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COMMANDER'S CORNER

MESSAGE FROM COL. ALAN DODD

ADVANCING EVERGLADES RESTORATION GOALS FOR EARTH DAY AND EVERY DAY

We frequently hear, "it's all about the water." What you hear isn't always true, but in this case, it is about the water.

It's about quantity of water, it's about quality of water and it's about rising water – as in sea level. The global theme for Earth Day 2013 is "The Face of Climate Change." Here at the Corps, we not only design our projects to adapt to changing conditions, but we are also working to restore natural flows in south Florida that will aid in the reduction of potential sea level rise impacts.

Climate change and rising sea levels are critical issues to Florida's future. As the sea level rises, salinity changes in coastal bays and tidally influenced creeks and rivers. Shorelines retreat with natural habitat changes and losses. Floods increase in frequency, and coastal areas deepen. Saltwater intrudes into fresh water supply.

With warmer temperatures, evaporation losses increase and water supply decreases. Plants, animals and marine ecosystems are stressed. Growing seasons, migratory patterns and water quality change.

Climate change also means hydrologic pattern changes, which means the potential exists for less frequent and more intense rain events and increased tropical storm intensity or frequency.

All of this makes restoring the Everglades ecosystem even more important. We believe that restoration will prevent saltwater intrusion and protect the state's water supply. Fresh water flowing through the Everglades will push salt water back and create more land mass.

The Corps has one of the largest environmental restoration and sustainability roles in the federal government, and Everglades restoration is the largest project of its kind. Through partnership and collaboration, progress is being made.

In March we completed a significant restoration milestone with the completion of the Tamiami Trail one-mile bridge, a key component of the Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park Project. This project will improve thousands of acres of wetlands, aid in the recovery of wading bird populations, and restore the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of much-needed water delivered into Everglades National Park.

The team continues to work to modify 9.7 miles of roadway to allow for increased water levels in the L-29 Canal that will flow beneath this bridge. Seventy-five percent of the roadway has been completed, and we are scheduled to complete the project by the end of the year.

Additionally, we are planning, designing and constructing multiple components of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan – and have more planned for the future.

The Central Everglades Planning Project is in the final stages of analysis. The technical team has proposed a tentatively selected plan and is in the process of preparing a Draft Project Implementation Report (PIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for public review. This pilot project will aid in setting the foundation for future restoration efforts in the central portion of the Everglades system.

We are advancing our restoration goals – for Earth Day and for every day – and I look forward to continuing to move the ball down the field in conjunction with our partners in the preservation of this national treasure – for future generations and for this great nation.

Army Strong. BUILDING STRONG®. JaxStrong.

Alan M. Dodd
Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander

DISTRICT COMMANDER
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ON THE COVER

At the Tamiami Trail One-Mile Bridge Opening Ceremony, held March 19, 2013 in Miami, Fla., Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar together cut a ribbon on the bridge deck prior to taking the inaugural drive across the fully-constructed bridge. The bridge will be opened to traffic in the coming weeks. STORY ON PAGE 3. (PHOTO BY JENN MILLER)



Completion of critical project milestone celebrated BY JENN MILLER

Tamiami Trail one-mile bridge part of project to restore water flow to Everglades National Park



Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy (fourth from right) celebrated the completion of a critical project milestone for the Tamiami Trail Modifications project alongside members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers team at the Tamiami Trail One-Mile Bridge Opening Ceremony March 19, 2013, in Miami, Fla. Pictured from left: Chris Rego; South Atlantic Division Commander Col. Donald E. (Ed) Jackson; Tim Brown; Nestor Rivera; David Hobbie; Shealy Bowell; Kim Taplin; Michael Collis; Darcy; Jacksonville District Commander Col. Alan M. Dodd; Howie Gonzales and USACE Deputy Commanding General Maj. Gen. Todd Semonite. (PHOTO BY JENN MILLER)

Federal, state and local officials stood atop 5,280 linear feet of restoration progress as they came together to celebrate the completion of the Tamiami Trail one-mile bridge March 19 in Miami, Fla.

"Today marks a critical milestone for the Tamiami Trail Modifications Project," said Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy, who spoke at the ceremony alongside Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Everglades National Park Superintendent Dan Kimball and South Florida National Parks Trust Board Chairman Neal McAliley. "But,



"Today marks a critical milestone for the Tamiami Trail Modifications Project," said Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy at the Tamiami Trail One-Mile Bridge Opening Ceremony March 19, 2013, in Miami, Fla. (PHOTO BY JENN MILLER)

there is still more to do. With the continued support of the administration, the state of Florida and our partnering agencies, we will continue our work to restore this American treasure."

The bridge is part of the Tamiami Trail Modifications Project, a key component in the Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park project that, once completed, will allow for increased water flow into Everglades National Park.

"Thanks to a remarkable partnership between federal agencies, members of Congress, the state of Florida, and the many stakeholders here in south Florida, we have reached a historic day in the long quest to restore the water flows vital to a renewed and healthy Everglades," said Salazar.

