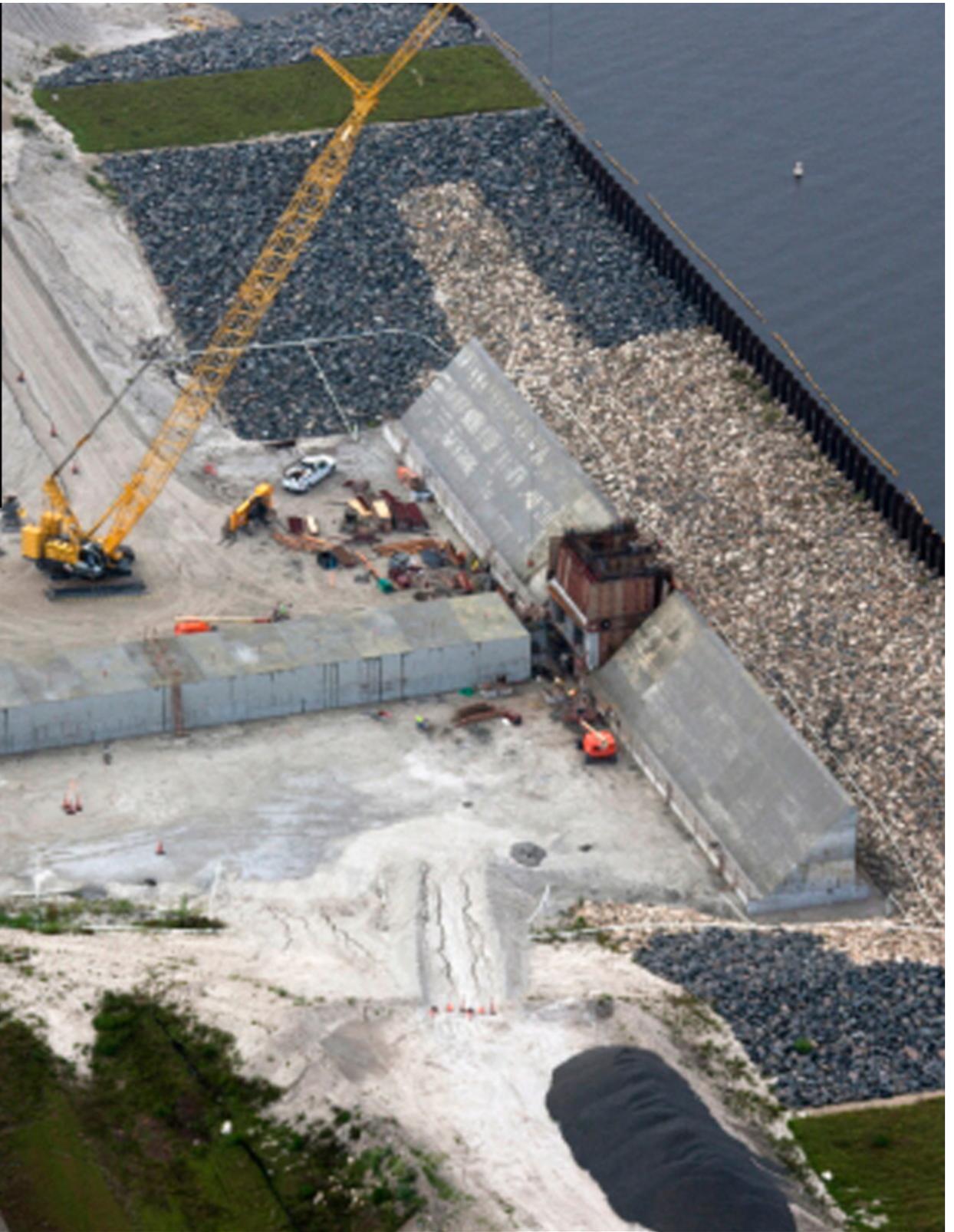




JAXSTRONG

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- HURRICANE SEASON BEGINS
- EMERGENCY BEACH PROJECT COMPLETED IN RECORD TIME
- VOLUNTEERS GET THEIR HANDS DIRTY AS THEY TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA
- ...AND MORE



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JUNE 2013 | Volume 5 Issue 6



COMMANDER'S CORNER

MESSAGE FROM COL. ALAN DODD

PREPARATION IS KEY

Andrea, Barry, Chantal, Dorian, Erin, Fernand, Gabrielle, Humberto, Ingrid and Jerry are just some of the names lined up for the 2013 hurricane season, which officially runs June 1 through November 30. So what's in store for us this hurricane season? The Colorado State University meteorological team is predicting an above average 2013 Atlantic hurricane season with 18 named storms and nine predicted to become hurricanes. Four of the nine predicted hurricanes will be major hurricanes with sustained winds of 111 miles per hour or greater. Many of you remember the "Big Four" of 2004: Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne. Meteorologists have retired those names as a result of the destructiveness of those storms, and while we hope history doesn't repeat, we could be in for the same kind of year if predictions hold true.

It's vitally important that you prepare early, so we all have a safer hurricane season. Hopefully you've already started thinking about what you need to do for you and your family to survive a hurricane. Preparation is the key. Particularly important is accountability – making sure you and your family are safe and then sharing that information with your supervisor. Establish a family plan for hurricanes and create an emergency supplies kit with items such as food, water and medication to get you through the first 72 hours when emergency services may not be able to provide these items for you. John Campbell's story on page 12 may help you in creating your plans and emergency kits.

Once a storm is forecasted to impact the area, hurricane evacuation preparations begin. One way to obtain the most current information on the city's evacuation status is through www.onewayflorida.org. Should the need arise, I urge you to consider leaving early. In any case, fill up your gas tank, pack your bags, get medication supplies together, get some cash and be ready to go. The safety of every member of the Jacksonville District and their families is one of our top priorities. District members are required to use the calling tree accountability method to let us know you are alright. This simply means calling your immediate supervisor or someone else in the supervisory chain if your immediate supervisor cannot be reached, to let them know you are safe and how you can be contacted. As a last resort, contact HI USACE by dialing 1-877-448-7223 or by email at 877-HI-USACE@usace.army.mil. We need to know as soon as you arrive at a safe location but no later than 12 hours after a hurricane makes landfall that you are safe. Each storm is different but please take some time before the season begins to plan for you and your family. Pay attention to the forecasts and follow the instructions of your local emergency management officials. If you have any questions or need any assistance, contact our Emergency Management Branch.

Before closing, I'd like to thank everyone for the tremendous work you are doing. Whether it's the Miami Harbor deepening contract or the Jacksonville, Lake Worth Inlet or Everglades port studies; Portugues Dam, Formerly Used Defense Sites, Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation, Nicodemus Slough regulatory decision, Picayune Strand pump house design and construction, or one of our 300 other projects, we have some tremendously dedicated people doing extremely important work. I'd like to express my appreciation in particular to two people who have really made a difference over the past few months. Shelley Trulock is project manager for several of our emergency shoreline protection projects and successfully led the team that completed the Ft. Pierce beach renourishment project. Kim Taplin is project supervisor for the Central Everglades Planning Project team, which has done a tremendous job developing the recommended plan and coordinating with numerous stakeholders, partners and other groups on an extremely tight timeline. Thank you for all you have done for the Corps and the nation. You are great!



