

Photo by Areca T. Wilson

Justin Gay, deputy district engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, left, speaks with Mark A. Macarro, Pechanga Band of Indians chairman, during a meet-and-greet between the Tribal Council and the LA District July 24 in Temecula, California. District representatives visited with the tribes' members to strengthen and demonstrate USACE's commitment to meeting its federal trust responsibilities.

## LA District meets with local tribes to strengthen lines of communication

BY ARECA T. WILSON  
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

TEMECULA, Calif. — Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians Tribal Council and Pechanga Band of Indians Tribal Council members hosted meet and greets with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District representatives July 24 at their respective reservations.

The LA District's delegation included Commander Col. Andrew Baker; Deputy District Engineer Justin Gay; Tribal Liaison Danielle Storey; and Regulatory Division's South Coast Branch Chief Cori Farrar.

"I felt for a long time a lot of our interactions were reactive," Storey said. "I would like to get on a new cycle that as any new commander

comes in, that introductions are made."

The Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians occupies about 4,600 acres in Valley Center, while the Pechanga Indian Reservation covers roughly 7,000 acres in Temecula Valley. Both tribes are two of six federally recognized tribes of Luiseño Indians.

The LA District visited with the tribes' members to strengthen and demonstrate USACE's commitment to meeting their federal trust responsibilities. The Federal Trust Doctrine, which is based on treaties, laws, rules, executive orders, case law and agreements between the U.S. government and tribal governments, gives USACE obligations to tribal nations.

"We're delivering solutions to serve and

strengthen all communities — it's just been a very deliberate reset on how we communicate and not just taking such a rigid stance on all things," Gay said. "There's always more to the story, and we're willing to hear that and work through it. We are looking at this culturally ... how do we partner to achieve mutual success?"

During each meeting, discussions covered issues the tribes are facing, changes in policy and how to improve relationships. The LA District also provided information on its scope of responsibility and resources available to the tribes, such as emergency management, ecosystem management, technical assistance and more.

## Civilian Service Commendation Medal



Photo by Richard Rivera

Steve Weiss, a lead/senior project scheduler with the Projects Control Branch, Programs and Projects Management Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Los Angeles District, receives the Civilian Service Commendation Medal July 24 from Col. Andrew Baker, Los Angeles District commander, at the LA District headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. Weiss has worked for the district for more than 23 years and has provided scheduling support for numerous projects, including the Santa Ana River Mainstem, Veterans Affairs Long Beach, VA San Diego, Whittier Narrows Dam and for the Military Construction Division, among others. Weiss is a second-generation Los Angeles District employee. His father, Ronald Weiss, also worked for the Los Angeles District for 39 years, so between both men, they have a combined 62 years of federal service to the nation, as Steve continues his family's legacy with the district and USACE.



Courtesy photo

Los Angeles District Park Rangers Emily Hibbard, background left, and Marlene Schmitt, background right, stopped by the Whittier Narrows Nature Center July 12 and gave an impromptu presentation to 12 teenagers, who are performing internships in conjunction with [Treepersons.org](https://www.treepersons.org), in South El Monte, Calif. The park rangers discussed the variety and importance of jobs in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, what USACE park rangers do and how students can plan and prepare for future federal careers. Hibbard and Schmitt also assisted in a guided hike about native plants, led by Colleen MacKay, superintendent of the nature center, and discussed environmental stewardship at USACE properties.

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## Commander's message: Thank you for a great first year

Hey, SPL Team!

I hope that you're having a great summer season so far! All good for my family and me. We survived the influx of Massachusetts drivers up in Maine over Fourth of July week and had a great time with friends and family. We got out on a couple of boats, knocked out some family hikes, and filled our yearly quota of east coast sea food, hotdogs ("red-dogs" up in Maine) and donuts (old school molasses style). Three of three of our dogs are now in California, and my wife Shannon and our girls follow on Friday! We're excited to have all of us living under the same roof in quite a while and already have some California / Arizona adventures in the works. I can't wait to introduce them to some of what makes this region such an amazing place to live. Hope to have the whole crew (maybe minus a dog or two) out at the 5K on Oct. 19!