"With the completion of this bridge and the Modified Water Deliveries Project, we are moving ever closer to our goal of restoring the River of Grass to ensure the health of this iconic landscape for future generations to enjoy, while creating jobs and boosting Florida's economy."

The Modified Water Deliveries project is a collaborative effort by the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service, South Florida Water Management District and Florida Department of Transportation. Agency representatives and numerous non-governmental organizations attended together to celebrate the opening of the bridge.

"It is with sincere gratitude that I applaud our dedicated project team for their commitment to getting the job done," said Col. Alan Dodd, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District. "Through their determination, the dedicated and collaborative efforts undertaken by our partnering agencies and the support of numerous non-governmental organizations, we were able to complete this critical project milestone."

In addition to constructing a one-mile bridge, 9.7 miles of roadway will be modified to allow for increased water levels in the L-29 Canal that will flow beneath the bridge. Seventy-five percent of the roadway has been

USACE begins Dam Safety Modification Study on Herbert Hoover Dike

BY JOHN H. CAMPBELL



Work continues on a water control structure replacement at the Culvert 11 site south of Port Mayaca. Jacksonville District plans to remove or replace 30 structures at Herbert Hoover Dike over the next five years. (USACE PHOTO)

“When will the next phase of cutoff wall begin?”

“How long will the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail be impacted?”

“Will the Corps raise water levels in the lake once construction is finished?”

This is just a sampling of questions asked by concerned stakeholders during recent public meetings, as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District project managers discussed the next phase of repair work at Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD) – completion of a Dam Safety Modification Study (DSMS).

With a cutoff wall seepage barrier installed between Port Mayaca and Belle Glade, and with work under way to remove or replace 32 water control structures surrounding the lake, the Corps is looking at the DSMS to provide the framework for future projects necessary to reduce the risk of failure of the dike.



Tim Willadsen, Herbert Hoover Dike project manager, describes the Dam Safety Modification Study at a recent public meeting. About 60 people attended the meetings in Clewiston and Okeechobee to learn more about future plans for rehabilitation of the dike. (PHOTO BY JOHN H. CAMPBELL)

“The Dam Safety Modification Study is a comprehensive, system-wide study intended to identify risks in the system, and to recommend the necessary measures that can reduce the risk of failure,” said Tim Willadsen, HHD project manager.

While certain sections of the dike have been studied before, HHD has never undergone a review this comprehensive and detailed. Each segment of the dike will be thoroughly reviewed for its geology and geometry, with particular attention given to scenarios that would cause the dike to fail.

“The study will analyze the information developed and organize it into a report that covers the 143-mile dike as a single system, with alternative plans that include structural and non-structural solutions to reduce existing risk in the system,” said Micah Buchholz, civil engineer. “The selected plans and associated implementation schedule will be the blueprint for future project work.”

As part of the process, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District is gathering input from the public and from environmental stakeholders, to ensure potential environmental issues are identified and addressed as necessary, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

“Lake Okeechobee is an incredible environmental resource used by many species,” said Angie Dunn, biologist. “We know there are important habitats, including wetlands, around the lake, as well as many protected species. As work on the HHD progresses, we will have to consider the habitat and species in the area and minimize the impacts.”

Willadsen estimates it will take about two years before the study produces a final report.

“The level of detail necessary to accomplish this study requires a tremendous amount of planning, design and analyses, which will take

(CONTINUES ON **PAGE 9**)

Residents learn about proposed confined blasting for Jacksonville Harbor

BY AMANDA ELLISON



Confined blasting method, using 3,000 pounds of explosives to crack rock beneath the water's surface in Miami Harbor. (PHOTO BY TERRI JORDAN-SELLERS).

When most people hear the term "blasting," they imagine a cosmic explosion of material that shoots into the earth's atmosphere and shakes foundations. However, for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Jacksonville Harbor Deepening Study, the proposed confined blasting technique to remove rock obstacles will sound more like a bullet as it is fired from a gun and will barely cause a blip on the radar.

The confined blasting technique is a potential option that could be used to deepen Jacksonville Harbor from its current depth of 40 feet to a proposed depth of 47 feet. Depending on the hardness of

the rock, confined blasting could occur in multiple areas throughout the navigation channel. Jacksonville residents learned about the technique during a recent public meeting for the Jacksonville Harbor Deepening Study.

Confined blasting has been successfully used on other Corps projects across the country. In fact, one of the most successful uses of the technique was during the Miami Harbor Deepening project in 2005.

The Port of Miami is situated in Biscayne Bay, home to many protected, threatened and endangered species. Parts of Biscayne Bay are designated as a National Park, a Florida Aquatic Preserve, Outstanding Florida Waters, and a state Critical Wildlife Area.

Confined underwater blasting has been used as a successful and efficient construction technique to pre-treat and crack hard rock with minimal impacts. In fact, confined blasting limits impacts to the environment by 60 to 90 percent. It keeps the pressure in the rock, preventing it from migrating and harming the environment.