Shelley Trulock



Kim Taplin

DISTRICT COMMANDER
COL. ALAN DODD

CHIEF, CORPORATE
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
TERRY S. HINES, APR

MANAGING EDITOR
NANCY J. STICHT

DESIGN AND LAYOUT ARTIST
JENNIFER G. KNUDSEN, MFA

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ON THE COVER

An aerial view of the Culvert 11 site shows the ongoing work to replace more than 30 water control structures around Lake Okeechobee, providing continued stability for Herbert Hoover Dike. (US-ACE file photo)



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

HHD named Project of the Year

BY JOHN H. CAMPBELL



Col. Alan Dodd (right), district commander, is briefed by Mario Fuquene and Eva Porras on cutoff wall installation near Canal Point during a visit to Herbert Hoover Dike in October. Rehabilitation work at the dike was recently named the Outstanding Project of the Year by the American Society of Civil Engineers, Palm Beach Branch. (Photo by John Campbell)

The list of adjectives to describe the ongoing rehabilitation efforts at Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD) includes words like “mas-sive,” “complex,” and “innovative.”

Now “award-winning” can be used to describe the project.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), Palm Beach Branch has given its Outstanding Project of the Year Award to Jacksonville District, for its work in designing and constructing the improvements to reduce the risk of failure at the dike. The award is presented annually by the organization to recognize the best example of an innovative or outstanding design/construction project in Palm Beach County.

“The Project of the Year Award is a distinguished professional honor,” said Tim Willadsen, HHD project manager. “All of us that work on this project take a lot of pride in what we do. It’s gratifying when a group such as the American Society of Civil Engineers publicly recognizes the expertise, professionalism, and hard work we put into our projects.”

In selecting the dike rehabilitation as its project of the year, the Palm Beach ASCE considered the following criteria:

- Contribution to the well-being of people, communities and environment
- Resourcefulness in planning and solution of design problems
- Pioneering in use of materials and methods
- Innovations in construction impact on physical environment, unusual aspects, and aesthetic values

For the last five years, the Corps has undertaken a number of projects to improve the conditions of the dike. These projects include installation of 21.4 miles of cutoff wall, improvements to the toe ditches in critical areas and the backfilling of an old quarry adjacent to the dike south of Pahokee. Nine different contracts were awarded to complete the cutoff wall installation and in October 2012, the Corps accepted the final segment of cutoff wall that was installed under these contracts

“Although much progress has been made, resulting in a

dike that is safer today than it was five years ago, much more remains to be done,” said Saxby Anderson, resident engineer for construction at HHD. “We are now focusing attention on replacing water control structures surrounding the lake, and we are also studying the other fixes that will be necessary to reduce the risk of failure at the dike.”

HHD is a 143-mile earthen dam that surrounds Lake Okeechobee in south Florida. Construction of the dike was authorized by Congress following catastrophic hurricanes in the 1920s that killed thousands of people. The dike started to experience problems in the 1990s and serious efforts to rehabilitate it finally gained traction in 2007, as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began work on the section between Port Mayaca and Belle Glade.

“The massive size of Herbert Hoover Dike means the work will continue for many years,” said Willadsen. “However, as we complete the many component projects around the dike, the risks to life and property in the adjacent communities are reduced.” ♦



Rehabilitation work continues at Herbert Hoover Dike, with the replacement of more than 30 water control structures around the lake, similar to the Culvert 11 site pictured above. Jacksonville District plans to continue work to replace these structures through 2018. (USACE file photo)

Tiger Mom effect served Asian American Pacific Islander Month speaker well

BY ANNIE CHAMBERS

Florence Chen, partner at the Yau Law Firm in Jacksonville, Fla., is a second generation Chinese-American and a current member of the Florida Bar. Chen visited Jacksonville District May 16 to celebrate Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month. She shared her insights on being raised by a 'tiger mom' and how it impacted her career and cultural values.

"I never thought about the differences between [me and] someone else until being asked to come here...I've never been asked to speak about my ethnic background," said Chen.

Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* was published in 2011, shocking many Americans with a look inside the authoritarian style of parenting common to the Asian culture. The book recounts instances of forcing her seven-year-old daughter to practice the piano for hours without a bathroom break and rejecting the birthday card her daughter made for her because she felt enough thought and effort hadn't been put into it.

Chen was raised in a similar environment, and she explained the concept of 'face' in the Asian culture. Face is earned through social standing, academic prowess, employment and marriage. Asian children are expected to go to the top schools, be the best in the class and receive first place in awards ceremonies. They are only to associate with good people, to bring honor to their families. They must pursue a position of prestige, such as doctor, engineer or lawyer. Their choice of spouse directly reflects on their family.

Historically, passing the Imperial Exams in China was considered a ticket out of poverty. Over the centuries these collective memories didn't fade. Individuality was considered counter-revolutionary and education a top priority.

The Chen children constantly wanted to impress their tiger parents, but their parents were exceedingly difficult to please. Coming in second place and earning almost straight As was never enough. In the Chen household there was a belief that there are two kinds of children: the obedient kind and the kind that lived on the street.

Chen never saw herself as a minority, and said she was treated the same as everyone else. It was not until law school that she saw differences, while studying individual and constitutional rights.



Florence Chen (right), a partner at Yau Law Firm, spoke to Jacksonville District employees May 13 for Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Chen attended Florida Coastal School of Law and was involved in various honor societies and groups, included the nationally recognized Moot Court Honor Board and Mock Trial. Sandra Moschetieri, chief of the Finance and Accounting Branch (left) was the mistress of ceremonies for the event. (Photo by Jennifer Knudsen)

Her parents pushed math and science careers so she could make top dollar. Finally, resigned to the fact that math was not her skill, they said, "If you can't become a doctor, be a lawyer." Instead, she spent years pursuing her passion, wanting to be an actress and studying broadcast journalism at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah before deciding to become a lawyer.

Neither her parents' persistence, nor her need to make them proud led her to this decision. It was after seeing the injustice of human trafficking while in San Francisco that she knew she needed to become involved in fighting against it by practicing law.

"My childhood may have been lost, but it was regained two-fold as an adult," said Chen. ♦



(Photo by Chris Rego)

Breaking through the old Tamiami Trail

BY JENN MILLER

The old Tamiami Trail roadway was broken through May 15 during roadway removal efforts, as part of the Tamiami Trail Modifications project in Miami, Fla. The road has served as a long-standing physical barrier, preventing water from flowing into Everglades National Park. While there is still much more work to be done on the project, removal of the one-mile section of roadway will bring the project one step closer to completion. For additional information on the project visit: <http://bit.ly/TamiamiTrail>.

National Trails Day BY ERICA SKOLTE

Whether you like to bike, hike or ride, National Trails Day, June 1, is a great day for everyone to get out in the "Great Outdoors."

People of all fitness levels can walk on the two nature trails located at the St. Lucie North Recreation Area in Stuart.

"The Red Trail is 0.3 miles and the Yellow Trail is 0.7 miles. The two trails are connected, so you can walk a whole mile if you



Bicycle enthusiasts get some exercise on the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail on a beautiful afternoon. (USACE file photo)

choose," said park ranger Paula Bratschi. "The gates to the St. Lucie North Recreation Area open at 7 a.m. and close at 6:45 p.m. Please remember that for your safety, bicycles must be walked across the St. Lucie Lock and Dam, and remember to bring along some water to stay hydrated."