I'll start this month's column with a BIG thanks to all of those who participated in FEVS, and a plug for the Defense Organizational Survey, or DEOCS. As I



COL. ANDREW BAKER  
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

wrote in the FEVS final update, we wrapped up with a 57.4 percent response rate — better than all but seven districts across the enterprise by my count — amazing!!

So, there's another survey coming down the pike. DEOCS is a requirement for all incoming commanders. Long story short, the DEOCS system recently came back on-line after an extended period of down time. After such a great push on FEVS, I'm wary of survey fatigue, but ask that you consider taking this one as well when you see it pop up in your inbox. The DEOCS includes the opportunity to provide free text responses to questions ... so you can be as specific as you'd like with your feedback. As with FEVS, this is all about making SPL better, and I'll owe you an overview after the survey closes.

My family's arrival to Southern California marks a year for me as SPL commander. Two things immediately come to mind when I think about this: (1) that was quick; and (2) we do way more work for the American people than I ever imagined before I took this job.

The scope and scale of our program are amazing — from defending our shoreline, to building amazing facilities for our veterans and warfighters, to protecting natural resources, to serving previously underserved communities, to protecting the largest share of the U.S. population in any district from natural disasters ... the list goes on and on. During the change of command ceremony last year, I talked about how excited I was to be a member of the "legendary" Los Angeles District — a district with proud history throughout the Corps for delivering remarkable and consequential projects for the American people. After experiencing a year on team SPL, it turns out that all that "legendary SPL" talk I heard coming up is absolutely true. I am proud and humbled to be part of such a phenomenal team and excited about delivering our righteous program every day.

Thanks for a great first year and for all you do to safely deliver our quality program on time and within budget!

Proud to be SPL!

Col. Andrew Baker

## Around the District

*"I truly believe in the programs we support, and I'm fortunate to be surrounded by dedicated professionals who make it all happen."*

Matt is a project engineer, collaborating with three military branches on four projects totaling \$400 million, stationed at Vandenberg Space Force Base in California. He specializes in military and national defense projects and construction. Matt has been with the Corps for nearly four years. He is from Ely, Minnesota.



Matthew "Matt" Hall  
Deputy Resident Engineer



# The many hats of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Courtesy photos

During a July 20 outreach event at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center Open House in South El Monte, California, Los Angeles District Park Ranger Marlene Schmitt gives young visitors the opportunity to try on some of the many hats U.S. Army Corps of Engineers park rangers wear in their diverse day-to-day missions in the LA District area of operations. About a week earlier, July 12, Schmitt joined fellow LA District Park Ranger Emily Hibbard at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center to give an impromptu presentation for teenage interns ([see the photo on Page 2](#)).

## Supporting Hawaii Wildfires Recovery

Louis Munoz, emergency management specialist with the LA District, left, was recently recognized by Col. Eric Swenson, Hawaii Wildfires Recovery Field Office commander, for his contributions to support the recovery efforts following the wildfires Aug. 8, 2023. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is actively supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency, State of Hawaii and the County of Maui. USACE efforts have included providing temporary power, building a temporary elementary school, planning temporary housing and removing debris from impacted areas in Kula and Lahaina.

To date, USACE teams and contractors have cleared fire debris from 1,400 residential properties and more than 100 commercial properties. USACE continues its response and recovery missions in coordination with local, state and federal partners.



Courtesy photo

# Outreach team visits Cal State LA

LA District continues strengthening partnerships with higher education



Courtesy photos

ABOVE AND BOTTOM RIGHT: Los Angeles District leaders and representatives meet with faculty and students at California State University Los Angeles' College of Engineering, Computer Science and Technology July 12 in LA to tell the district story, talk about the district's hiring authorities and connect employees with university faculty. Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, LA District deputy commander, presented several coins to faculty and staff on behalf of Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander.



Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, LA District deputy commander, right, shakes hands with Mark Tufenkjian, interim associate dean of Cal State LA's College of Engineering, Computer Science and Technology, left, during a July 12 visit. Assistant Professor Joseph Lucey-Renteria, center, also was there to meet with Brooks and other LA District representatives.



# Small town trains for big disasters

LA District conducts emergency response training exercise in Southern Nevada



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

A small group, led by a Los Angeles District emergency management specialist, rehearses emergency response tactics for a natural disaster scenario during an emergency tabletop training exercise, or TTX, June 25 at the Panaca Fire Station in Lincoln County, Nevada. The TTX is designed to review, practice and assess federal and nonfederal partners' response to catastrophic disaster scenarios in Lincoln and Clark counties in Nevada. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Emergency Management Branch team provides engineering services to respond to national and natural disasters to minimize damage and help in recovery efforts.

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX  
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PANACA, Nev. — The Los Angeles District Emergency Management team conducted an emergency tabletop training exercise June 25 at Panaca Fire Station in Lincoln County, Nevada, to practice emergency response and coordination skills with local, state and federal agencies.

Under the leadership of LA District Emergency Management Branch Chief David Kingston, the agencies gathered in Panaca to rehearse, practice and assess their response to a catastrophic flood and sudden earthquake using virtual scenarios.

“We are training with many agencies to better coordinate and make sure we can protect lives and property in this area,” said Kingston, a former Army colonel. “Southern Nevada is made up of small towns with limited resources, like Panaca. They are highly vulnerable to flooding.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Lin-

coln County has a population of about 5,000 people, with about 1,000 of those residing in Panaca.

“The town of Panaca is a small farming community,” said Cody Tingey, the eastern regional manager for the Nevada Division of State Parks. “This training helps the town of Panaca by giving them the resources they need, so that when emergency disasters happen, they have the contacts, sandbags and what residents need.”

The training focused on three objectives:

- Review and rehearse the Los Angeles District's written emergency action plan to be implemented in the event of a disaster.
- Familiarize state and federal emergency management teams with the terrain of Clark and Lincoln counties, specifically dams, flood zones and towns that could be affected in the event of an earthquake or major flood.
- Create and strengthen partnerships among county commissioners, emergency responders, community leaders and municipi-

pal partners responsible for providing essential functions during a major disaster.

“This training gives me the tools, so that when our dams are having problems or when we have flash flooding or we have concerns that we have a breach, I'll have the contacts available to me to make sure I make solid decisions,” Tingey said. “Having contacts and different resources and working with other agencies makes all the difference when the actual emergency happens.”

After the presentations and small-group exercises, participants toured Matthews Canyon Dam, which is about 25 miles south of Panaca.

“I think it's important to come out to the dams after the exercise to see the reality of what we just went over on a tabletop,” said Lincoln County Emergency Manager and Fire Chief Eric Holt, stationed in Panaca. “A tabletop is great, but actually being on site to see the magnitude of water capacity really brings

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the training into perspective. It helps us with understanding what types of resources we would need if the dam failed.”

The LA District conducted the training in accordance with its Matthews Canyon Dam Emergency Action Plan as a framework. Additionally, the LA District has the ability to assist communities during emergencies under Public Law 84-99, Emergency Response to Natural Disasters, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Regulation 500-1-1, Emergency Employment of Army and Other Resources - Civil Emergency Management Program.

“The focus of our training scenario was to ensure state and local leadership know how to coordinate and execute our emergency action plan during specific disaster scenarios,” Kingston said.

The Sacramento District also sent an emergency manager to assist the LA District with training objectives. Both Los Angeles and Sacramento districts' emergency management teams provide engineering services to respond to national and natural disasters to minimize damage and help in recovery efforts.

“It's important to the South Pacific Division that we're here to protect these small towns,” Kingston said.



Photos by Robert DeDeaux

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District safety and emergency management experts pose for a picture with representatives from Nevada State Park Rangers, Lincoln County Fire Department, and other federal and nonfederal agencies, on top of Matthews Canyon Dam, following an emergency training exercise June 25 in Lincoln County, Nevada. The LA District Emergency Management Branch team conducted the training event with the support of the Nevada Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, and Lincoln County.