A technique called "stemming" is used to reduce the pressure. Stemming gets its name from the material placed in the mouth of the drill hole to restrict the gas from escaping during the detonation. The hole in which the explosive material is placed is capped with an inert material, such as crushed rock. This is referred to as "stemming the hole." Studies have shown that stemmed blasts have up to a 90 percent decrease in the strength of the pressure wave released, compared to unconfined blasts of the same charge weight.

Protecting the environment during its work is one of the Corps' top priorities. For the Miami project, the Corps conducted extensive plan formulation, revision and refinement to avoid impacts to the environment. This is the same model that is being followed for the Jacksonville Harbor project.

Successful implementation of the technique in Miami provided a large database of information to facilitate successful implementation of future confined blasting projects in sensitive areas.

Jacksonville District has been asked to assist Alaska District in their confined blasting program at Kodiak Harbor, home to the threatened sea otter. Jacksonville District continues to be the leading expert in confined blasting techniques and is setting the standard for the program throughout the United States. ♦



Unconfined blasting method, using seven pounds of explosives. (PHOTO BY TERRI JORDAN-SELLERS)

Rescued Florida panther released into Picayune Strand BY ERICA SKOLTE



Florida panther 219 exhibits powerful beauty as she returns to the wild in Picayune Strand. (PHOTO BY TIM DONOVAN, FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION)

Earth Day is an annual world-wide celebration of support for environmental protection. The first Earth Day was celebrated April 22, 1970, when the infrastructure for the 55,000-acre Southern Golden Gate Estates, near Naples in southwest Florida, was being laid out.

The grid of roads and large drainage canals in the "south blocks," as it was known locally, would alter the hydrology, habitat, biodiversity and functionality of the natural ecosystem. Even the native sabal palm or cabbage palm, the state tree of Florida, behaved like an invasive plant. It began to grow in monocultures so dense they presented ecological problems and limited biodiversity. At the same time, the endangered Florida panther hovered on the edge of extinction. Only 12 to 20 breeding adults remained, fraught with a variety of physical problems that shortened the lives of individuals and affected the ability of the species to successfully breed and thrive.

This year, Earth Day in the south blocks is a very different story. It's an environmental success story with a variety of subplots. The Picayune Strand Restoration Project, the first component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) to begin construction, is well under way. Though the project is not yet complete, benefits are already being observed. Groundwater levels have improved and vegetation is recruiting naturally in an orderly succession. Wildlife continues to use the area, traveling long-used trails and open areas, including a bridge across one of the canals near the Merritt Pump Station, even during the construction phase.

The endangered Florida panther is making a comeback, with an estimated 100 to 160 adults and juveniles in the breeding population south of the Caloosahatchee River in southwest Florida. Biologists have been able to track, rescue and raise some of the orphaned kittens, making it possible for them to return to the wild instead of remaining in captivity.

All of these plots add up to a happy ending for FP219, as Florida panther number 219 is known. She and her brother were orphaned in 2011 when their mother was found dead. Only five months old and unable to fend for themselves, the kittens were rescued by panther biologists and raised at White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee. Now healthy and full-grown, FP219 was ready to be released into the wild.

"The goal in any panther rescue is to be able to release the animal back into the wild to aid in the recovery of this endangered species," said Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) panther team leader Darrell Land.

Biologists chose the Picayune Strand State Forest for the release of the panther after they evaluated the home ranges of other females in the region and found available space between them. The FWC panther team had been monitoring the movements of several panthers with radio collars, and knew that there was a home range available that spanned the eastern edge of Picayune Strand and the western part of Fakahatchee Strand. On Jan. 31, they released FP 219 in the footprint of the Picayune Strand Restoration Project, with hope that she would thrive there and one day have kittens of her own.

When it comes to land, panthers have a much different definition of "huge" than we do. The home range of a male panther is 200 square miles, though they disperse as young adults in an effort to find a home range of their own, where they don't have to compete with other males. Several years ago, a male Florida panther was identified after he was shot in Georgia. Females tend to stay closer to where they were born, and their home ranges are smaller, about 80 square miles.

"Do you have a place where you can walk across 50 miles?" asked Land. "If so, you might have panther country."

"It's good to have Picayune Strand being restored," said Land. "For wide-ranging species like panther and Florida black bear, it was the missing piece of the puzzle. Where else can you walk a 50-mile path from Naples through Picayune, the Fakahatchee and Big Cypress, and only have to cross one major north-south road?"

"The Picayune Strand Restoration Project connects surrounding state and federal lands, including nature preserves and wildlife areas. It provides contiguous land area with opportunities for habitat for many animal species, including the Florida panther," said Lacy Shaw, Corps project manager.

"The work done on the Prairie Canal area several years ago by our partners at the South Florida Water Management District has already



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers partners with FLW Outdoors to connect America's youth with the outdoors

BY DOUG GARMAN, USACE HEADQUARTERS



Father and sons enjoy fishing at one of Jacksonville District's recreation areas along Lake Okeechobee in south Florida. USACE's new partnership with FLW Outdoors will connect America's youth to their natural resources while promoting education, conservation and an active lifestyle. (USACE PHOTO)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will partner with FLW Outdoors and the FLW Foundation on future events and activities designed to connect America's youth to their natural resources while promoting education, conservation and an active lifestyle.

