



Photo by Stephen Baack

Officials with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Riverside County, the cities of Temecula and Murrieta, along with congressional representatives, gather Aug. 28 to take part in a ceremonial shovel toss during the Phase 2B groundbreaking of the Murrieta Creek Flood Control, Environmental Restoration and Recreation project in Temecula, California.

Murrieta Creek Phase 2B groundbreaking

USACE, partners launch next phase of flood control, restoration effort

BY STEPHEN BAACK
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

TEMECULA, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District joined local, state and federal partners Aug. 28 to break ground on Phase 2B of the Murrieta Creek Flood Control, Environmental Restoration and Recreation project.

The project will increase flood protection, restore habitat and expand recreational opportunities for Riverside County communities.

“Anything is possible when we come together with a shared vision and relentless determina-

tion,” said Julianna Adams, chief of Emergency Management and Government Affairs at the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, who has worked side by side with local elected officials, congressional representatives and agency partners during the last six years of planning, design, construction and utility relocations for the project. “I look out into the crowd today, and I’m filled with deep gratitude. So many familiar faces. So many incredible partners. Thank you for being here to mark the milestone with us.”

Construction of Phase 2B was awarded in

July to Empire Equipment Services Inc., under a three-year, \$43.6-million contract. The scope of work includes bank protection, grade-control structures, side drain outlet improvements and scour protection, along with ecosystem restoration, native landscaping and new multi-use trails.

The Murrieta Creek project is advancing in phases. Phases 1 and 2A have already been completed, and Phase 2B builds on that work to deliver additional flood protection, ecosystem restoration and recreational benefits.

“At its core, the project is about partnership,”

[‘MURRIETA’ continued on Page 4](#)

From ashes to recovery



Courtesy photo

Crews load the final bucket of debris from the last private property cleared in the Eaton and Palisades wildfire recovery mission Sept. 3 in Pacific Palisades, California. This marks the completion of the federal debris removal operations — a mission that cleared thousands of properties and more than 2 million tons of fire-related debris. The milestone reflects months of dedication and partnership across USACE, FEMA, Cal OES, Los Angeles County and the community — working together to help families and neighborhoods move forward.

Official publication
of the
U.S. Army Corps
of Engineers
Los Angeles District

Fall 2025
Volume 48, Issue 3

District Commander:
Col. Andrew Baker

Public Affairs Chief:
Dena M. O'Dell

Editor: Stephen Baack

Contributing Editors:
Robert DeDeaux, Dan Collins

Tel: 213-304-1181

The NewsCastle is published quarterly under the provisions of AR 360-1 for the employees and extended engineer family of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District.

Views and opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the district or of the Department of Defense.

Address mail to the Los Angeles District Public Affairs Office
ATTN: NewsCastle Editor
Room 1105, 915 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90017-2325

Email the Public Affairs Office at:
publicaffairs.SPL@usace.army.mil



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

The 56th Mission Support Group Commander Col. Tyler Smith, left, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Commander Col. Andrew Baker, right, discuss ongoing construction projects at Luke Air Force Base Aug. 4 near Phoenix. The LA District has a long history of supporting the base through construction and renovation projects.

Reflecting on historic year, looking ahead to FY26

Team,

Happy New Year! Fiscal Year 2025 was a historic year from both work placement and delivery perspectives in the LA District. I'll share some detailed stats during our upcoming town hall (Oct. 16!) ... but by way of a little sneak preview: We awarded more than \$2 billion in contracts — a much bigger number than any other district in the region and right up there in the enterprise as well.

We wrapped up construction on several high-priority and high-visibility projects, including mental health inpatient and outpatient facilities at the VA Long Beach health campus, military construction projects throughout Arizona, long-overdue flood-risk management work at Upper Norco Bluffs, and we broke ground on several others, including our very first Arizona Section 595 project — a nonpotable water irrigation system for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe — the culmination of a ton of great work by that team! Big congratulations to all and an even bigger thank-you for all you do to support the delivery of our righteous mission. I'm looking forward



COL. ANDREW BAKER
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

to celebrating our accomplishments later this month!

In case you missed it, there have been some significant changes at our higher headquarters, the South Pacific Division, over the past few months. First, after nearly 140 years in San Francisco, SPD has relocated 90 miles to the northeast, to Sacramento. The primary catalyst for this move was cost — both the high cost of office space and the high cost of living in the San Francisco area.

As of today, you'll find about one-third of the SPD team still working in San Francisco, one-third in Sacramento — including the command team — and one-third working out of other federal spaces. As new folks come on board, they will join the team sitting in Sacramento. Brig. Gen. John Lloyd took command of SPD in August, replacing Col. Jim Handura. Lloyd joins the team with an exceedingly well-informed perspective on USACE division operations from his time commanding the North Atlantic Division and the Pittsburgh District.

We have two new SPD Senior Executive Service-level directors as well, both joining

the team from Headquarters USACE: Tambour Eller, former SPK DPM, who took over as programs director, and Christy Jones, an SPK Construction Division alum, who took over as regional business director. I'm glad for the opportunity to leverage our new SPD command team's experience and perspective to continue improving our own delivery.

As we wrap up FY25, I hope you can find some time to sit back and reflect on all we've accomplished together this past year — and that you're able to spend some well-earned time with family and friends. I had a great time with my family in Maine this summer. We've been back to school — back to swim team, piano, tennis, dance, etc. — since August and are having a blast.

Below is a picture of my and my brother's families on top of the Beehive Trail at Acadia National Park in Maine, near where we're from in Castine, back in July. Don't mean to stoke any controversy with the UCLA shirt — glad to be representing SoCal at the very least!

All the best to you and yours and, again, Happy New Year!