The Los Angeles District's Matthews Canyon Dam outlet is pictured June 25 in Lincoln County, Nevada. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built the uncontrolled dam in 1957, about three hours north of Las Vegas. The dam is designed to slow heavy waterflow and mitigate potential catastrophic flood damage to nearby towns and farms. The training exercise was designed to review, practice and assess the district's response to catastrophic disaster scenarios.

# USACE hiring managers connect with future talent at LULAC National Convention in Las Vegas



Photo by Stephen Baack

Ernest Drott, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Louisville District hiring manager and chief of engineering and construction, second from left, speaks with an attendee of the 2024 League of United Latin American Citizens National Convention and Exhibition July 26 in Las Vegas. Drott is joined by Lt. Col. Guillermo Guandique, Louisville District deputy commander, left.

BY STEPHEN BAACK  
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LAS VEGAS — Hiring managers from throughout the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made 20 tentative job offers and offered a combined \$215,941 in centralized incentives during the 2024 League of United Latin American Citizens National Convention and Exhibition June 26-28 in Las Vegas.

The annual national convention brings together a range of keynote speakers, discussion panels, sponsors and exhibitors in support of LULAC, the largest and oldest Hispanic advocacy organization in the U.S., with the three-day career expo being just one part of the multifaceted four-day convention and exhibition. The theme of this year's convention was "Empowering the Next Generation."

The hiring effort, led by USACE's Talent Acquisition Center of Excellence and conducted in partnership with the Army Civilian Career Management Agency, brought together hiring managers with a diverse set of backgrounds from various districts, divisions and centers across the enterprise.

Stephen Wheeler, team leader for TACE, said career fairs fulfill several needs, including ensuring districts are reaching a diverse pool of candidates and that hiring managers are leveraging a way to get talent on board quickly.

"For career fairs like this, whenever we can go out there and offer jobs on the spot, that makes us more competitive," Wheeler said. "And then we're able to offer our incentives, which makes us more competitive with the private sector. In today's environment, you've got to be quick."

At this event and others like it, hiring managers do this by using USACE's Direct Hire Authority, which differs from the standard application and hiring process through USAJOBS.gov.

"Direct Hire Authority allows us to bypass the USAJOBS process and post our own vacancies and our own events," Wheeler said. "Direct hire is a leaner process and is designed to be much quicker, end to end."

## HOW IT WORKS

Typically, each participating district and center provides TACE with a list of the vacancies hiring managers need to fill. For each national event, TACE publishes a public notice, listing the vacancies that districts and centers

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plan to hire for, along with a link for job seekers to register and provide pertinent information ahead of time.

Wheeler said hiring managers don't even need to wait until an event to start evaluating job candidates; they can log into the Talent Acquisition Recruitment Platform to search for candidates who have already uploaded their resumes.

Additionally, job candidates themselves don't necessarily need to physically attend the career fair to receive job offers. In fact, Wheeler said, most tentative job offers occurred virtually. Some events even have "digital twins," he added, during which hiring managers are available online and in person simultaneously.

Conversely, since not all conference attendees may be aware of the career fair portion of the event, many of those who stopped by the USACE booth had not yet registered. At the LULAC career fair — as is the case at other events — hiring managers were available to provide the appropriate link for job seekers to register, apply, be interviewed and evaluated, and, in some cases, receive tentative job offers the same day.

Wherever hiring managers meet candidates in that process, Wheeler said the TACE team is there to help — not just with career fairs, but staffing questions, training, recruitment strategy and instructions on working with the TARP system. He added that TACE has a member assigned to each USACE division to provide support.

Although the option to attend career fairs is a powerful mechanism for recruiting talent, Wheeler said hiring managers don't need to attend every event.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Shaun Frost, hiring manager and chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's Construction Division, right, provides information about employment opportunities to an attendee of the 2024 League of United Latin American Citizens National Convention and Exhibition July 26 in Las Vegas.

