain facilities in the vicinity of bases for joint public/military use, especially as a way to continue operations of Corps facilities that may be at risk of closures or significant changes in operations. Additionally, explore with other DOD offices means to better serve active duty military and veterans, especially the severely wounded and their families, through creative partnerships with local, state, and national organizations such as the US Olympic Committee's US Paralympics Division and other outreach programs and activities.

CORPS PLAN FOR EXPANDED PARTNERSHIPS

Finding: The Corps has less robust strategic relationships with key partners (stakeholders) interested in its recreation mission than many other federal agencies, including other DOD units. Other agencies use a variety of advisory committees, foundations and other mechanisms to communicate and coordinate with constituencies. The Corps has made credible efforts in this area, including conducting listening sessions for stakeholders. Stronger regional and national partnerships between the agency and key groups are needed. The Corps has signed an MOU with the Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation, but its function and focus needs to be further developed.

Solutions: The new Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation should play a central role in an inventory of current and potential stakeholders, and identifying opportunities for cooperative actions. These activities should not require significant additional funds, but should be elevated in priority.

High Priority Actions:

6. Agree to work with stakeholders under the auspices of the Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation to develop a concept and conduct a "Summit" of a manageable group of key partners in 2009 to build a national

constituency for the Corps recreation program. The Working group would identify and support pre-summit activities to enhance the outcomes of the Summit.

7. The Foundation would work with the stakeholder group to develop a plan for the transition of a new administration to educate and inform them about the Corps role and importance of recreation.
8. Work with Department of Defense to expand understanding and appreciation for the importance of Corps recreation facilities and opportunities to family health and wellness of the general public, active military, reservists and veterans.

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Finding: The impact of Corps recreation sites on gateway communities is substantial, both economically and on quality of life, and will influence the sustainability of many communities impacted by changes in manufacturing, mining, agriculture and other basic industries. Elements of current project plans could boost the positive influence of the Corps on these communities and millions they serve. Yet, potential contributions to these communities are limited by Corps budgets for recreation infrastructure, management and communications.

Solution: The Corps should convene a meeting with local government officials, business and tourism industry leaders in one or more districts to discuss innovative ways to expand the benefits of Corps facilities to local communities. Among the possible outgrowths of such meetings would be consideration of cost-sharing with local governments to build, maintain and expand Corps recreation based on innovative approaches by the local governments to fund their share.

High Priority Action:

9. Collaborate with a State tourism organization to bring together regional interests and identify changes and improvements that could be made that would address Corps management issues and keep the local areas economically vibrant.
 - Explore potential opportunities for beneficial public and/or private partnerships, initially targeting areas in Texas and/or Arkansas where current or proposed reduced operating seasons are of regional concern and which have a good partnership base.
 - Reward Corps managers for instituting changes by allowing at least partial retention of savings, rather than redistribution of savings to other lakes or Districts.

PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL "CHILDREN AND NATURE" INITIATIVES

Finding: Other federal agencies have publicly announced national commitments to support a variety of initiatives related to “children and nature”. There is ample evidence, that an entire generation of children will soon be separated from beneficial connections to nature and the outdoors with many resulting negative impacts to individuals and to society at large. The Corps lakes currently provide for local programs and initiatives that will get children outdoors, but more can and should be done at national and local levels.

Solutions: The Corps should play a meaningful role in the national movement to reconnect children and youth to nature and the outdoors. Corps facilities, lakes, and programs offer unique opportunities to families, organized groups, intergenerational initiatives, and local and state governmental partners to get kids reconnected with nature.

High Priority Actions:

10. National Youth Marine Alliance—Corps Memorandum of Understanding
 - Formalize the partnership with the National Youth Marine Alliance to work with the NYMA and the Adventure Scouts on their “Preserve America’s Waterways” youth initiative.
 - Support lake projects to work with local NYMA groups, project partners and others to provide areas for watershed, recreation, and stewardship community service projects at Corps lakes for youth 14-20.
11. Corps leaders commit to expanded participation in National Get Outdoors Day and other events that promote Children and Nature activities. Corps actively participates in efforts to integrate Children and Nature initiatives within the Federal agency family and state and local initiatives. Reward Corps projects that stretch their abilities to promote partnerships and activities with youth.
12. Increase contact of Corps leadership with allied public and private organizations, including President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, to support the Army’s goals for recruitment of healthy young people and safety of the American public through improved health.

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Appendix

Supporters of the Corps Recreation Program: Participating Organizations

American Recreation Coalition

National Marine Manufacturers Association

National Recreation and Parks Association

National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds

Recreation Vehicle Industry Association

Association of Marina Industries

National Association of State Parks Directors

American Sport Fishing Association

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Professional Paddle Sports Association

Recreation Boating & Fishing Foundation

Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation

Boat US

ReserveAmerica

National Park Hospitality Association

National Alliance of Gateway Communities

CHM—Government Services

Personal Watercraft Industry Association

Southeast Tourism Society

Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association

Marinas International