In addition to the trails at St. Lucie Lock and Dam, visitors can enjoy walking, hiking, rollerblading, bicycling and horseback riding around Lake Okeechobee. Designated as part of the Florida National Scenic Trail in 1993, the Lake Okeechobee



The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST) is on the crown of the Herbert Hoover Dike, which surrounds Lake Okeechobee. This section is near South Bay at the southernmost end of the lake. (Photo by Mark Bias)

Scenic Trail (LOST) is an approximately 110-mile trail encircling the lake. More than half of the trail is paved, and the remainder consists of a two-track gravel roadway on top of the 35-foot high Herbert Hoover Dike.

The height above the surrounding area provides hikers, bikers and wildlife watchers with scenic vistas of the lake. The trail is open year round and can be used for hikes of almost any length. There are also many organized events for bicyclists and others throughout the year. There are 14 camping areas available on or adjacent to the trail. No fees or permits are required for trail use, and access can be gained from any of the recreation areas located around the lake.

Bratschi, an avid nature photographer, encourages people to bring their cameras along on their hikes. She has taken many beautiful photographs of scenery and wildlife along the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail atop the Herbert Hoover Dike.



A group of equestrians enjoy the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail. (USACE file photo)

"The LOST Trail offers miles of trail and the best views of Lake Okeechobee," said Bratschi. She also cautions, "Some sections of the LOST are closed due to construction on the Herbert Hoover Dike, so please check out the Jacksonville District website for the latest information before heading out."

"Both the trails at St. Lucie and LOST are great venues for biking, hiking, photography, bird watching and critter viewing. Come on out, breathe some fresh air, get your heart pumping and burn some calories while enjoying the great vistas!" said Bratschi.

For more information on the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, including a trail map with facilities and access points, and a map of closures due to Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation construction projects, visit: <http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/Recreation/LakeOkeechobeeScenicTrail> or the Lake Okeechobee and the Okeechobee Waterway Facebook page, which includes photos and events. "Like" us on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/LakeOkeechobee-OWW>.

NATIONAL TRAILS DAY (continued from PAGE 5)



This is one of the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail primitive campsites, 4.5 miles east of Clewiston. (USACE file photo)



On summer afternoons, there is often a ring of clouds around Lake Okeechobee, and sometimes, it looks like the water meets the sky as the horizon on the big lake seems to disappear. (Photo by Paula Bratschi)

National Trails Day event information is available at <http://www.americanhiking.org/events>. Information about the 22nd annual Big "O" hike, in November, is available at <http://www.floridahikes.com/big-o-hike>. It's the longest-running group hike in Florida history, and offers options from a few miles on opening day to the full nine-day, 109-mile hike. ♦

**OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS
WELCOMEHOME**

PEDRO DAVILA
ORLANDO RAMOS-GINES
ROBERTO CANSECO

Female lock leader honored with Steel de Fleury

BY ERICA SKOLTE

Forty years ago, career choices for women were generally not as diverse as they are today. Pam Peralta never let that stand in her way. Her choices leaned toward the non-traditional and resulted in several historic firsts.

In 1973, Peralta served in the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the women's branch of the United States Army. The same year, she graduated from the Southeastern Signal School in Fort Gordon, Ga. After serving a year as a telecommunication special-



Lt. Col. Thomas Greco, deputy commander for south Florida, awards the Steel de Fleury Medal to retiring lock leader Pam Peralta, the first woman to serve in her position with the Corps in Florida. (Photo by Jack Pasch)

ist at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Peralta received orders to serve overseas at the Army Security Agency in Okinawa. Peralta was one of only 12 women in a class of 125 to graduate from the Korean-based non-commissioned officer academy. She served for a total of five years in Okinawa, first as a telecommunications shift chief and later as the communications security chief.

Peralta returned to the U.S. when she was assigned to the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, where she served until her honorable discharge in 1979. In total, she served nearly seven years in the United States Army and earned several awards, including the National Defense Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal (2nd Award) and the M16 Rifle Expert Qualification Badge.

Peralta began her federal civilian career in a six-month temporary position with the Corps' Huntington District, as a lock and dam operator at Racine Lock and Dam, West Virginia. She was later hired permanently at Marmet Lock and Dam, also in Huntington District.

In 1984, Peralta accepted a lock and dam operator position with Jacksonville District, at Moore Haven Lock and Dam

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 7)

FEMALE LOCK LEADER (continued from PAGE 6)


Adam Morrison (left), Jacksonville District Equal Employment Opportunity Office, visited lock leader Pam Peralta (right) and lock operator Robert Holmes (center) at Moore Haven Lock and Dam on the Okeechobee Waterway. (Photo by Gonzellas Williams)

on the west side of Lake Okeechobee in Florida. Her selection was historic – Peralta was the Corps' first female lock and dam operator in Florida. After nine years, she filled a critical vacancy at the Ortona Lock and Dam on the Caloosahatchee River for one year, before returning to Moore Haven.

In 1997, Peralta was promoted to lock and dam leader at the Moore Haven Lock and Dam. Her promotion was another historic first for a woman in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the state of Florida. Peralta served in that position with a reliable, steady dedication for 16 years.

Peralta's responsibilities as the Moore Haven lock and dam leader included scheduling, coordination and execution of work projects for three lock operators manning a year-round 12-hour daily mission for navigation of vessels and spillway operations to balance water levels from Lake Okeechobee into the Caloosahatchee River.

"Pam has always found ways and means to be successful," said Steven Dunham, chief of the South Florida Operations Office in Clewiston, Fla. "Despite the maintenance challenges of working on a lock built in the 1930s, she has worked steadily and responsibly to keep the mission going, even through times of great adversity. She was an expert in the abilities of the hydraulic machinery, gate operations, gear systems and spillway capabilities. She ensured any discrepancies were addressed and resolved."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District recognized Peralta's 40 years of outstanding federal service by awarding her the Steel de Fleury Medal April 29 at the Moore Haven Lock.

"Pam's four decades of outstanding service to the nation is exceptional and exemplifies the selfless service of those in our workforce," said Lt. Col. Thomas Greco, deputy district commander for south Florida.

Greco described the significance of the award as he presented the medal and a certificate signed by the Chief of Engineers.

"The engineer regiment adopted the de Fleury medal as an award because of the values demonstrated by the man for whom it was struck – values of special meaning to Engineer Soldiers," he said. "The de Fleury Medal was the first congressional medal struck. This prestigious award recognizes both civilian and military personnel for outstanding contributions to the United States and to Army engineering."

"Pam was the first female hired by the division, and she maintained the position until her retirement. She kept up with all of the regulations, always made sure her people followed the standard operating procedures, and safety was always on her mind," said Jack Pasch, her supervisor and acting chief of navigation operations. "Pam made sure that her people were doing the right thing and then she always backed them up."