"Go to the event that's right for your organization," he said. "And there's not really one strategy; there's several, and you need to develop that based on your needs."

## ADVANTAGES

Shaun Frost, chief of the Los Angeles District's Construction Division, said he attended this event looking to fill entry-level engineering positions in the Engineering Division and possibly in the Construction Division.

"We're looking for interest in civil works design, construction and those who are interested in joining a team with a worldwide mission and who want to make an impact on the communities we serve," said Frost, who added that USACE devotes significant resources to "grow the organization and to spread the word of our projects, mission, capabilities and how we serve the country."

The team of USACE hiring managers was at the LULAC event not just to hire on the

spot, but also to share with candidates about why USACE civilians are key to improving the overall quality of life for citizens, influencing the accessibility and functionality of vital infrastructure that communities rely on daily and actively participating in projects that shape the nation's future.

"We have a large amount of work coming to the district in the near future, and we need a staff with a full range of experience and training to meet critical needs for the district," Frost said. "Events like this allow us to contact a large number of people to see who would be interested in filling these roles."

Facilitating this process for Frost and others were Wheeler and the rest of the TACE team, who specialize in the direct hiring process at these events. Wheeler said hiring through Direct Hire Authority is not meant to replace USAJOBS, but to complement it based on the varying needs of hiring managers.

"At hiring events, the name of the game is direct hire," Wheeler said. "And the TACE team is here to help in whatever way we possibly can."

To learn more, visit <https://www.usace.army.mil/careers>. For a schedule of upcoming hiring events, visit <https://www.usace.army.mil/Careers/Career-Fairs/>.

*"We have a large amount of work coming to the district in the near future, and we need a staff with a full range of experience and training to meet critical needs for the district."*

— Shaun Frost, chief, LA District Construction Division

# Why safety matters — putting it into perspective

BY CHRIS RAINWATER  
SAFETY OFFICE CHIEF

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prioritizes safety and occupational health above all else. The commanding general, Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon, has consistently emphasized that safety is not just a priority but an “imperative” within USACE.

Col. Andrew Baker, Los Angeles District commander, reinforced this at a recent town hall, stating that nothing that USACE undertakes is worth risking a life or causing a life-altering injury. This steadfast commitment to safety should be well known to every employee across the district, underscoring the vital importance of safeguarding everyone’s well-being in all USACE operations.

Some folks understand the prioritization of safety better than others. People who believe there is too much emphasis on safety might not fully grasp that every regulation, every precaution and every measure is fundamentally about preserving human life. It’s not about bureaucratic red tape or unnecessary caution; it’s about ensuring each worker returns home safely to their loved ones.

The devastation of losing a colleague, friend or family member in a preventable accident is immeasurable, and the ripple effects of such tragedies are felt deeply across communities. Safety measures are a compassionate response to the inherent risks in various professions, acknowledging that no

task is worth more than a human life. When we prioritize safety, we affirm the intrinsic value of each person and our collective commitment to protecting one another in every possible way.

Despite the myriad of safety regulations, advanced procedures, innovative approaches and cutting-edge technology, the grim reality remains that workplace fatalities in the U.S. are increasing. Each new statistic is a stark reminder that behind the numbers are real people — mothers, fathers, sons and daughters — whose lives are cut short. These tragedies ripple through families and communities, leaving an indelible mark of sorrow and loss. It’s a sobering testament to the fact that while progress in safety measures is crucial, it is not yet sufficient.

The rising numbers call for a renewed, heartfelt commitment to creating environments where the sanctity of life is paramount and where every worker is valued and protected. It’s a poignant reminder that we must never become complacent, but instead, redouble our efforts to ensure everyone can work in a safe and secure environment, returning home to their loved ones each day.

Last year in the U.S., the tragic reality was that 15 workers lost their lives on the job every single day. That’s one life snuffed out every 96 minutes. This heartbreaking statistic marks a 15-percent increase from the previous year, highlight-

ing that, despite our nation’s commitment to safety, we have miles to go. In the same year, workers suffered 320 recordable injuries every hour of every day, many resulting in permanent disabilities.