FLW Outdoors, named after the founder of Ranger Boats, Forest L. Wood, is a nationally recognized fishing tournament organization. FLW Outdoors offers anglers of all skill levels the opportunity to compete in more than 231 fishing tournaments annually across five tournament circuits. USACE officials estimate that more than 60 percent of these tournaments are held on USACE-managed lakes.

In the months ahead, USACE, FLW Outdoors and the FLW Foundation, a non-profit cooperating association of FLW Outdoors, have agreed to work together to maintain and enhance environmental and natural resources stewardship; promote conservation and appreciation for the outdoors, including public safety awareness and boating education and connect the American public with nature, parks and outdoor activities, with particular focus on activities related to fishing.

"Partnerships like this are key to engaging the public and getting the word out about the variety of recreation opportunities at USACE lakes," said Steven L. Stockton, director of USACE Civil Works. "More importantly, these opportunities build future good stewards...of our nation's natural resources."

"This partnership between FLW, the FLW Foundation and USACE reinforces FLW's commitment to conservation and educating today's youth about the sport of fishing," said FLW President of Operations Kathy Fennel. "Today's young people are the future of recreational and competitive fishing, and we are pleased to be working side-by-side with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that our fishing resources will be enjoyed by generations to come."

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 9)

PANTHER (continued from PAGE 6)



The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) released a female Florida panther that had been rescued as an orphaned kitten in 2011. Biologists released her in the Picayune Strand Restoration Project area in Collier County in southwest Florida. (PHOTO COURTESY OF FWC (GOPRO VIDEO STILL IMAGE))

provided benefits not only to Picayune Strand but also the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park to the east of the project site," said Shaw. "Corps construction projects are moving forward, with Merritt Pump Station construction scheduled to be complete in fall 2013, followed by Faka Union Pump Station in fall 2014.

"The team is in the process of designing protection features to avoid impacts to the adjacent lands to the west of the project footprint," Shaw added. "We are also analyzing alternatives for the manatee mitigation project in the Port of the Islands. The four large canals that have overdrained the area since the 70s are being plugged in an effort to restore more natural hydrology, and the reduced point-source discharge of fresh water from the Faka Union Canal will likely affect the warm water refugium where manatees congregate. We will take public comment for that portion of the project in the future. We expect all phases of the Picayune Strand Restoration Project to be complete in 2018."

To view all of the photos and a brief video from the panther release in Picayune Strand, go to:

www.flickr.com/photos/myfwcmedia/sets/72157632660462449/with/8435503772/ ♦



Air Potato Roundup yields big results, educates community

BY ANNIE CHAMBERS



The air potato is an invasive vine native to southeast Asia. (PHOTO BY KAREN BROWN, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, BUGWOOD.ORG)

National Invasive Species Week, held March 2 through 8, focused on raising awareness of non-native threats to local ecosystems and endangered species. Invasive species smother native plants and are one of the greatest ecological threats to natural communities, according to the U.S. Department of the Interior, which also estimates the costs to prevent, monitor and control invasive species at about \$137 billion annually.

An invasive, non-native plant is a species outside its natural range that displaces native species and disrupts ecosystem processes. The second greatest threat to the more than 500 endangered and threatened species in Florida is adverse effects from invasive non-native plants, according to the Florida Exotic Plant Council.

Biologist Jessica Spencer was among the 162 volunteers participating in the 7th annual First Coast Air Potato Roundup, held March 2. The volunteers removed a combined 4,940 pounds of air potatoes from nine sites in Jacksonville, Fla. The air potato is an invasive vine from southeast Asia, thought to have come to the United States via Africa during the

slave trade. It grows very quickly – up to 8 inches per day – and can reach more than 70 feet in length, according to the University of Florida Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants website. Air potato typically climbs to the top of trees and overtakes native plants.

Spencer also demonstrated how to identify and eradicate air potato March 16 at one of the sites participating in the 18th Annual St. Johns River Cleanup. The city of Jacksonville and its mayor asked residents to take part in cleaning up the St Johns River, a critical component of the city's economy and culture. Volunteers removed litter and debris from parks, neighborhoods, creeks and boat ramps.

Following the cleanup, Spencer spoke to community members at the Riverside Arts Market about gardening and finding alternatives to invasive plants. Many were curious about how to rid their yards of air potatoes. Invasive plants can reduce biodiversity, resulting in loss of habitat and food sources for native insects, birds and other wildlife, and changing natural ecological systems, according to the Florida Plant Society. ♦



Left - After volunteering for the 18th Annual St. Johns River Cleanup in Jacksonville, Fla. March 16, community members stopped by the Riverside Arts Market, where biologist Jessica Spencer (left) provided information about invasive species located in Florida. Center - Biologist Jessica Spencer (left) educates a volunteer group about air potato, an invasive vine that has been found at local creek cleanups. The volunteers were at one of many cleanup sites around Jacksonville, Fla. (PHOTOS BY ANNIE CHAMBERS). Right - Air potato typically climbs to the top of trees and overtakes native plants. It grows very quickly – up to 8 inches per day – and can reach more than 70 feet in length. (PHOTO BY FOREST & KIM STARR, STARR ENVIRONMENTAL, BUGWOOD.ORG.)