"Pam was gifted in leading others and did her job very well during many storm events," said Dunham. "Her quiet confidence and resolute abilities on the job are her hallmark traits. She has earned this distinguished award given her 40 years of military and federal service." ♦

Volunteers take pride in accomplishments at Take Pride in America Day BY ERICA SKOLTE

Like anything worthwhile, Jacksonville District's observance of Take Pride in America Day took a lot of planning, preparation and hard work. For the Corps employees and volunteers who participated in the May 4 event, the results were well worth the effort again this year. It was a win-win for everyone involved.

The annual Take Pride in America Day is part of a long-standing tradition around Lake Okeechobee and the Okeechobee Waterway. The first events took place at the South Florida Operations Office in Clewiston, beginning in 1986. Later, volunteer coordinator and park ranger Phil Hart, who works at the W.P. Franklin Lock & Dam in Alva, Fla coordinated the event for five years, from 1999 through 2003. Hart then passed the torch to park ranger Richard Bailey, who has taken the lead for the past 10 years. Bailey has worked with many organizations, including church groups, Boys Scouts and Girl Scouts, and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) units. The event provided an opportunity for the park ranger to do two of the things that he really enjoys.



Park ranger Richard Bailey (left), the coordinator of Take Pride in America Day, proudly stands next to a newly planted Royal Palm at the entrance to the Moore Haven Lock and Dam. At right, members of the JROTC from North Fort Myers High School "got their hands dirty" at Take Pride in America Day. (Photos by Henry "Bo" Harrell)

"I like working with people and I like working out in the field," Bailey said.

Bailey has a background in wildlife biology and understands the principles such as diversity that drive a healthy ecosystem.

"I don't just plant Live Oaks; I always use a variety of plants and I try to replace exotic plants with something else. I try to integrate native plants into the landscape whenever I can," he said.

The small but beautiful Atala Hairstreak Butterfly is dependent upon Coontie as its host plant. The Florida subspecies of this butterfly was at one time believed to have become extinct due to over-harvest of its host plant, and it was not collected in Florida from 1937 until 1959. The Atala is now common locally in southeast Florida, rebounding to some extent thanks to people like Bailey, who use native plants such as Coontie for landscaping purposes.

During one of his earlier efforts, Bailey provided plants such as Blue Porter Weed, Red Tropical Sage and Blanket Flower to volunteers to create a butterfly garden at W. P. Franklin Lock and Dam. He has spruced up visitor centers, locks and dams,



Donald Chapman (left), one of the Corps' many volunteers, joined Corps employees Thompson Graham (center) and Dan Finke (right) to prepare planting areas for Take Pride in America Day. (Photo by Phil Hart)

campgrounds, volunteer camping sites and recreation areas. He uses plants for beautification and wildlife and to make camping areas more pleasant, providing shade and screening for more privacy.

Several Corps employees and volunteers worked hard for days ahead of the Take Pride event, digging holes wide enough to allow for healthy root expansion for newly planted trees and surrounding each hole with caution tape for safety purposes. Each plant with a one-foot by one-foot root ball required a three-foot by three-foot hole and most of the trees to be planted had seven to 15-gallon root balls. Trees, shrubs and mulch were set in place on site, and equipment such as shovels and rakes were assembled.

Over the years, Bailey has built relationships and worked with a variety of organizations. Command Sergeant Major (retired) Bill Lansberry, senior Army instructor at North Fort Myers High School, contacted Bailey, seeking a community project for his unit. The Corps provided the pavilions and other facilities for the campers, and for the fourth year in a row, the JROTC from the North Fort Myers High School volunteered to participate in Take Pride in America Day.

The JROTC is a federal program sponsored by the United States Armed Forces in high schools across the United States. The purpose of JROTC is to instill in students the values of citizenship, service to the United States, personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment. Community projects are one way to accomplish this goal.

On Friday afternoon, "Tootsie" one of the volunteer park hosts, welcomed the JROTC volunteers to the Ortona North Recreation Area, where they set up tents and camped out for the weekend.

Waking up on site made it easier for everyone to be up bright and early to begin Take Pride in America Day in the cool of the morning on Saturday, May 4. The volunteers planted native trees and bushes at Ortona North Recreation Area on the Caloosahatchee River and at the entrance to the Port Mayaca Lock and Dam on the west side of Lake Okeechobee.

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 9)

PRIDE IN AMERICA DAY (continued from **PAGE 8**)

At the Ortona North Recreation Area on the Caloosahatchee River in Alva, volunteers learned how to plant correctly, to give the plants the best possible chance for success. They planted, watered and mulched 10 new native trees, shrubs and flowers. Some of the plants include the Pigeon-Plum, an evergreen tree that has purple fruit that attracts birds; 'Little Gem' Southern Magnolia, with fragrant white flowers and bright red seeds used by a variety of wildlife; Gumbo-Limbo, a large tree with attractive shiny, coppery bark; shade-loving Myrsine that attracts butterflies; Red Maple for shade and fall color and Dahoon Holly, which has brilliant red berries that serve as an excellent food source for wildlife. Firebush, with its tubular red-orange flowers and berries is another valuable addition to native plant, butterfly and hummingbird gardens. The Firebush is not just beautiful – modern re-

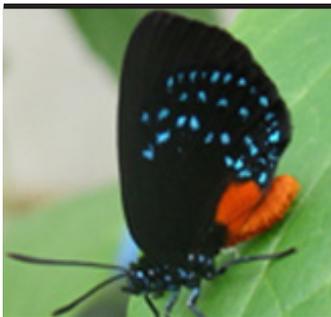


Graham Thompson, master tender from the Clewiston Office, digs holes for trees in advance of the event, making tree planting more efficient for volunteers the day of the Take Pride in America Day event. (Photo by Phil Hart)

searchers have found that extracts of the plant contain several active phytochemicals that have antibacterial and antifungal properties. In addition to the planting, volunteers also learned how to do much-needed maintenance by pruning many of the existing trees and removing moss growth.

The group then traveled to the Moore Haven Lock and Dam on the west side of Lake Okeechobee, where they planted, watered and mulched 12 Royal Palm trees along the entrance road. These beautiful and stately palms, which are native to Florida, will provide shade.

Many people contributed and worked together to make Take Pride in America Day a success, including Henry "Bo" Harrell, a general maintenance worker with R&D Maintenance Services, Inc., who volunteered to photograph the event. At the end of the event, after all of the tools had been cleaned, Bailey presented the volunteers with certificates of appreciation.



The Atala Hairstreak Butterfly is dependent on Coontie, one of the native plants chosen by park ranger Richard Bailey for use in butterfly gardens planted by volunteers on Take Pride in America Day. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

"It's really important for us to recognize the contributions made by our volunteers and to show appreciation for their service. They all did a great job! Many of the kids told me that they really enjoyed the experience," said Bailey. "They loved camping and being outdoors with their friends." ♦



Volunteers camped out over the weekend at Ortona North Recreation area. Corps volunteers and employees prepared holes, delivered trees and put up caution tape to ensure safety. (Photo by Henry "Bo" Harrell)



Members of the JROTC unit from North Fort Myers High School plant native shrubs at Ortona North Recreation Area. (Photo by Henry "Bo" Harrell)



Steve Dunham, chief of the South Florida Operations Office in Clewiston (in white shirt) and park ranger Richard Bailey speak with army instructor Sergeant First Class Brian Lambertson as JROTC volunteers plant Royal Palms along the entrance to the Port Mayaca Lock & Dam. (Photo by Henry "Bo" Harrell)

Lake Worth Inlet moves forward with release of draft report

BY AMANDA ELLISON



A view of Palm Beach Harbor, the site of the Lake Worth Inlet Feasibility Study, which evaluates the potential widening and deepening of the channel. (USACE file photo)

In May, the Lake Worth Inlet project team reached a major milestone with the release of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) to the public. A public meeting to introduce the plan to the community was attended by nearly 70 interested residents and stakeholders in Palm Beach. The meeting provided interested stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss the DEIS and to address any concerns and comments.