Col. Andrew Baker

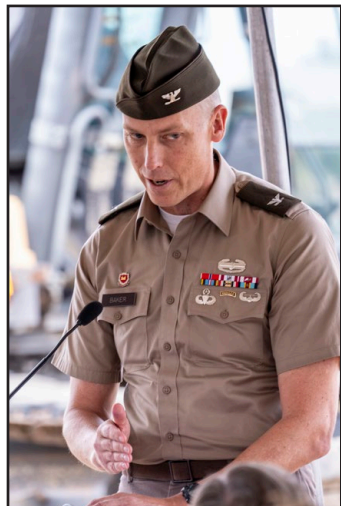




Shovels in hand, distinguished guests of the Murrieta Creek Flood Control, Environmental Restoration and Recreation Project Phase 2B groundbreaking ceremony gather for photos Aug. 28 in Temecula, California.



LEFT: Julianna Adams, chief of Emergency Management and Government Affairs at the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, delivers remarks Aug. 28 during the groundbreaking ceremony for Phase 2B of the Murrieta Creek Flood Control, Environmental Restoration and Recreation Project in Temecula, California. RIGHT: Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, delivers his remarks.



[‘MURRIETA’ continued from Page 1](#)

said Riverside County Supervisor Chuck Washington. “Riverside County Flood Control District, the Army Corps Engineers, the City of Temecula and the City of Murrieta have worked together to make today possible. And, thanks to the support of Congress, we are moving forward with an investment that will protect families, enhance recreation and preserve natural spaces.”

Washington added that Phase 2B is about building for the future.

“It’s about creating a safer, stronger, more connected community,” he said. “Whether it is protecting Old Town Temecula from flooding, expanding trails for our residents or strengthening habitat for future generations, Phase 2B represents the very best of what we can accomplish when we work together.”

When complete, the project will provide 100-year-level flood protection through eight miles of channel improvements and a 270-acre flood control basin. Nearly 600 structures valued at \$1.35 billion, including the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base, transportation infrastructure and sewage treatment facilities will be protected.

The project also will restore continuous habitat within the channel bottom, creating a vital corridor between the Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve and the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve.

Col. Andrew Baker, commander of USACE’s Los Angeles District, emphasized that technical expertise, planning and partnership are

the foundation for delivering lasting protection.

“To reach this point, it was essential to get the engineering right,” Baker said. “Technical precision is the foundation of successful delivery. Plans behind this project reflect years of expertise and coordination and partnership to ensure that we are building it right from the start and that it’s going to be a project that will last.”

“Phase 2B represents the very best of what we can accomplish when we work together.”

Riverside County Supervisor Chuck Washington

Baker emphasized, however, that the project’s significance extends far beyond engineering.

“The importance of this project isn’t theoretical,” he said. “Many in this community remember the floods of the early 1990s, when streets, businesses and homes near Old Town Temecula were underwater. These events made it clear how urgent it was to reduce the risk of flood damage here, and they continue to remind us of what’s at stake.”

Rep. Ken Calvert, who represents California’s 41st Congressional District and has been involved with Murrieta Creek efforts since the 1990s, reflected on the long journey.

“You know, there was a great song that Supervisor Washington and I both remember: ‘It Never Rains in Southern California,’” Calvert said. “Until it does. And that happened in 1993. I was a congressman here back in 1993 when Temecula was overwhelmed with floodwaters ... and we started on this trek to put the flood protection along Murrieta Creek. We’ve been working on it ever since.”

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District teammates stand together for a photo Aug. 28 at the groundbreaking ceremony for Phase 2B of the Murrieta Creek Flood Control, Environmental Restoration and Recreation Project in Temecula, California. From left to right: Florin Nistor, lead project engineer and contracting officer’s representative for Murrieta Creek Phase 2B; Maj. Matthew Morgan, alternate project engineer and contracting officer’s representative for Murrieta Creek Phase 2B; Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander; Darrell Buxton, chief of the LA District’s Civil Works Branch; and Damien Lariviere, project manager.

Farewell ceremony honors outgoing SPL Safety Office leaders

SOUTH EL MONTE, Calif. — The Los Angeles District hosted a farewell ceremony Aug. 5 at the South El Monte Base Yard to honor two of its Safety Office leaders: Chief of Safety Chris Rainwater and Operations Division Safety Specialist Gregory “Tony” McCoy.

Col. Andrew Baker, SPL commander, and Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, deputy commander, joined co-workers, friends and family in recognizing the pair for their significant contributions to strengthening the district’s safety culture and advancing the Corps of Engineers Safety and Occupational Health Management System, or CE-SOHMS.

Over the past five years, Rainwater and McCoy have been instrumental in promoting safety across the district, leaving an impact that leaders described as both immeasurable and essential to mission success. As they departed, Aaron Burke started a 120-day assignment as acting safety chief. Burke is known throughout the district as a high-level performer, and leaders expressed confidence in his ability to continue building on the office’s strong foundation.



Photos by Richard Rivera

During an Aug. 5 farewell ceremony, Col. Andrew Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, left, thanks Chief of Safety Chris Rainwater, right, and Operations Division Safety Specialist Gregory “Tony” McCoy, center, for their contributions to safety for the district.



LEFT: Col. Andrew Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, left, presents the Department of the Army Civilian Service Commendation Medal to outgoing Chief of Safety Chris Rainwater, right, during a farewell ceremony Aug. 5 at the LA District Base Yard in South El Monte, California.



RIGHT: Baker, left, presents a Department of the Army Certificate of Achievement to Gregory “Tony” McCoy, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Operations Division safety specialist, right, Aug. 5 at the LA District Base Yard in South El Monte, California.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

From left, Jonathan Hallemeier, Alan Wells, Chris Stanton and Joel Pliskin of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Silver Jackets planning team pose for a photo May 30 in Birdsprings, Arizona. The Birdsprings Chapter of the Navajo Nation hosted the inaugural flood-response tabletop exercise in partnership with the Silver Jackets, a program that brings together local, tribal, state and federal agencies to collaboratively address flood risk and other natural hazards.

Planner of the Year: Chris Stanton

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PHOENIX — Traveling throughout the Southwest, Christopher Stanton, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District lead planner and Silver Jackets program manager, has built a professional reputation for dependability.

For his dedication and tireless efforts, the Los Angeles District leadership — along with its higher command echelon, the South Pacific Division — named Stanton as the recipient of the Planner of the Year award.