Imagine the profound impact on each family member of these workers. Picture yourself as the close friend of one of these employees — how would you feel about your employer’s safety program after witnessing such a devastating loss? The emotional toll is immeasurable, underscoring the urgent need for stronger safety measures to ensure no more lives are needlessly shattered.

To all SPL employees, regardless of your role or duty location, let us unite in our commitment to fully implement the Corps of Engineers Safety and Occupational Health Management System, or CE-SOHMS. By embracing this system, we are not just following protocols; we are actively protecting ourselves, our colleagues and the families who depend on us.

Each day we dedicate to safety is a step toward ensuring that every one of us returns home unharmed. Let’s make safety our shared mission, embodying the values of vigilance and care in every task we undertake. Together, we can build a culture where safety is second nature and where every employee feels confident and secure. Let this dedication to CE-SOHMS be our promise to each other, transforming our workplaces into beacons of safety and care.



Photo by John Reese

In this file photo, senior leaders with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Veterans Affairs and contractors pose for a photo at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System project site Oct. 12, 2023, in Long Beach, California. The VA Long Beach Healthcare System serves more than 50,000 veterans.



Photo by Richard Rivera

Chris Rainwater, chief of the Los Angeles District’s Office of Safety and Occupational Health chief, addresses Operations Division employees July 15 on the importance of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Safety and Occupational Health Management System, or CE-SOHMS, as part of a weeklong safety stand-down in mid-July at the LA District Baseyard in South El Monte, California.

## ‘Ops never stops’: Embracing safety in Operations Division

TONY MCCOY, LA DISTRICT SAFETY OFFICE

In mid-July, the Los Angeles District Operations Division conducted its annual safety stand-down, an event showcasing the division’s ongoing commitment to the safety of its employees.

As LA District commander Col. Andrew Baker once said, “Ops never stops.” This statement encapsulates the continuous mission of the Operations Division. Tasked with flood protection and mitigation for the vast LA County Drainage Area and Santa Ana River basins, the dam facilities act as steadfast guardians against natural and extreme weather threats, requiring constant vigilance and resource management.

In early 2020, the then-newly formed Operations Division faced significant challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated a focus on improving safety performance to safeguard both equipment and personnel.

A key challenge was transforming the existing safety culture. Michael Turanitz, then-incoming deputy chief, initiated the first Operations Division safety stand-down that year to unify all Operations Division personnel, including engineers, biologists, maintenance staff and park rangers, in their safety efforts.

Despite initial setbacks due to Covid-19 restrictions, the stand-down proved valuable and set a precedent for future events. Mark Cohen, Op-

erations Division chief and a strong advocate for safety, emphasized the importance of this annual training in maintaining a “safety always” mindset.

Conducted during the peak heat season, the stand-down provides a break from the heat and prepares the workforce for the demanding field-work season that begins in the September-October timeframe, minimizing impact on critical habitats and aligning with the “rainy season.”

The weeklong training is collaboratively delivered by personnel assigned safety duties and responsibilities within Operations and specialists from the Safety Office. Topics range from homeless encampment cleanup safety procedures to fall protection and confined space entry, covering a broad spectrum of mission-critical tasks.

In 2024, 14 presenters delivered training to 81 students across 25 courses, driven by multiple requirements from the district Safety Office’s training matrix and mission-specific needs. In total, that’s nearly 1,400 man-hours of training so far this year.

Each stand-down is unified by a theme, with 2024’s being “Foundations for Safety Leadership.” This theme expanded on the idea that everyone is a safety officer, highlighting the characteristics and skills needed for effective safety leadership across the organizational chart. The training incorporated a variety of leaders and subject-matter experts from the Safety Office and Operations Division

teams as speakers, which highlighted the importance of broad participation.