Lake Worth Inlet, serving as an entrance channel to the port, is inadequate both in width and depth, negatively impacting the current vessel fleet as well as future port potential. To ensure safety, local harbor pilots and the U.S. Coast Guard have restricted vessel transit. In turn, these restrictions lead to light loading, tidal delays and maneuvering difficulties, resulting in economic inefficiencies that translate into impacts on the national economy.

The tentatively selected plan proposes the following: deepen the entrance channel from 35 to 41 feet and widen from 400 to up to 460 feet, plus a southern approach flare; deepen the inner channel from 33 to 39 feet and widen from 300 to 450

feet; deepen the main turning basin from 33 feet to 39 feet and extend the southern boundary of the turning basin an additional 150 feet.

Suitable material would be placed in a near shore disposal area adjacent to the beach, or beneficially used for proposed mitigation. Unsuitable material would be taken to the Palm Beach Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site. Approximately 4.5 acres of seagrass habitat and 4.9 acres of hard bottom habitat would be affected through implementation of the tentatively selected plan. However, 8.25 to 11.25 acres of seagrass mitigation and 4.9 to 9.8 acres of hard bottom mitigation are being negotiated.

In addition, immediately south of the main turning basin, a warm water outfall from the Florida Power and Light Riviera Plant creates a warm water refugium for manatees.

The project is scheduled to be presented to the Civil Works Review Board in October for approval to move to Congress for authorization. ♦

The student connection: Corps employees reach out to local schools

BY ERICA SKOLTE



Lt. Col. Thomas Greco, deputy commander for south Florida, spoke to students about Everglades restoration and careers with the Corps. (Photo courtesy of Polo Park Middle School)

Now that the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests (FCATs) are over for the year, both teachers and students are breathing a sigh of relief. Teachers are eager to bring in enriching and interesting activities to keep the students engaged as the school year draws to a close.

For the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, this time of year provides an opportunity to educate future engineers and scientists on the breadth of the district's work and the contributions it makes to the quality of life in Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. All Corps team members are representatives for the Corps in their own communities. Every interaction provides a potential opportunity to share information about the district's programs and projects.

When Lt. Col. Thomas Greco, deputy commander for south Florida, made a visit to his eldest son's school, Polo Park Middle School, he left with an offer to return to do a presentation on Everglades restoration.

Surprisingly, the offer came not from a science teacher, but rather from his son's math teacher, Jim Ring. Earlier in the year, Ring told Greco, "I would like to do something at the school regarding Everglades restoration that might get our students interested in the environmental sciences and engineering."

Ring saw this presentation as a starting point for bigger things, including moving the school toward a specialized curriculum. "With the Everglades restoration project in our own back

yard, we as educators should take advantage of all of the exciting things that are going on in south Florida. This is something that the students should be knowledgeable about, and might want to consider as a career path."

Greco, an instructor at West Point prior to working with the Corps, spoke about the changes in south Florida over time, and highlighted what is being done to restore the area now.

Teachers and students were also interested in careers with the Corps. "We have careers in a broad variety of areas including STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics," said Greco.

When it comes to STEM, the Corps has no shortage of excellent role models. When her daughter's teacher requested parent participation in Career Week, Linda Knoeck, a project manager and biologist in the Palm Beach Gardens Regulatory Office answered the call.

"I decided to volunteer when I noticed that there were no professional women on the agenda," said Knoeck.

Knoeck gave a presentation to her daughter Avery's fourth grade class at Beacon Cove Intermediate Elementary School in Jupiter. She discussed her responsibilities and described the types of projects that she evaluates. Knoeck explained to the students how wetlands act as natural filters, and demonstrated the importance of the type of sand that is allowed to be placed on Florida beaches.

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 12)

THE STUDENT CONNECTION (continued from PAGE 11)

"The children really enjoyed looking at all the beautiful pictures of the endangered and threatened animals found in the waters of the U.S. within Florida. It helped them to understand why it is important to regulate potential impacts to these animals and their habitat," said Knoeck.

"Our Everglades restoration and regulatory programs provide an outstanding way to teach students about the importance of a healthy south Florida ecosystem, and also inspire interest in STEM," said Greco. ♦



Emergency Management Branch prepares for hurricane season

BY JOHN H. CAMPBELL



Significant erosion from Hurricane Sandy is visible from the sky in Brevard County along the Atlantic Ocean. Although the storm caused more damage in New York and New Jersey, Floridians in several counties were also impacted. (USACE file photo)

Tension filled the classroom. Although the students attending the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Advanced Public Information Officer class in Emmitsburg, Md. were 150 miles inland, they were becoming increasingly distracted as forecasts called for the storm to make landfall much too close for comfort.

As the winds howled that Monday night in late October, the students did not enjoy a restful night. When they assembled in class on Tuesday, it was apparent that the worst of the storm had passed to the north...

to New Jersey...and New York.

For some, it was called a "Superstorm." Others called it a hurricane. Whatever you call it, Sandy was a powerful system that forever changed the lives of the people it touched – as a storm survivor or as a responder.

Now imagine a similar storm bearing down on northeast Florida. What would you do? Are you ready? Really ready?

"It's my biggest nightmare," said Aaron Stomant, chief of Jacksonville District's Emergency Management Branch. "Not only would we have to find people and methods to continue our critical operations, we'd also have to manage an influx of responders that would come from other Corps districts to help us carry out disaster recovery missions to help the citizens of the impacted area."

Continuing to operate in the aftermath of a major storm will be the focus of an exercise the district is conducting with its leaders June 4. The continuity of operations, or COOP exercise, allows the district to review its plan for conducting its most crucial tasks after it loses a critical facility, such as its main office.

"We will be exercising what roles we would take if the district headquarters building goes down," said Stomant. "Whether it's a notice event like a hurricane, or a no-notice

Top - Students examined a lime rock core sample from the C-111 Spreader Canal project, part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The sample has many holes, almost like Swiss cheese, and illustrates one of the challenges of Everglades restoration – keeping the water in the natural areas, when water moves quickly underground.

Middle - Students examine a tracking collar that was used on an endangered Florida panther. **Bottom** - Outreach program specialist and former middle school teacher Erica Skolte spoke to eighth grade students at Polo Park Middle School about what the Everglades were like prior to being altered by man. (Photos courtesy of Polo Park Middle School)

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 13)

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (continued from PAGE 12)

event like a fire, there are certain functions the district must continue to execute, even if the building where we normally work is not available. This exercise tests our capabilities in that regard.”

In such a scenario, where the headquarters building or any other work facility were damaged, Stormant says it would be important for supervisors and employees to be able to contact each other.