“I’m truly honored to receive this award,” said Stanton, an Indiana State University graduate. “I think I was selected for the award because I’ve focused on building meaningful partnerships and getting results, especially through the interagency Silver Jackets program.”

The Los Angeles District’s Silver Jackets program brings together local, state, tribal and federal agencies to collaboratively address flood risk and other natural hazards.

“I’m delighted to recognize Mr. Chris Stanton as SPD’s programmatic Planner of the Year,” wrote Tambour Eller, programs director for the South Pacific Division in an announcement to the workforce. “Chris truly had an inspired year, spearheading the formation of the Navajo Nation Silver Jackets team, the first-ever tribally led interagency team in

the nation, as well as the revitalization of the Arizona Silver Jackets team.”

One of Stanton’s programs is based on Section 165(a) of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020, which authorized the Army to implement a pilot program to carry out up to 20 Continuing Authorities Program projects in economically disadvantaged communities, with the purpose of supporting the safety and economic viability of underserved and overburdened communities.

“He was also integrally involved in the development of the Navajo Nation Birdsprings 165(a) Continuing Authority Program application, and joined the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works on site in 2024 to announce it was one of the pilots selected nationwide,” Eller’s announcement continued.

As with previous winners, Stanton recognized his team and partners for their contributions in making each project and program a success.

“Really, this award reflects the strengths of the partnerships around me more than anything I did on my own,” said Stanton, who earned a master’s degree from New Mexico State University. “There are a lot of people I’d like to thank: First, the folks across the district and division, who have backed this work from the start; none of these projects would have moved without their support and coordi-

nation. I’ve also learned a lot from the tribal partners I’ve worked with, especially with the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe.”

Since receiving the award, Stanton has continued supporting projects focusing on interagency collaboration and community resilience. He continues to work with the Navajo Nation and Arizona Silver Jackets teams, including planning a binational tabletop exercise for the Painted Rock Dam and follow-up flood-risk awareness workshops for communities. Stanton also supports the Tres Rios Ecosystem Restoration project, located in and around Phoenix, which applies Engineering with Nature principles in an urban setting.

“I really appreciate the recognition; but more importantly, I’m proud to be part of a team and program that puts people and partnerships first,” wrote Stanton, a Tucson resident, in a follow-up email. “Looking ahead, I want to keep building on the work I’ve been doing — supporting tribes and communities in managing their water resources and reducing disaster risk.”

Editor’s note: In addition to Stanton’s recognition as Planner of the Year, the Navajo Nation Silver Jackets team he was instrumental in forming went on to be named Silver Jackets Team of the Year, an award announced during annual training in September in Washington, D.C.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Los Angeles District Commander Col. Andrew Baker, right, presents coins to several outstanding employees at the Nellis Resident Office July 15 at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, near Las Vegas.

LA District commander visits Air Force project sites in Nevada

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LAS VEGAS — Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, toured several district military construction projects July 15, including site visits to Creech and Nellis Air Force bases in Nevada.

Baker, who took command of the district in July 2023, was accompanied by John Oshima, chief of military programs, and James Elsberry, a district project manager, to discuss current and future projects with the Air Force base commanders.

“Air Force leadership engagement with Col. Baker plays a vital role in building and sustaining strong relationships,” Elsberry said after the site visit. “This allows for increased customer service, attention to priorities, workload posturing and improved project execution.

Baker toured multiple projects on the bases, showcasing a cross section of many of the district’s efforts supporting military construction programs.

“The commander’s support and project awareness show that he is aware of the issues and challenges our projects face,” said Elsberry. “He has sought out process improvement and helped with issue resolution through these engagements and to help assure the success of the military program.”

In May of last year, the district completed construction of a \$29-million virtual training range and testing facility at Nellis and is currently supporting the base’s hospital renovations.

“Yearly office calls to both Creech AFB and Nellis AFB are needed due to the current and future workload to support both military installations,” Oshima said, after listing several current and planned projects for the installation.

“The in-person engagement demonstrates that Los Angeles District leadership is aware of each installation military program, which may need our installations’ stakeholders’ input of the services that we provide for the enterprise.”

Baker is responsible for a \$750-million annual budget for planning, engineering, construction, real estate, regulatory, emergency management and environmental services for three Army and eight Air Force installations, interagency and international customers, and for the nation’s water resources infrastructure in the Southwest, valued at about \$240 million.

“With a large Civil Works program at the district, Col. Baker’s yearly office call to visit both installations and the resident office identifies that the district’s military program is a significant part of how the district delivers the enterprise mission to support our installation stakeholders,” Oshima said.



Photos by Stephen Baack

Port of Long Beach officials, International Transportation Service leaders and Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson, third from right, break ground July 11 on the Pier G Slip Fill Project in Long Beach, California.