MILESTONE (continued from PAGE 3)



In addition to constructing the one-mile bridge, 9.7 miles of roadway will be modified to allow for increased water levels in the L-29 Canal that will flow beneath the bridge. Seventy-five percent of the roadway has been completed, and the Tamiami Trail Modifications project is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. (PHOTO BY AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY, INC.)

completed, and the Tamiami Trail Modifications project is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

Water delivered from this completed project will improve thousands of acres of wetlands, aid in the recovery of the wading bird populations, and restore the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of water deliveries to the park.

As part of the celebration, Darcy and Salazar cut a ribbon on the bridge deck prior to taking the inaugural drive across the fully-constructed bridge, which will be opened to traffic in the coming weeks ♦



OUTDOORS (continued from PAGE 7)



USACE is the nation's largest federal provider of outdoor recreation, managing more than 400 lake and river projects in 43 states and hosting more than 370 million visits per year. Through its partnership with FLW Outdoors, USACE is helping to shape future stewards of the nation's natural resources. (USACE PHOTO)

The FLW Foundation functions nationwide and strives to maximize the impact of existing FLW partnerships and to support youth fishing and boating safety programs as well as career pathway programs for high school and college students. The foundation also supports conservation programs to enhance aquatic habitat and sustain quality fisheries for future generations. For more information, visit the community outreach section of www.FLWOutdoors.com.

USACE is the nation's largest federal provider of outdoor recreation, managing more than 400 lake and river projects in 43 states and hosting more than 370 million visits per year. With 90 percent of these recreation areas within 50 miles of metropolitan areas, they provide a diverse range of outdoor activities close to home and to people of all ages. For more information on Corps recreation sites and opportunities, visit www.corpslakes.us. ♦

STUDY (continued from PAGE 4)

time to complete," said Willadsen. "Previous studies focused on specific areas, whereas the Dam Safety Modification Study is comprehensive and includes the entire dike as a system."

While the study is ongoing, work will continue on replacing water control structures around the lake. Contractors are continuing work at the Culvert 1A site east of Moore Haven, the Culvert 4A site near South Bay, and the Culvert 11 site south of Port Mayaca. Additional contracts are expected to be awarded later this year, and replacement work is expected to continue at various culvert sites through 2018. The Corps will then look to execute the projects identified by the DSMS.

"We will continue replacing water control structures over the next few years while we complete the Dam Safety Modification Study," said Willadsen, "If all goes as planned, we will award contracts in 2017 for further risk reduction measures around Lake Okeechobee identified by this study."

For more information, visit the Dam Safety Modification Study web page: www.sqj.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/LakeOkeechobee/HerbertHooverDike/HerbertHooverDikeDamSafetyModificationStudy.aspx ♦

Coastal menace from the Carolinas creeps towards Florida

BY ANNIE CHAMBERS



Beach vitex is a rapidly spreading invasive vine native to countries in the western Pacific. It is creeping down the eastern coast from the Carolinas towards Florida, impacting beach stability and endangering sea turtles. (PHOTO BY FOREST & KIM STARR, STARR ENVIRONMENTAL, BUGWOOD.ORG)

The rapidly spreading beach vitex, an invasive vine native to countries in the western Pacific, is creeping down the eastern coast from the Carolinas towards Florida, impacting beach stability and endangering sea turtles.

Beach vitex made its way to the southeastern United States in the mid-1980s because of its attractiveness and perceived ability to stabilize beaches. After Hurricane Hugo, North Carolina and South

Carolina beaches suffered extreme dune erosion and residents needed something to stabilize the dunes. With a lack of native vegetation at local nurseries, beach vitex was marketed as quick-growing and easy to maintain.

Although introduced to stabilize beaches, the invasive vine accomplished the opposite. It lacks the fibrous root system of native plants and is unable to trap sand adequately. Once it dies back in the winter, its exposed root systems show erosion from underneath the beach vitex, according to the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force.

The task force said that beach vitex is also endangering sea turtles' lives by altering nesting areas. Hatchlings become caught in the thick vegetation and are too exhausted to reach the ocean, perishing en route.

The Carolinas Beach Vitex Task force includes several agencies and groups, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District.

Beach vitex leaves are round, silvery gray-green, have a spicy fragrance and purplish blue flowers. If beach vitex is spotted, do not dig it up. Scientists are working hard to record and monitor the location of the plant to determine how widespread the problem is and how fast it is spreading.