“Everyone needs to make sure their supervisor has their updated contact information,” said Stormant. “Additionally, it’s important to prepare ourselves and our families, to ensure we have a plan for what we should do in a variety of hurricane scenarios.”

Stormant says those people with response roles have an extra responsibility to ensure their family has a good plan.

“It’s much harder to focus on disaster response activities if your family has unmet needs,” he said. “Responders need a plan in place so they can continue their mission.”

On this particular day in mid-May, Stormant has paused from a very busy spring schedule that was keeping him focused on preparations for the 2013 hurricane season, which officially started June 1.

The month of May had him and his assistant, Logan Wilkinson, conducting briefings in Puerto Rico, participating in exercis-



“Blue roofs” dot the landscape in this aerial photo taken near Port Charlotte following Hurricane Charley in 2004. Jacksonville District maintains Temporary Roofing and Temporary Housing Response Teams to assist local officials with unmet needs following a disaster. (USACE file photo)

es with the state of Florida and with officials in the Virgin Islands, and organizing the COOP exercise for Jacksonville District. Additionally, Stormant and Wilkinson have been attending training on the Corps’ role in FEMA disaster missions, and they have been inspecting flood control structures around the state as part of their preparedness activities.

Despite a lot of activity from tropical storms in 2012, it has been seven years since Florida saw its last hurricane. Stormant worries about complacency setting in.

“A lot of people have left the district since we opened our last RFO [Recovery Field Office] in Palm Beach County in 2005,” said Stormant. “It’s been even longer, all the way back to the 90s, since we opened RFOs in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. There are fewer and fewer people within the district that have any disaster response experience.”

Sandy did offer an opportunity for 20 people from Jacksonville District to get some disaster response experience. Employees from the district filled a wide variety of roles to include quality assurance specialists, safety specialists and mission management.



Jacksonville District Emergency Management Chief Aaron Stormant (second from left) works with officials in New York City while coordinating response activities in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Jacksonville District deployed 20 people to the northeast to assist following the storm. (USACE file photo)

Opportunities abound for district employees who would like to assist. Jacksonville District is able to field planning and response teams (PRTs) for temporary housing and temporary roofing. Additionally, Stormant says employees can augment staffing within the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), provide engineering support for FEMA Urban Search & Rescue teams, or assist with conducting infrastructure assessments.

“During 2012, we found we have many very skilled employees in Jacksonville District that are able to respond in a crisis,” said Stormant. “We were capable, ready and willing to support.”

Some forecasters are calling for an active hurricane season in 2013. The Colorado State University meteorological team is predicting 18 named storms, with nine predicted to become hurricanes. Accuweather specifically states in their report that Florida is long overdue for a direct hit.

For more information on hurricane preparedness measure, visit the following websites:

- FEMA individual preparedness www.ready.gov/hurricanes
- Florida Division of Emergency Management www.floridadisaster.org
- National Hurricane Center www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare
- American Red Cross www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/hurricane ♦

Laurel wilt – a possible threat to Everglades restoration

BY ANNIE CHAMBERS



A survey of laurel wilt damage to swampbays in an Everglades tree island. (Photo by Ellen Allen, South Florida Water Management District)

Florida's redbay trees are dying at an alarming rate, at the hands of a dangerous pair – the deadly combination of a symbiotic plant pest and disease called laurel wilt.

First discovered in 2005 in Duval County, laurel wilt disease has since spread south and is covering a vast section of Tamiami Trail, potentially threatening the Everglades. The disease, caused by a fungus transmitted by the invasive redbay ambrosia beetle, kills avocado and other trees in the laurel family. The insects can enter Florida on infested firewood and host trees; for that reason, it is recommended to use local firewood only.

Jacksonville District is part of the Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ECISMA), a formal partnership of federal, state and local government agencies, tribes and interested groups. Everglades restoration poses new challenges for invasive species management and a need for cooperation among agencies and organizations at higher levels of policy and management.

Recent survey flights by ECISMA confirmed laurel wilt is expanding rapidly across the Everglades. The primary method of control for laurel wilt, proposed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, is scouting and early detection, leading to suppression of redbay ambrosia beetle. Educating the public – gardeners, homeowners and landscapers – about the signs of laurel wilt and redbay ambrosia beetles is a top priority.

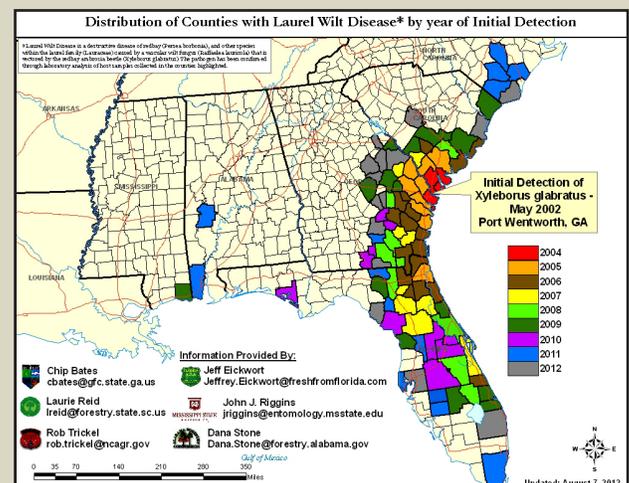
“Our concern is that it will open up niches for invasive species to thrive; they out-compete our natives,” said Jon Lane, chief of the Invasive Species Management Branch.

Tree islands are considered an extremely important contributor to habitat heterogeneity and overall species diversity within the Everglades ecosystem because they provide nesting habitat and refugia for birds and upland species and serve

as hotspots of plant species diversity within the Greater Everglades, according to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report.

“I am concerned about laurel wilt causing bay tree mortality on tree islands, this mortality would leave gaps within the canopy that would allow other invasive species to colonize, further degrading the system by reducing native tree species diversity and causing cascading effects to other ecosystem component,” said Gina Ralph, chief of the South Florida Section of the Planning Division’s Environmental Branch.

The implications are huge, because a loss of tree island ecosystems would result in a loss of the valuable services they provide for wildlife. ♦



Laurel wilt, a destructive disease of trees and other species has been confirmed by host samples collected in the counties highlighted in the map above. Map from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service.

Archaeologists help preserve the past, link to the future

COMMENTARY BY CYNTHIA THOMAS, PLANNING DIVISION



Col. Alan Dodd (left), district commander and Eric Bush (right), chief, Planning and Policy Division, conduct archaeological compliance fieldwork for the Central Everglades Planning Project. (Photo by Cynthia Thomas)

“A morsel of genuine history is a thing so rare as to be always valuable.” – Thomas Jefferson

Archaeological evidence shows that the area that we now know as Florida has been occupied by man since around 12,000 B.C. Known as Paleo-Indians, these inhabitants lived off of available plants and animals, including mega-fauna such as the mastodon or the 12-foot-tall giant ground sloth that once roamed Florida. Over time, Florida slowly evolved into what we see today, with climate and sea levels becoming more stabilized.

By looking at the archaeological record, we are able to observe and interpret evidence of lifestyle changes made by inhabitants of Florida as a result of the changing climate and landscape that occurred so long ago. Locations of homes, types of firewood used and available foods that people ate all reflect environmental changes within a specific area. This type of information can be useful to scientists and engineers working to restore an environment that has been impacted as dramatically as southern Florida.