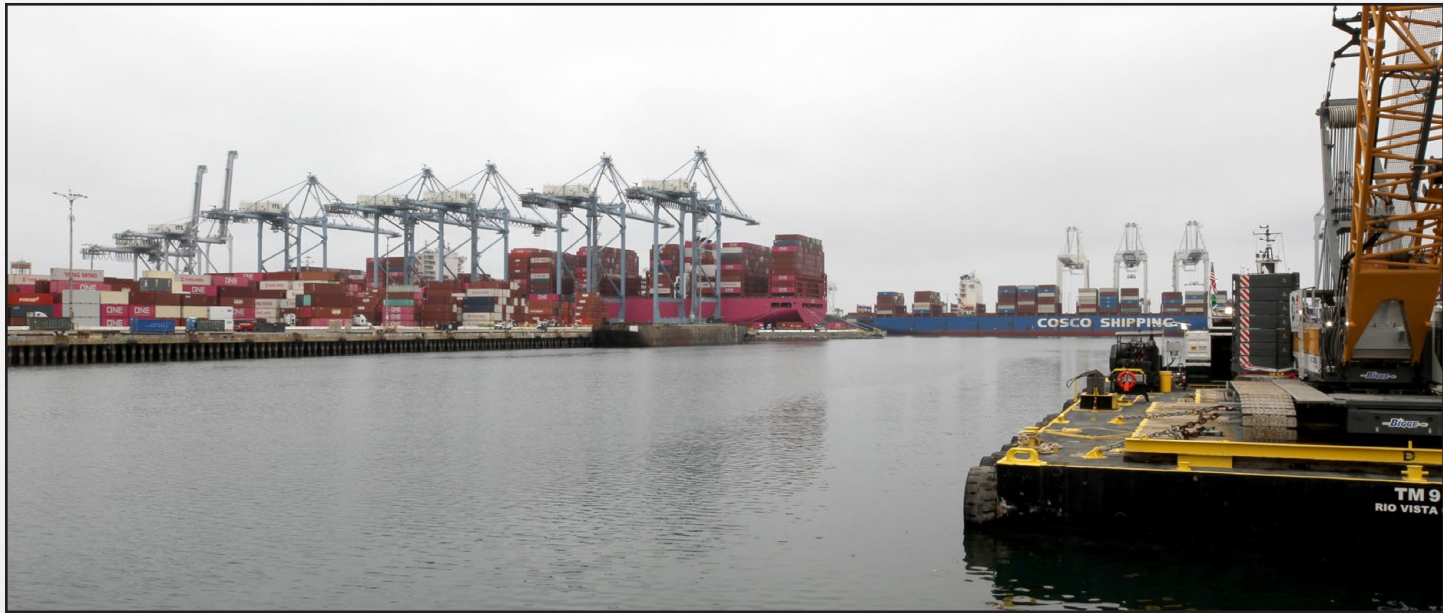
LA District commander joins local officials to celebrate Port of Long Beach infrastructure project groundbreaking

BY STEPHEN BAACK
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

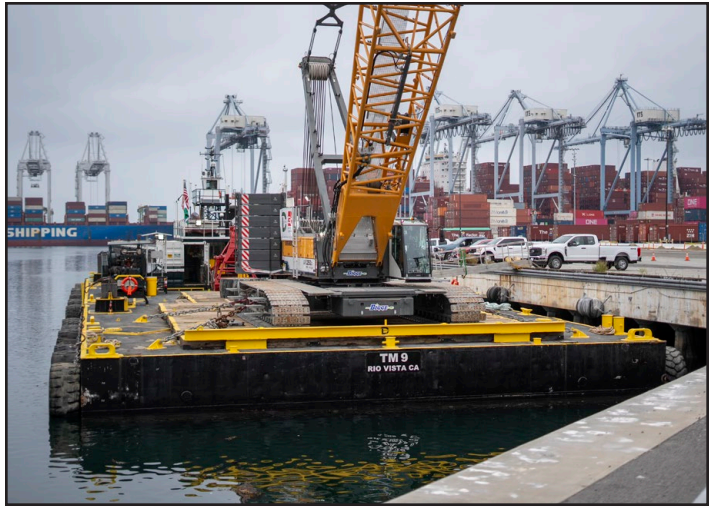
LONG BEACH, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander joined local officials July 11 to break ground on the Port of Long Beach’s Pier G Slip Fill Project.

Col. Andrew Baker took part in the ceremonial event alongside representatives from the Port of Long Beach, International Transportation Service and the City of Long Beach, celebrating a major infrastructure milestone that also supports the LA District’s Newport Bay Harbor maintenance dredging effort. “Partnerships like this are critical to helping

us deliver smart, effective solutions,” Baker said. “The Port of Long Beach’s willingness to accept dredged material unsuitable for ocean disposal is not only helping Newport Bay Harbor move forward, but it’s a great example of regional cooperation in action.” USACE’s maintenance dredging project at ['PORT' continued on Page 9](#)



Cranes rise over the Port of Long Beach’s Pier G, where a slip will be filled with solid material, including a portion from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Newport Bay Harbor maintenance dredging project.



Photos by Stephen Baack

LEFT: The Dutra Group’s spud barge TM 9 sits alongside the Pier G project area at the Port of Long Beach. The barge is supporting construction activities for the slip fill project. RIGHT: Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson delivers remarks during the July 11 groundbreaking ceremony for the Pier G Slip Fill Project in Long Beach, California.

['PORT' continued from Page 8](#)

Newport Bay Harbor, sponsored by the City of Newport Beach, will remove about 675,000 cubic yards of sediment. While most of the material will be placed in a permitted open ocean site, roughly 163,000 cubic yards are unsuitable for ocean placement. The Port’s Pier G Slip Fill Project offers a crucial solution for managing that material.

Newport’s contract was awarded in mid-July, with the port’s timeline indicating the site will be ready to accept USACE-placed sediment between February-May 2026.

Without the port’s support, the Newport dredging project would still be in the pre-construction engineering and design phase. Officials said this collaboration represents an important step forward for both navigation and

environmental stewardship.

Ongoing Navigation Partnership

While the groundbreaking marked the start of a major construction effort, it also offered an opportunity to highlight the LA District’s broader partnership with the port on the Deep Draft Navigation project — an authorized effort now in the pre-engineering and design phase.

Under a Section 221 Memorandum of Understanding, the Port of Long Beach is designing and constructing several general navigation features of the project, including dredging in the West Basin and portions of the Main Channel — as well as the construction of an electric dredge substation. These efforts preserve the port’s eligibility for in-kind credit ahead of a formal Project Partnership Agreement.

The project was authorized under the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 and

received nearly \$8 million in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding for design. USACE is now preparing a Post-Authorization Change Report to support reauthorization in WRDA 2026, as revised cost estimates exceed the original 902 limit due to refined quantities and increased hauling distances.

In April, the port awarded a \$360 million contract to The Dutra Group and Griffith Company Joint Venture to develop Pier G South, which is expected to begin dredging in fall 2025. The site may also accept material from Newport Bay Harbor in early 2026, creating an efficient overlap between the two efforts.

Environmental review for the DDN project is ongoing, with a public release of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment expected in July 2026 and final plans and specifications scheduled between late 2027 and early 2028.



LEFT: Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, center, stands with Port of Long Beach Chief Executive Officer Mario Cordero, left, and Chief Operating Officer Noel Hacegaba, right, following the Pier G Slip Fill Project groundbreaking July 11 in Long Beach, California. RIGHT: Baker, right, greets leaders from International Transportation Service before the ceremony.