The First Coast Invasive Working Group identified the beach vitex as a potential threat and is educating members on how to identify and eradicate it.

"Beach vitex sightings in Nassau and St. Johns County have been eradicated and we're actively vigilant against any new populations that may show up," said Jessica Spencer of the Invasive Species Management (ISM) Branch.

If you see beach vitex, contact Jacksonville District's ISM Branch at (904) 232-1044. ♦



Beach vitex leaves are round, silvery gray-green, have a spicy fragrance and purplish blue flowers. If beach vitex is spotted, do not dig it up; contact Jacksonville District's Invasive Species Management Branch. (PHOTO BY FOREST & KIM STARR, STARR ENVIRONMENTAL, BUGWOOD.ORG)

A brief history of the Antilles Office through the eyes of the people

Third in a series of four stories about the history of the Antilles Office

BY ERICA SKOLTE



The "Flamboyán" tree, known in English as a Royal Poinciana or Flame Tree, is named for its flamboyant display of orange-red petals. The tree, planted by Corps employees in 1976, still graces the grounds of the Antilles office today. (PHOTO COURTESY OF CARMEN MÁRTIR-COLLAZO)

If the responsibility for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office in Puerto Rico was a dance, it would probably be closer to the currently popular "Harlem Shuffle" than a salsa. Though responsibility for the office was shuffled over the years from New York to Panama, then to Puerto Rico, and finally to Jacksonville District, the importance of having a Corps office located on the island has never shifted. Corps civilian and military activities in Puerto Rico include administration, coastal defense projects, facilities construction on military bases and flood risk reduction, as well as maintenance and improvement of inland waterways and harbors. Specific navigation projects have included Arecibo Harbor, San Juan Harbor, and Mayaguez Harbor in Puerto Rico.

Like many of her colleagues, Carmen Mártir-Collazo, chief of administrative services in the Antilles Office in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is a long-time employee, with 35 years of service to the Corps. She understands the value of long-standing relationships and face-to-face contact.



To celebrate Earth Day in 1976, Corps employees in the Antilles Office, San Juan, Puerto Rico gathered together to plant a Flamboyán tree. (PHOTO COURTESY OF YAMIL CASTILLO)

"Puerto Rico is a commonwealth away from the mainland, with a unique strategic location between the U.S. and Central and South America. The presence of the Department of Defense, the deputy district engineer and Corps representatives facilitates relationships with governmental officials within our area of responsibility," said Mártir-Collazo. "Communication in person provides for a better understanding of procedures, policies and implementation of directives, as well as resolution of any issues.

"The Corps of Engineers is one of the most trusted and serious federal agencies in Puerto Rico, where an open door exists for all individuals," added Mártir-Collazo. She explained that the presence of the Corps, through public hearings, site inspections, construction projects and quality assurance, shows continuous service to the citizens of Puerto Rico, thus creating a bond of security and trust.

"Flood control projects, regulatory actions that protect the environment, real estate services to the Department of Defense and recruiting offices, are among those things that make the Corps very visible in the public eye," said Mártir-Collazo.

Another long-time employee, Ernestina Miranda, known as "Ernie," began to work with the Corps in the early 1970s. Born in 1923, retired in 1985 and still vibrant at 89, Miranda, like many Corps retirees in Puerto Rico, still maintains friendships from her days in the Corps. She was like a "godmother" and counselor to many young engineers, including Jose "Chemi" Rosado and Yamil Castillo, both of whom joined the Corps in the late 1970s. All maintain that those who work for the Corps in Puerto Rico form a close-knit family, with few ever really leaving.

As for Miranda, she saw many changes during her long tenure as the chief administrative services supervisor in the area engineer's office. She supervised all of the administrative services in the busy office, including the clerical pool - those who did the typing, took dictation and took care of correspondence in the days before personal computers.

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National Volunteer Appreciation Week

BY ERICA SKOLTE



W.P. Franklin and Lock volunteers measure twice and cut once when replacing re-planed boards in shelters. (PHOTO COURTESY OF PHIL HART)

All volunteers come to their position with vastly different life experiences and equipped with equally diverse skill sets, knowledge and abilities. Put them all together, and they comprise a small army of people who are ready, willing and able to tackle just about any need.

National Volunteer Appreciation Week takes place April 21-27, providing an opportunity to celebrate the many talents and accomplishments of volunteers who give of their time and themselves on behalf of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District.

In the Corps' robust volunteer program, many couples work side-by-side, each providing their own special contributions. From much-needed maintenance to greeting guests at visitor centers and performing administrative functions, there are opportunities to use just about every skill. For example, maintenance volunteers may check and repair pedestals, kiosks and shelters, fix water leaks, repair sinks, paint, reseal, mow and trim lawns, pick up litter, weed gardens, plant trees and install wildlife boxes, among many other tasks.

Since the Corps is the largest provider of water-based recreation nationwide, it is helpful to have volunteers who can travel to schools to provide water safety presentations that help to keep families safe while they enjoy our nation's resources.