The stand-down’s main goal is to involve everyone in improving safety culture and performance, contributing to the district-wide goal of complete implementation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Safety and Occupational Health Management System, or CE-SOHMS. Positive feedback from end-of-course surveys indicated the stand-down was well-received, boding well for continued employee involvement and overall safety performance.

One participant commented, “The training was great. Thank you for putting these safety stand-downs together. We appreciate you caring about the safety of our team,” with another participant noting the boost in morale as a key benefit of the training.

Cohen underscored that safety is about taking care of each other, seeing processes honestly and preventing injury and mishap.

The cumulative effect of the annual safety stand-downs has been continuous improvement in both safety performance and culture. Operations Division personnel have demonstrated that even amidst persistent mission demands, taking a moment to focus on safety is always worthwhile. By pausing for safety, it ensures the ongoing success of mission-critical projects, while fostering a culture of care and vigilance.

# LA District PDT named 'USACE Planning Team of the Year'

BY STEPHEN BAACK  
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LOS ANGELES — A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District project-delivery team has been named the USACE 2023 Outstanding Planning Achievement Team of the Year (Programmatic) after taking on the study of a nontraditional Tribal Partnership Program project using new guidance from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works.

The LA District's Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Renewable Energy Project Tribal Partnership Team recently completed the study in coordination with tribal and federal partners, resulting in the recommendation from USACE to proceed on a project to install solar panels over about a 1,000-foot stretch of irrigation canal in central Arizona within the Gila River Indian Community Reservation in Maricopa and Pinal counties.

The purpose of the Corps study was to evaluate the technical and economic feasibility, and environmental acceptability, of the proposed project.

The Tribal Partnership Program, or TPP, gives USACE the ability to leverage its capabilities and resources to support and advance the interests of tribal communities in planning, studying, designing and constructing water re-

sources development projects. Typical examples of these activities include projects for flood damage reduction, environmental restoration and protection, and preservation of cultural and natural resources; watershed assessments and planning activities.

The Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Renewable Energy Project, however, is distinct in that it falls under the category of nontraditional water resources development projects. The guidelines for USACE to implement TPP more broadly were provided in a November 2022 memorandum from Michael Connor, assistant secretary of the Army for Civil Works.

"The guidance on how we implement the Tribal Partnership Program is part of how the Army is modernizing civil works," said Danielle Storey, the LA District's tribal liaison and TPP program manager. "They gave the guidance that it can qualify as a USACE project if it's attached to a water resource and is in USACE's core competencies. So, the connection was there, and that got approved."

For a TPP project, "this determination of feasibility includes that the project is technically feasible; the economic, environmental and social benefits to the tribal nation outweigh the costs; the project is cost-effective; and the proj-

ect is environmentally acceptable," Connor said in the November 2022 memo to the USACE commander. "The primary driver in the implementation consideration is whether the project will substantially benefit Indian tribes."

Storey said she and her PDT worked closely with division and headquarters, as well as those updating the TPP implementation guidance, as they were conducting the study to determine the project's feasibility.

"This was the test case, and the questions that came up as we were going through this got put into that guidance," she said. "Many of the decisions that we made as a team on how we should proceed have now been codified in the TPP guidance."

On Nov. 9, less than a year after initiating the study, LA District commander Col. Andrew Baker joined Gila River Indian Community Governor Stephen Roe Lewis to sign a project partnership agreement at the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona. Connor traveled from Washington to commemorate the event.

"The community expects this first phase of the project to be completed in 2025 and hopes to launch the second phase as soon as December of this year," Connor said in a written statement.

['TEAM' continued on Page 13](#)



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

In this file photo, the Gila River Indian Community and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commemorate a project partnership agreement signing during a ceremony Nov. 9, 2023, at the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona. This project is scheduled to be the first solar-over-canal project constructed in the U.S.