In memory of John Oshima: Celebrated for his impact, service

SOUTH EL MONTE, Calif. — The Los Angeles District celebrated the life of one of its own Aug. 27, as family, friends, and current and former coworkers from the Los Angeles, Japan and Seattle districts joined a ceremony in person and online in honor of John Oshima, Los Angeles District Military Programs Branch chief, who passed away unexpectedly on Aug. 11. He was 51.

During the ceremony, the Los Angeles District presented a posthumous Bronze Order of the de Fleury Medal on behalf of John to his mother, Shizuko, for his “exceptionally significant impact on the Engineer Regiment throughout his 17 years of honorable federal service.” The family also was presented with a posthumous Civilian Service Commendation Medal on behalf of John for his outstanding leadership as the chief of the Military Programs Branch in Los Angeles.

We honor and remember John’s life, his dedication to his career and the enduring impact he made on those around him. He will be dearly missed.



Justin Gay, Los Angeles District employee, speaks about his friend, John Oshima, during an Aug. 27 ceremony in Oshima's honor at the LA District Baseyard in South El Monte, California. Oshima, the LA District's Military Programs Branch chief, passed away unexpectedly Aug. 11.

Photos by Richard Rivera



LEFT: Col. Andrew Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, far right, presents a posthumous Civilian Service Commendation Medal Aug. 27 to the family of John Oshima, Los Angeles District Military Programs Branch chief, who passed away unexpectedly Aug. 11. Pictured with Baker are John Oshima's siblings, Damon and Daniel Oshima, and Dana Mimms, center.



RIGHT: USACE Chaplain (Col.) Jason Lorenzen, right, gives Dana Mimms, sister of John Oshima, left, a hug following an Aug. 27 ceremony in honor of Oshima, who passed away unexpectedly Aug. 11. Oshima was the Military Programs Branch chief for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District.

Around the District

“I love being a part of a large team that helps support the overall mission of USACE and the positive impacts we make all over the world.”

Frost manages the dates and resources of civil works projects with a focus on projects within the 595 and 219 programs. He is from Chandler, Arizona. Frost has been with USACE for eight years.



Shane Frost Sr.
Project Scheduler

Clearing the way, supporting the community



Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, right, and Kim Thomas, deputy district engineer for Programs and Project Management, left, present the Civilian Service Commendation Medal to Chadi Wahby during a Sept. 9 ceremony at the district's downtown Los Angeles headquarters. Wahby, a project manager with the district's Programs and Project Management Division, was honored for his leadership and commitment during the Los Angeles wildfire debris-removal mission. As the primary project manager on site, he played a key role in coordinating efforts that cleared nearly 10,000 parcels in the Eaton and Palisades areas, bringing distinction to himself, the district and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Photo by Lisa Lugar



Photos by Stephen Baack

Col. Andrew Baker, Los Angeles District commander, left, talks with Mark Pestrella, LA County Public Works director, right, before a July 30 meeting with partners from LA County, City of LA and LA Olympic Committee at Los Angeles County Public Works in Alhambra, California.

USACE support to LA Olympics 2028 principals meeting

ALHAMBRA, Calif. — With the 2028 Summer Olympics on the horizon, leaders from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers joined local, state and Olympic officials July 30 to strengthen coordination on venues planned within USACE-managed lands.

The group, which gathered at Los Angeles County Public Works in Alhambra, included Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander, and Col. James Handura, then commander of the South Pacific Division, along with program leaders from across the region. They met with LA28 representatives and partners from Los Angeles County, Caltrans, LADWP and the Sanitation Districts to discuss timelines, permitting and infrastructure needs.



Several Olympic events are slated for the Sepulveda Basin and Whittier Narrows areas, which will require real estate agreements with USACE. Planning continues with quarterly meetings, while work with LADWP advances on utility easements for late 2027 installations. Officials underscored that USACE's flood-risk management mission will remain the priority as preparations progress.



ABOVE: Trevor Snyder, LA County Drainage Area program manager for the Los Angeles District, left, participates in a July 30 meeting.

LEFT: Mark Pestrella, LA County Public Works director, far right, addresses attendees during the LA Olympics 2028 principals meeting.

LA District joins Fort Irwin to celebrate Barracks 249 upgrades

ALHAMBRA, Calif. — Fort Irwin celebrated the ribbon cutting for the renovated Barracks 249 on Aug. 19, with leaders from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District joining garrison officials for the ceremony.

Built in the 1980s, the barracks has undergone several remodels over its 40-year lifespan, but this latest repair brings the facility up to modern living standards and extends its service life. Upgrades include induction cooktops, solid surface countertops, new appliances, improved furnishings, and individual temperature control. The most anticipated improvement, however, is the addition of dedicated internet routers in each room—replacing the previous spotty, shared connection.

The completion of Barracks 249 repairs on July 16 is just the beginning. With Barracks 250 fully designed and a contract award expected in early 2026, Fort Irwin's Directorate of Public Works, in coordination with USACE Los Angeles District, continues to prioritize barracks renovations as part of the Army's broader Quality of Life initiatives for soldiers and their families.



Courtesy photos



ABOVE: Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District and Fort Irwin garrison cut the ribbon Aug. 19 to officially reopen Barracks 249 at Fort Irwin, California, marking the completion of major repairs and upgrades to the facility.

LEFT: Leaders with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District and Fort Irwin garrison staff gather in front of the newly renovated Barracks 249 following the ribbon-cutting ceremony Aug. 19 at Fort Irwin, California.





Photo by Stephen Baack

Daniel Huff, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project manager, center, helps San Luis Obispo community members better understand the regulatory process and environmental cleanup being conducted in their community during a public meeting Aug. 25 at the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden, California.

Public meeting gives community a chance to learn about remediation at former training site

BY STEPHEN BAACK
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hosted a public meeting Aug. 25 to share plans for removing old military munitions from the former Camp San Luis Obispo.