Jacksonville District has five archaeologists supporting civil works projects and one archaeologist in Regulatory Division. Each is tasked with ensuring that every district project meets federal, state and local laws governing the protection of cultural resources. That is a huge job, particularly considering the

number of ongoing civil works projects and the number of federal permits requested through the regulatory process.

Cultural resources can be either tangible or intangible. Examples of tangible cultural resources include buildings, objects, features, locations and structures with scientific, historic and cultural value. Cultural resources are considered finite and non-renewable, in that once impacted, they cannot be returned to their original state.

According to archaeologist David McCullough, in considering how Jacksonville District's projects may affect cultural resources, Planning Division's Environmental Branch applies a number of historic preservation and environmental laws and regulations, in the interest of protecting cultural resources.

“One of the goals that archaeologists have is to ensure that our history is saved for future generations,” said McCullough.

Engineering regulations require that the Corps conduct field investigations early in the planning process, to verify the presence or absence of cultural resources. If the Corps finds cultural resources, it works with stakeholders to determine the best way to avoid, minimize or mitigate the effects that a project will have on those resources.

Ensuring each Corps project is in compliance with all federal, state and local laws that protect cultural resources contrib-

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 16)

ARCHEOLOGISTS (continued from PAGE 15)

utes greatly to the understanding of the cultural history of North America and the Caribbean. Archaeologist Grady Caulk is a project delivery team (PDT) member for the Indian River Lagoon project, and McCullough is a PDT member for the Portugues Dam project, both prime examples of successful projects that have caused us to reevaluate how the world views Native Americans that lived in those areas.

The job of the archaeologist isn't just about preserving history, but consideration of other people and organizations' concerns for how historic sites are treated during Corps projects or the permitting process. Archaeologist David Pugh, Regulatory Division, says federal law requires the Corps to consult with other parties prior to and during projects. This consultation goes much further than most people realize.

By law, public participation is necessary in the Corps' decision-making process. Executive Orders dictate consultation with federally recognized Tribes, such as the Seminole Tribe of Florida and The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. This means that when the Corps becomes involved with a project, it must begin the consultation process with the Tribes, the State Historic Preservation Office, and other concerned or affected stakeholders to determine if the project will have direct or indirect impacts to cultural resources. Failure to do so may cause projects to be delayed or potentially result in litigation.

Recently, Col. Alan Dodd, district commander and Eric Bush, chief of the Planning and Policy Division, helped to conduct compliance fieldwork in the Everglades. They confirmed that they gained a better understanding of the role archaeologists play in the Corps mission, and how difficult the fieldwork can be. Unique circumstances allowed the Corps to invite the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Historic Preservation Officer, Paul Backhouse to join in the fieldwork. This was a great opportunity to foster new relationships by taking advantage of a neutral meeting area and a little hard work.

An important lesson learned is that biologists, archaeologists, engineers and historic preservation officers all have the same goal – a successful mission. Every role is important and contributes to that success. ♦



These intricately carved ancient petroglyphs are part of a 60-foot row of well-carved stones discovered at the archaeological site near the Portugues Dam construction site in Ponce, Puerto Rico. (Photo courtesy of New South Associates, Inc.)



Archaeologist Cynthia Thomas (right), instructs Col. Alan Dodd (left), district commander on archaeological field techniques. (Photo by Eric Bush)



Archaeologists Grady Caulk (left) and Wendy Weaver (right) conduct archaeological investigations at the 8.5 Square Mile project in South Miami-Dade County. (Photo by Cynthia Thomas)

Emergency work begins and ends in record time at Fort Pierce Beach

BY AMANDA ELLISON



Left - Fort Pierce Beach shows significant erosion following Hurricane Sandy last fall. Right - Fort Pierce Beach, following completion of emergency renourishment work in May. (Photos by Shelley Trulock)

Last year, as it skirted up the east coast, Hurricane Sandy ravaged Florida's coastline, including Fort Pierce Beach. St. Lucie County applied for the Flood Control and Coastal Emergency (FCCE) program late last year, hoping to obtain U.S. Army Corps of Engineers funding to renourish the shoreline prior to the onset of the 2013 hurricane season.

In March 2013, the Corps received approval to renourish Fort Pierce Beach and began working at a feverish pace to get work under way. In record time, funds were received and a contract was awarded to begin work prior to the beginning of turtle nesting season.

Within 30 days of the approval of the Project Implementation Report, which documented damages caused by Hurricane Sandy, a contractor began dredging from an offshore borrow area and rebuilding the beach. The 30 days included development of plans and specifications, advertisement, award, notice to proceed and mobilization. The work was completed May 30.

"As a district, when we are faced with reacting to a storm like Hurricane Sandy, we all know it's going to be fast paced, constant thinking outside the box and some long hours," said Shelley Trulock, project manager. "For the Fort Pierce project, we all knew that if we didn't get the beach repaired before the start of the 2013 hurricane season that the beaches wouldn't be able to provide the level of protection that they were designed to provide in between scheduled nourishments.

"The team pulled together and accomplished what many said couldn't be done; in fact, I think we surprised ourselves! We came through for our sponsor and provided them with a final product that they couldn't be happier with," added Trulock.

In addition to Fort Pierce Beach, 11 other projects received a positive outcome and were approved for FCCE funds by Corps headquarters. The total funds (federal and non-federal)

approved to date as part of the program are currently estimated at \$147 million.

The following projects received approval:

Tropical Storm Debby:

- Pinellas County: Treasure Island
- Manatee County: Anna Maria Island
- Lee County: Gasparilla
- Lee County: Captiva

Hurricane Sandy:

- Brevard County: North Reach
- Brevard County: South Reach
- Martin County
- Palm Beach County: North Boca Raton
- Palm Beach County: Jupiter/Carlin
- Palm Beach County: Delray Beach
- Broward County: Segment 2

These reports follow guidance under Public Law 84-99 to determine the storm significance, damage significance, and if benefits outweigh the costs of rehabilitation.

In addition, emergency supplemental operations and maintenance funds were approved for Hurricane Sandy impacts at the following navigation projects:

- Port Canaveral
- Palm Beach Harbor
- Ft. Pierce Inlet
- St. Lucie Inlet
- Port Everglades
- St. Augustine Inlet
- Ponce Inlet
- Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway – Jacksonville to Miami ♦

Successful collaboration on Puerto Rico bridge project is rewarded

BY NANCY J. STICHT



Special construction methods were required as a condition of the Department of the Army permit issued by the Corps. Demolition of the old bridge, and construction of the new bridge were done concurrently, to limit the active construction footprint along the lagoon. (Photo courtesy of the Federal Highway Administration)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District was recently honored with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration's (FHA) National Award for Exemplary Human Environment Initiatives. Sindulfo Castillo, chief of the Antilles Regulatory Section, accepted the award on behalf of Col. Alan Dodd, district commander.

The award recognized the district's collaborative efforts on the Dos Hermanos Bridge project, which the FHA reconstructed to address safety and travel needs in an area of Puerto Rico known for its tourist attractions, sensitive environmental habitat and fragile historical and archaeological sites. The four-lane bridge carries Ashford Avenue over the Condado Lagoon, connecting Condado with Old San Juan. It includes 16 spans, 15 piers and two abutments, as well as two sidewalks and a bicycle lane.

