

# The Public Speaks...

## and your Corps of Engineers in New England answers the call

**Commentary by Jess Levenson**  
**Public Affairs Office**

After 242 years, honeymoon long over, the New England Corps of Engineers and the public have settled into life as an old married couple: they can't live with, or without, each other.

The public cares about the Corps in New England. They perpetually voice genuine concerns running the gamut of the Corps' authorities, from hazards in their backyards to rising recreation costs; from traffic jams along the Cape Cod Canal to complex permitting activities.

In turn, the Corps cares for the public by addressing environmental hazards and impacts to waters and wetlands, by making available pristine recreation opportunities at 31 Corps New England projects, by maintaining navigation and coastal infrastructure, by informing the public of pending traffic impacts, and so much more.

The public speaks; the Corps listens and responds - individually, directly, and quickly.

What is the key to this symbiosis?

The secret to success is communication. Criticism is a healthy and necessary form of communication, not an indication that the relationship is unhealthy or in trouble. The District Public Communication and Outreach Program demonstrates daily the Corps' dedication to fostering a healthy, open, and honest dialogue.

Since my first day working in New England's Public Affairs Office seven years ago, I've been responsible for responding to public inquiries. I've helped thousands of people find the answers they need in the District's extensive purview, from reporters seeking new developments on projects, to congressional officials seeking progress on programs, to the public seeking updates about, well, the things that matter to them.

Millions of people are passionate about diverse New England regulatory actions like the precedent-setting Cape Wind permit. Hundreds of millions nationwide have a stake in other Corps permits such as the Dakota Access Pipeline. While New England wasn't at the forefront of that pipeline project, the Public Affairs Office was the first point of contact for many. I spoke with numerous upset callers and gave them an opportunity to voice their concerns.

In my experience, producing first-rate customer assistance doesn't take a backseat to delivering services because people remember their experience with the Corps.

For instance, on Cape Cod alone, I helped a man find information on donating a park bench in honor of his father's memory. His father had been an avid fisherman along Cape Cod's shores and had always wanted to remain there. Another resident contacted me about his late father and reminisced about how they would fish by the Buzzards Bay docks and gaze at the tugs berthed by the Corps' field office. His favorite tug had long since disappeared, and I helped him discover what became of it.

The bottom line is we care about each other. The Corps of Engineers has provided quality customer service for 242 years and will continue to do so well into the future. It's impossible to imagine doing anything else.