The meeting introduced the team leading the project and gave residents a chance to hear directly from those responsible for the remediation. The effort, taking place on a site known as Camp San Luis Obispo Project 05 Multi-Use Range Complex, covers 2,626 acres once used for rocket, mortar, grenade and small-arms training during World War II and the Korean conflict.

The project is part of the Formerly Used Defense Sites program and is within the 9,159-acre area formerly used by the Army as part

of Camp San Luis Obispo. About 5,800 acres of Camp San Luis Obispo remains in use by the California National Guard.

“This is the first of the public meetings that we hold for the Remedial Action phase for this FUDS project,” said Daniel Huff, USACE project manager. “We made it through the investigation phases and finalized a decision for the remedial action in 2020. Now we’re at the Remedial Action phase, and we have been working on the planning and coordination with our contractor, who is here with us presenting tonight, along with stakeholders, including landowners, regulators and other interested parties.”

USACE is working with the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, San Luis Obispo County, Bureau of Land

Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and California Polytechnic State University.

The team is expected to begin geophysical surveys this fall. Specialized instruments will be used to detect potential munitions above and below the surface, followed by excavation and safe disposal, if items with a potential explosive hazard are identified.

“Overall, we’re looking at about a two- to three-year effort to complete this,” Huff said. “Our goal is to be finished with the Remedial Action phase by the end of 2028, but, of course, that depends on a lot of factors.”

Community members also learned that the work extends beyond removing munitions. Huff said long-term land use controls

will include signs, educational materials and recurring five-year reviews to ensure the remedy remains protective.

“We want to be protective,” Huff said. “Our goal here is to mitigate the unacceptable risk to protect human health and the environment.”

The Aug. 25 meeting was the first of four planned for this phase of the project. Huff said public involvement is essential, not only for transparency, but also because local knowledge can improve the work ahead.

“It’s important to have the community show up at meetings like this, and, if nothing else, just listen to the presentation and become maybe more educated about what’s going on with the project,” he said. “But also, we learn from the members of the public who are here in the community.”

USACE, Oceanside leaders advance plans for river, shoreline resilience

Senior leaders from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers joined Rep. Mike Levin, Oceanside Mayor Esther Sanchez, and city officials Sept. 24 in Oceanside, California, for a series of site visits focused on protecting the community from flooding and coastal erosion.

The group toured the San Luis Rey River and Oceanside Pier to discuss levee repairs, sediment removal, and long-term shoreline mitigation projects designed to strengthen the city’s resilience. USACE leaders emphasized their commitment to working closely with Oceanside partners and local stakeholders to reduce flood risk, restore natural beach habitat and support long-term coastal protection for the community.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Foreground from left, Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, Maj. Gen. Jason Kelly, deputy commanding general for Civil Works and Emergency Operations, and U.S. Rep. Mike Levin walk along the Oceanside Pier Sept. 24 in Oceanside, California, to discuss the shoreline mitigation project.

Partnerships strengthen Arizona’s water infrastructure



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Yavapai-Apache Nation leaders, along with representatives from U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly’s and U.S. Rep. Greg Stanton’s offices, join U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Deputy Commander Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks for a group photo during the Tribe’s Section 595 Project groundbreaking Sept. 26 in Camp Verde, Arizona. The project, supported through the Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure Program, invests in Arizona’s critical water infrastructure to address challenges such as drought, wildfires, flash flooding and extreme heat. Keep an eye out for the full story in the next issue of *The NewsCastle*.

Courage, service and sacrifice



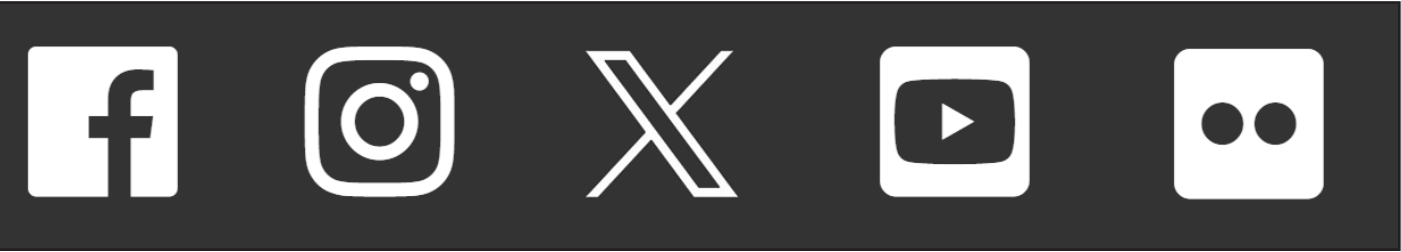
Photo by Dena O'Dell

For two decades, Iraqi-born Mohannad Ali, right, stood shoulder to shoulder with U.S. military forces in Iraq, Syria, Qatar and Saudi Arabia as a contractor linguist, security specialist and, at times, the last line of defense.

On Aug. 26, he was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for the Defense of Freedom during a ceremony hosted by South Pacific Division Commander Brig. Gen. John Lloyd, left, in San Diego for injuries sustained in 2010 while on assignment in Iraq for the USACE Gulf Region District as a contractor. The medal, the civilian equivalent of the Purple Heart, honors U.S. Department of Defense civilian employees who are killed or wounded by hostile action while serving in support of the DOD.

[Ali's story](#) is one of courage, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to the teams he served alongside.

Click on the icons below to visit the LA District's social media platforms!



Photos by Stephen Baack

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Commander Col. Andrew Baker speaks about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' wildfire recovery and debris removal mission during the National Association of Women in Construction Los Angeles Chapter Board of Directors Installation Gala Sept. 16 at the Los Angeles County Fire Museum in Bellflower, California.

LA District commander underscores wildfire recovery, partnerships at National Association of Women in Construction gala celebration

BY STEPHEN BAACK
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

BELLFLOWER, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers took part in the National Association of Women in Construction Los Angeles Chapter's Installation Gala, Sept. 16 at the Los Angeles County Fire Museum.

Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the Los Angeles District, spoke about USACE's role in helping Los Angeles communities recover from this year's wildfires.