"Last year, our volunteers presented water safety programs to more than 45,000 children at the elementary and preschool level, and they reached more than 8,000 children this month," said Phil Hart, park ranger and volunteer coordinator. "Volunteers saved the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers more than \$25,000 doing water safety presentations this year alone. There would be no way for us to provide this program to the children without the volunteers."

If Hart sounds proud of the program, it's because he is proud. "We have one of the highest number of interpretative contacts for water safety within the Corps. We are able to accomplish an important mission using volunteers instead of taxpayer dollars."

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A BRIEF HISTORY (continued from PAGE 11)

"We always had good communication and good relationships with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and the office of the governor," said Miranda.

In addition to the important flood-control channelization projects in Ponce, in south Puerto Rico, she also recalls Corps efforts to save and preserve one of San Juan's historic treasures from the days of Spanish rule, the promontory of the Castillo San Felipe del Morro, usually referred to as el Morro. This fortification was designed to guard the entrance to the San Juan Bay and defend the Spanish colonial port city, and stands strong today, thanks to the Corps. The work included filling caves and undermined areas, building protective walls, constructing a breakwater to lessen wave action and erosion, repairing the foundation, and constructing a stone revetment.

When he retired in July 2012 after 33 years of service, Jose Rosado, known as Chemi, was the chief of the Antilles construction office and the deputy district engineer for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"Traditionally, the Antilles Office has always had an exceptional relationship with the local government. Having a Corps office located in Puerto Rico is very important, because the local leadership can work with Corps employees who speak both Spanish and English fluently, and can relate to the culture of the people on the island," said Rosado. "The governor's office, local representatives, mayors of the local towns, and the resident commissioner to the U.S. Congress all drop in at our office or pick up the phone at any time."

Rosado was also in the U.S. Army Reserve for 33 years, retiring as a brigadier general. His military service helped to establish and facilitate longstanding relationships with other branches of the military in the area.

Rosado remembers his last eight years as being very exciting, with a lot of construction projects moving forward. An entire section was devoted to doing work for five different Corps districts. They supported Louisville District's military projects; provided "Support for Others" work for Savannah District and homeland security work for Fort Worth District and civil works projects for Jacksonville District. During his tenure, the staff grew in size from 30 to 62 employees.

Two major dams were built near Ponce in the southern part of Puerto Rico: Cerillos Dam was completed in 1992, providing flood risk reduction and potable water and Portugués Dam, which also will provide flood risk reduction and recreational opportunities, was started in 2008 and is in the completion stages now. Other major projects included the Portugués and Bucana Rivers Flood Damage Reduction projects, also on the south side of the island.

"The Corps is very well thought of here. To be a Corps employee – it's considered to be a premier job; a desirable, professional job," said Rosado. "When people come to work for the Corps, few leave. Employees have exceptional relationships. It's like a family. At lunchtime, you will find most of the people here eating together."

Yamil Castillo, chief of the Antilles construction office, agrees with the importance of having a Corps office located in Puerto Rico.

"There are 4.2 million American citizens in Puerto Rico, many living in areas that are flood-prone and subject to natural disasters such as hurricanes. The Corps helps to protect these citizens and assists in local development, since we are capable of dealing with the big issues," said Castillo.

"Puerto Rico is only 35 miles wide. When it rains, water moves quickly from the mountains into the valleys, and it only takes an hour to get to where you are. There's not much time to react and flash-flooding was a huge problem. The Corps has several projects to take care of critical flows and carry the water at very high velocities to the discharge point on the coast. Our projects save lives," said Castillo. "That, to me, is essential."

"In Puerto Rico, the government and local people generally see the Corps as an 'honest broker.' Projects or permits sometimes seem controversial due

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 13)

A BRIEF HISTORY (continued from PAGE 12)



Beloved retiree Ernestina "Ernie" Miranda (center) served as a "godmother," counselor, mentor and role model for many Corps employees over the years. Pictured today, along with Angela Muñoz-Caro (left) and Gisella Román (right), Miranda is still young at heart at 89. (PHOTO COURTESY OF CARMEN MÁRTIR-COLLAZO)

to local politics, but the Corps is usually seen as being above the controversy, and we are able to stay outside of all that. We have been successful in maintaining a good relationship with the local government through several changes in the administration," Castillo added.