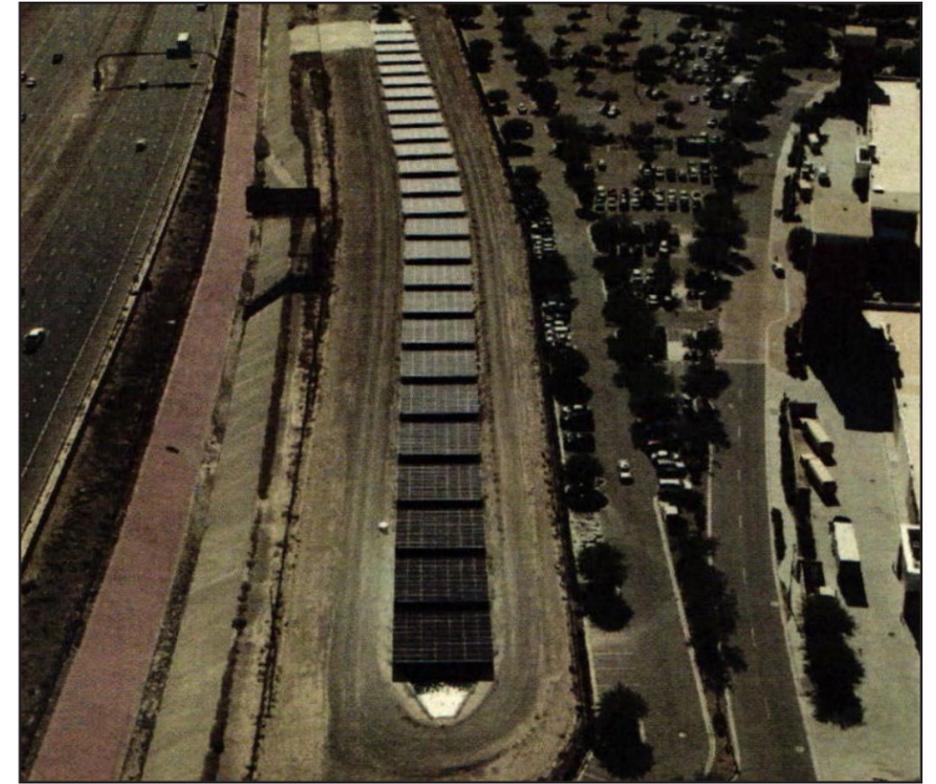
['TEAM' continued from Page 12](#)

Once the project starts, it will be the first LA District Tribal Partnership Program project to reach active construction.

"The stellar work done by this team literally charted a new path in the Tribal Partnership Program, test drove a new policy from the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, and demonstrated the Corps' capabilities in non-traditional projects," said David Hibner, South Pacific Division programs director, in his nomination packet for the team. "A first of its kind in the United States, this study had visibility at the highest levels of Army leadership, and the team magnificently rose to the exceptional challenges encountered at every step of the way."

Storey said the team's accomplishment would not have been possible without the strong vertical coordination within USACE, the quick work with federal agency partners like the Bureau of Reclamation, and the close collaboration and responsiveness of the tribal sponsor.

"We relied heavily on our tribal partner — as it should be," Storey said. "They're knowledgeable about their irrigation canals because they built them. They were a great resource for providing everything we needed to move it through as quickly as possible."



Courtesy graphic

A conceptual rendering shows the projected end state of the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Renewable Energy Project in central Arizona.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Pictured is a portion of the 1,000-foot stretch of irrigation canal in central Arizona within the Gila River Indian Community Reservation, over which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is planning to install solar panels, Nov. 9, 2023.

# JULY

## HISTORICAL MILESTONES

**Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin.

Congress repealed the statutory requirement for the service's four all-black regiments.

**Army Organization Act of 1950**

**AMENDMENT XIV 1868** No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.

**Executive Order 9980 1948** Established a policy of fair employment throughout the Federal establishment; without discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin.

**Executive Order 13163 2000** Increasing the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to be employed in the Federal government.

**Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990** An act to establish a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability.

There shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.

**Executive Order 9981 1948**

**Women's Reserve PL689, HR6807 1942** Created to expedite the war effort by releasing officers and men for duty at sea and their replacement by women in the shore establishment of the Navy.