Baker's remarks centered on the USACE debris removal mission, led by Task Force Phoenix — a specially organized team of

personnel drawn from across the enterprise. While the mission belongs to the task force, Baker said it has been especially meaningful for the LA District, as the wildfires struck within the district's area of operations and directly affected its people.

"Out of our Los Angeles District family, three of our employees and one of our retirees lost their homes," Baker said. "This mission affected us not just as professionals, but as neighbors, friends and community members."

The district's Emergency Operations team has played an active role throughout the response, coordinating closely with Task Force



From left, Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, deputy commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District; Stephani Valdez, vice president of the National Association of Women in Construction Los Angeles Chapter; Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the Los Angeles District; Assistant Fire Chief Karen Rindone of the Long Beach Fire Department, the event's keynote speaker; Dawn Davis, president of the NAWIC Los Angeles Chapter; and three members of the Long Beach Fire Department gather for a group photo following the NAWIC Los Angeles Chapter's Board of Directors Installation Gala Sept. 16 at the Los Angeles County Fire Museum.

Phoenix, FEMA, Cal OES and Los Angeles County. As the mission transitions from emergency response toward long-term recovery, responsibility will soon shift to the LA District.

To date, the debris removal effort has cleared more than 9,500 properties in six months — the fastest large-scale wildfire debris removal in USACE history. Crews removed more than 2.6 million tons of debris, the equivalent of more than 218,000 truckloads, and supported cleanup at several schools in the Pasadena and Los Angeles unified school districts.

Baker emphasized that lessons learned from USACE's work in Maui following the 2023 wildfires helped shape operations in Los Angeles County. Shared contracts, experienced lead-

ers and tested community engagement practices allowed USACE to move quickly and sustain close coordination with local, state and federal partners.

A hallmark of the mission has been direct engagement with survivors. USACE teams met face-to-face with residents during property walkthroughs, town halls and community outreach events. They also worked to help families recover sentimental items when possible.

"In one case, crews recovered a police badge that had belonged to a veteran and longtime officer — a priceless heirloom that his son feared was lost forever," Baker said. "In another, a boy's grandfather's coin collection was found and returned to him. These moments reminded us that recovery is about more than debris; it's about people."

Baker also placed the Los Angeles District effort in context with past wildfire recoveries. The Camp Fire in 2018 required 18 months to clear 11,000 properties, while the Woolsey Fire cleanup in Ventura and Los Angeles counties took 12 months to clear 1,700 properties.

"Together, with strong partnerships and lessons learned, we helped thousands of families take the first step toward rebuilding their lives," Baker said. "The success here sets a benchmark for how quickly and safely wildfire debris can be cleared, not just in California, but across the nation."

Partnership brings water to a dry land

Pascua Yaqui Tribe breaks ground on Section 595 Project



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Pascua Yaqui Tribe leadership, U.S. Rep. Greg Stanton, center, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Commander Col. Andrew Baker, left of center, pose for a photo during the Tribe’s Section 595 Project groundbreaking Sept. 16 near Tucson, Arizona. The Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure Program invests in Arizona’s critical water infrastructure projects to address climate challenges, including extreme heat, prolonged drought, wildfires and flash flooding.

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

TUCSON, Ariz. — The Pascua Yaqui Tribe, along with U.S. Rep. Greg Stanton, joined U.S. Army Corps of Engineers leaders Sept. 12 near Tucson to break ground on the Pascua Yaqui Wellness Center Water Distribution Project.

The project includes preparing and installing a mile-long nonpotable water distribution line that will supply water to sustain recreational and residential areas on Tribal lands.

“In Arizona, water is life,” Stanton said. “And making sure we get the most out of every single drop is critical. That’s why I created the Arizona Environmental Infrastructure Authority. It’s a \$250-million fund through the Army Corps to specifically help small, rural and tribal communities address their water infrastructure needs.”

The project is mostly funded through the Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure Program, which provides 75 percent of the federal investment for critical water infrastructure projects addressing climate challenges, such as extreme heat, prolonged drought, wildfires and flash flooding.

“It’s an honor to be here in the great state of

Arizona to celebrate this important milestone with the Pascua Yaqui Tribe and Congressman Stanton,” said Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District. “Today, we break ground on a project that reflects true partnership and a shared commitment to this community’s future.”

According to project officials, the effort is about more than infrastructure — it’s about sustainability, conservation and improving the quality of life for the Pascua Yaqui community.

“For a long time, I’ve seen our tribe building a future,” said Peter Yucupicio, Pascua Yaqui Tribe vice chairman. “A lot of that is associated with water. Without water in the desert, you can’t survive.”

Once completed, the project will:

- Conserve drinking water by replacing about 50 acre-feet of potable water annually with nonpotable water for irrigation and preserving valuable drinking water resources for community use.
- Support community wellness by providing a reliable nonpotable water source for the Wellness Center and ballfields, ensuring recreational and health-focused facilities can thrive.

- Promote sustainability by reducing the strain on Tucson Water’s potable supply and supporting long-term water conservation goals for the Tribe and region.

“I am honored to work with the Pascua Yaqui Tribe,” said Rick Arvey, project manager with the LA District’s Section 595 Program. “As a project manager, it’s especially rewarding to see this project come to life, from conception to groundbreaking. Through the Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure Program, this project introduces a sustainable and environmentally responsible solution to providing more potable water to the tribe.”

In 2021, Congress expanded the existing environmental infrastructure program under the 2020 Water Resources Development Act to include Arizona. The program provides critical assistance to communities and tribal nations across Arizona to address their aging water and wastewater systems.

“I think the Corps of Engineers has been a great partner for us,” Yucupicio said. “They jumped in and helped us with funding. I’m extremely thankful to Congressman Stanton and the Corps of Engineers, Pima County and the City of Tucson for helping the Pascua Yaqui people.”

Senior leaders tour new VA facilities

Col. Andrew Baker, Los Angeles District commander, joined LA District teammates and their Department of Veterans Affairs’ Office of Construction and Facilities Management counterparts July 17 to see the latest developments on the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center as it nears completion.