In Puerto Rico, it's all about family, and it's all about relationships. "We are very lucky that Jacksonville District is very supportive of our work down here," said Rosado. "We feel like we are an integral part of the district. And even though I'm retired, I still see myself as a Corps employee." ♦

Coming in next month's issue: Corps projects in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

THE SAN JUAN SHUFFLE

FROM NEW YORK TO JACKSONVILLE, VIA PANAMA

- 1907** – Pursuant to the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1907, funds appropriated for the improvement of San Juan, Puerto Rico harbor. Engineering activities supervised by Maj. Charles Potter on detail in Tompkinsville, Staten Island, N.Y., with the Third Lighthouse District of the Lighthouse Board, an agency of the Department of Commerce and Labor.
- 1910** – Supervision of San Juan works transferred to Col. Solomon Roessler, appointed to head both the Second New York District and the Porto Rico (later Puerto Rico) District, with both districts headquartered in New York, N.Y.
- 1942** – Puerto Rico District headquarters transferred to San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- 1946** – Puerto Rico District is re-designated the Antilles District, with geographical territory expanded to include the U.S. Virgin Islands and neighboring islands.
- 1948** – Antilles District abolished, with territory and functions transferred to the Panama District, headquartered in Ancon, Canal Zone. By the same General Order, the former Antilles District headquarters office in San Juan was re-designated the San Juan Engineer Office and made a component of the Panama District.
- 1950** – Panama District abolished, with civil works functions transferred to Jacksonville District. Military works functions were transferred to the direct supervision of South Atlantic Division, headquartered in Atlanta, Ga.
- 1951** – South Atlantic Division Military works functions transferred to Jacksonville District.

VOLUNTEERS (continued from PAGE 12)



Corps volunteers provide water safety programs that save lives. (PHOTO COURTESY OF PHIL HART)

"One other small example of the many ways that volunteers provide service and savings to the Corps is the rehabilitation of picnic tables," said Hart.

One table has approximately 90 board-feet per table, and a tree has an average of 180 board-feet. Volunteers have redone over 500 boards. By restoring the boards, volunteers saved more than 40 trees from being cut down in the last year. With a cost of \$66.47 per board, the total savings realized was more than \$33,000.

"We have great volunteers. They do outstanding work, and they save us a lot of time, money and resources," said Hart.

Volunteers play a vital role in the success of the recreation and environmental stewardship programs at Lake Okeechobee and along the Okeechobee Waterway. Each year, approximately 350 volunteers provide more than 16,500 hours of service.

Nationwide, the Corps is the steward of almost 12 million acres of land and water and offers many volunteer opportunities in recreation and natural resources management. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Volunteer Clearinghouse (www.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/Recreation/VolunteerClearinghouse.aspx) is the link between potential volunteers and the park rangers at lakes and waterways that need them. If interested in volunteering, check out the opportunities listed on the website and apply online or call 1-800-VOL-TEER (1-800-865-8337).

Volunteers provide important services such as campground host, visitor center staff, park and trail maintenance, water safety program presenter and more. ♦



Volunteers re-plane and recycle old boards that are weathered and splintered, making them look like new. The boards are recycled and replaced on picnic tables, benches and other structures, saving both money and resources. (PHOTO COURTESY OF PHIL HART)

HOLOCAUST

National Days of Remembrance



NEVER AGAIN
heeding the warning signs



Corporate Communications Office
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District

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Army Family Action Plan

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
FAMILY READINESS NETWORK



Do you want to make the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the U.S. Army a better place to work and live? Make a suggestion through the Army Family Action Plan (AFAP) program.

AFAP is input from the people of the Army to Army leadership. It's a process that allows Soldiers, Department of the Army (DA) civilians, retirees and family members to say what's working and what isn't – and what they think will fix it. It alerts commanders and Army leaders to areas of concern that need their attention and it gives them the opportunity to quickly put plans into place to work toward resolving the issues.

The process really does work. Since the 1980s, when AFAP was instituted, 691 issues identified in the AFAP process have driven 128 legislative changes, 179 Department of Defense or Army policy and regulatory changes, and 200 improved programs and services. Through annual conferences and forums, delegates (military, civilian, family members and retirees) review various issues and recommend the ones they feel are most important for action by commanders and leaders.

The process also works for DA civilians as well. A few years ago, a Corps employee submitted an issue. At the time, if a DA civilian was killed in a military contingency operation, the law required certain beneficiaries to receive the death gratuity. The civilian could not choose to give 100 percent of the death gratuity to whomever he or she wished, whereas Soldiers' beneficiaries were authorized to receive 100 percent of the death gratuity regardless of their relationship to the Soldier. The Corps employee did not think this was fair.

This issue could not be resolved at the USACE level, so it was submitted to DA for consideration, where it was prioritized and worked by action officers. Resolution required a change in the law.

On Dec. 31, 2011, the president signed the fiscal year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act which "authorizes civilian employees to designate anyone they choose to receive the entire death gratuity if the employee dies of injuries incurred in connection with service with an armed force in a contingency operation."

Issues do not always have to go all the way to DA to be resolved. Commanders at all levels of USACE are reviewing and, as appropriate, resolving issues at their level.

USACE and Army leaders want to hear from you and your family members. For more information on AFAP or to submit an issue, visit <https://www.myarmyonesource.com/FamilyProgramsandServices/FamilyPrograms/ArmyFamilyActionPlan/Default.aspx> or email familyreadiness@usace.army.mil. Completed issue forms must be sent to sad-fr@usace.army.mil by not later than May 24, 2013. ♦

WELCOME HOME

OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

QUATINA AUSTIN
CHARLES COMEAU
RAFAEL FELIX

DEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

CATHERINE VISCUSO