With sensitive aquatic resources in the lagoon, including seagrasses and manatees, and the proximity of the remnants of a historic Spanish fortress wall dating to 1776, special construction methods were required as a condition of the Department of the Army permit issued by the Corps. Demolition of the old bridge, and construction of the new bridge were done concurrently, to limit the active construction footprint along the lagoon. The Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority's contractor, Las Piedras Construction, designed and used custom rigs to protect the seabed, and an archaeologist qualified in historic and underwater archaeology monitored to ensure protection of existing and unknown cultural resources. Seagrasses were inventoried and transplanted outside the direct impact area, and the contractor used turbidity barriers and monitored water quality.

"The importance of the historical legacies and environmental resources of Puerto Rico transcend the country; they form the history and features of Latin America and the American continent," said Eddie Rivera, Federal Highway Transportation Administration. He cited the Dos Hermanos Bridge as "a model project...for other jurisdictions in how preservation of the historical and environmental elements in transportation projects can be achieved."

Gisela Roman, project manager, oversaw the permit action for the project from the beginning. "Gisela ensured all correspondent evaluation for impacts on aquatic resources, including the protection of seagrasses, coral reefs, water quality and historic preservation," said Castillo. "Her direct involvement in the permit process stressed the importance of balancing the protection of aquatic and historic resources to ensure regulatory compliance and achieve common goals." ♦



The wall of the historic San Antonio Fortress was monitored throughout construction of the new Dos Hermanos Bridge, to ensure its structural integrity was maintained. (Photo courtesy of the Federal Highway Administration)



A view of the new Dos Hermanos Bridge, for which Jacksonville District was recently honored with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration's National Award for Exemplary Human Environment Initiatives. (Photo courtesy of the Federal Highway Administration)

Corps recognized for role in making Florida panther corridor a reality

BY ERICA SKOLTE



Susan Waichulis (left), project manager with the Fort Myers regulatory section, was recognized by Larry Williams, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for her role in performing the jurisdictional determination needed to move the project forward. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Sometimes it really does take a village to accomplish an important goal. Numerous partner agencies, non-governmental organizations and ranchers came together in LaBelle recently to celebrate the acquisition of the American Prime property one year ago, and to chart the path forward. The purchase of this “keystone tract,” now known as the Lone Ranger Forge, preserved a vital corridor for natural expansion of the endangered Florida panthers. The movement of the animals northward is considered to be one of the keys to the continued recovery of the species.

Panther scientists estimate that there are only 100 to 140 Florida panthers remaining in the wild, and the last remaining breeding population of Florida panthers is in south Florida, south of the Caloosahatchee River.

Though their home ranges are fairly large, female panthers tend to stay close to where they were born. When males mature, they naturally disperse. Historically, this was a wonderful natural strategy for maintaining genetic diversity. With breeding populations in more than one area, there is less competition for prey, mates and territory, and intra-specific aggression, a leading cause of death second only to vehicle collisions, is reduced. And if there are separate populations in different locations, it is easier for the species to recover from the effects of a natural disaster or a disease outbreak.

Though there have been numerous stories of panthers with kittens north of the Caloosahatchee, none have been confirmed by panther scientists. However, maintaining a path for panthers to migrate to other areas is of the utmost importance. The areas east and west of Lake Okeechobee were not previously connected as they are today by the Okeechobee Waterway. In the late 1800s, the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee River were connected to the west side of Lake Okeechobee via a three-mile canal at the Moore Haven Lock and Dam. On the east side of Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie canal was cut at the Port Mayaca Lock and Dam, connecting the lake to

the St. Lucie River. This presented a problem for the northward movement of panthers, in that they had to cross a wide body of water and climb steep banks caused by channelization.

Still, panther biologists have tracked the movement of male panthers with radio collars across the Caloosahatchee River in one key area. Animals don’t move randomly through the wild; even creatures of different species tend to move through certain areas more frequently than others, sometimes even creating trails. The panthers coming out of south Florida seemed to be traveling along the edges of a natural waterway, and then following an agricultural ditch to a narrow spot along the Caloosahatchee River. It was this area that was identified as most important to preserve and protect, so that panthers could continue to move northward in the future.

Just how special is this spot? During the meeting, neighboring ranchers Chris Asplundh and Dwayne House, provided some perspective on just how important this area is – though few people have been lucky enough to get a glimpse of a Florida panther in the wild, House and Asplundh say they see panthers in the area almost every week.

The 1,278-acre Lone Ranger Forge property where the ditch is located, fronts a narrow section of the Caloosahatchee River that is about 92 feet wide, only a few miles west of the Ortona



Panther biologists have tracked Florida panthers crossing north in a section of the Caloosahatchee River that narrows to about 92 feet across and has relatively gradual banks. It is just a few miles west of the Ortona Lock and Dam. (Photo by Erica Skolte)

Lock and Dam. The complex purchase of this key property last year, with an incredible number of moving parts, extraordinarily tight deadlines, and multiple legal and funding issues, was brought to a successful conclusion at the eleventh hour, due only to dedication and combined efforts of many individuals and groups working together to achieve a common goal.

Larry Williams, field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Florida Ecological Services office in Vero Beach, Fla., opened the celebratory meeting. “We have a lot of momentum right now, and we want to keep that momentum going,” he said. Williams also announced the formation of a new panther recovery implementation team.



PANTHER (continued from PAGE 19)



Aliesa "Liesa" Priddy, FWC Commissioner and a rancher, stressed the importance of public-private partnerships on ranch lands, with private property owners like Dwayne House, who also owns this ranch adjacent to Lone Ranger Forge. (Photo by Erica Skolte)

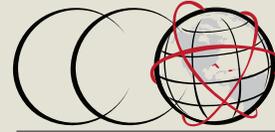
There were several other presentations during the meeting to highlight everything that had gone on behind the scenes to make this important acquisition a reality, and to illustrate the work that must still be done to restore and manage the property. Part of the meeting was dedicated to recognizing the many individuals at multiple organizations and agencies that played a part in the eventual success of what often seemed a near-impossible undertaking.

Tunis McElwain, Fort Myers regulatory section chief, represented the Corps team members at all levels who collectively prepared the necessary documents to facilitate the easement exchange required to set the stage for the purchase.

Susan Waichulis, regulatory project manager in the Fort Myers office, was the Corps' first "boots on the ground" representative at the beginning of the project. She accepted an award for her contribution to moving the project forward.

"This is very exciting," said Waichulis. "I was privileged to represent the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and meet everyone for the site visit, and then complete the jurisdictional determination in June 2011."

"The Corps values our partnerships with other federal and state agencies," said McElwain. "Establishment of the panther corridor shows just how important these partnerships are and underscores the fact that innovative problem solving can make a tremendous difference to the south Florida ecosystem. The employees recognized today represent a broad cross-section of the Corps team who worked to make the corridor a reality." ♦



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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District

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JUNE 2013

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AND OUR TROOPS
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DEFEND

THE freedoms & liberties
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AMERICANS"

President Barack Obama
September 20, 2011