Now at about 94 percent complete, the SLI/CLC facility will provide care to veterans and active-duty personnel with spinal cord injuries and disorders, who live in the San Diego and Imperial counties in California, and in Arizona and southern Nevada.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:

Dr. Frank Pearson, director of the VA San Diego Healthcare System, left, talks with Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander, right, during a July 17 tour of the nearly complete Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center.

Roberto Paredes, resident engineer with the LA District, far left, provides updates during a tour of the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center for Col. Andrew Baker, LA district commander, third from left, and representatives with the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Office of Construction and Facilities Management.

Members of the LA District and the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Office of Construction and Facilities Management begin a tour of the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center in San Diego.

A nearly finished section of the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center reflects the project’s progress. Once complete, the facility will provide advanced care for veterans and active-duty personnel with spinal cord injuries and disorders across southern California, Arizona and southern Nevada.

Capt. Gregory Sacenti, a project engineer with the Los Angeles District, right, briefs teammates and VA partners July 17 on the progress inside the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center in San Diego, California.





LA District hosts 2025 third-quarter town hall

District leaders highlight achievements, recognize award winners

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District hosted its 2025 third-quarter town hall and awards presentation Aug. 19 at the district headquarters in downtown LA. The event gave leaders a chance to share updates, highlight recent successes and recognize employees for their outstanding contributions to the mission.

Photos by Richard Rivera

Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, and Kim Thomas, deputy district engineer for Programs and Project Management, lead the district's third-quarter town hall and awards presentation Aug. 19 in downtown LA.



LEFT: Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, deputy commander of the Los Angeles District, announces award winners during the third-quarter town hall and awards presentation Aug. 19 at the district headquarters building in downtown LA.

ABOVE: Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the Los Angeles District, right, presents the Jennie Ayala "Beyond the Call of Duty" Award to LA District employee Kevin Lam Nguyen, left, during the district's third-quarter town hall Aug. 19. Nguyen was recognized for his outstanding administrative support, professionalism and commitment to the district's mission.

Engineering students tour Prado Dam

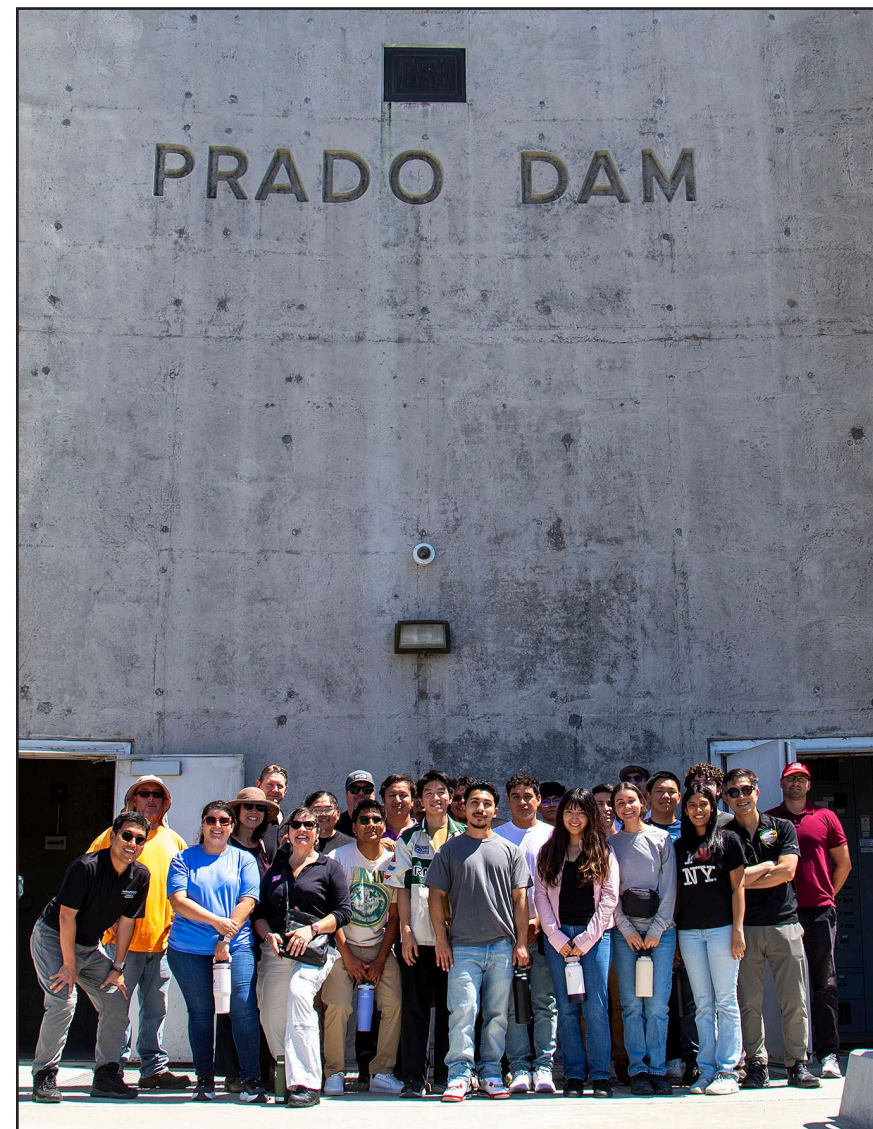
Students and faculty with California State Polytechnic University-Pomona toured Prado Dam Aug. 6 in Corona, California. The Cal Poly-Pomona incoming transfer students — who are majoring in several different engineering disciplines — are enrolled in Cal Poly-Pomona Engineering Department's Bridge Program, funded by the National Science Foundation. The program offers three primary categories to ensure students' academic success: recruitment, retention and faculty development activities. The tour of Prado Dam was part of a field trip to introduce the students to industry professionals.

During the tour, LA District engineers and project managers briefed the students about Prado Dam and the Santa Ana River Mainstem project and presented a real-world project challenge of building a bridge for the students to work on in their program. The LA District is working on finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding with the university for its ongoing and future partnership.



Photos by Dena O'Dell

David Van Dorpe, chief of the Department of Veterans Affairs Project Execution Office, USACE South Pacific Division, far left, talks to Cal Poly-Pomona incoming engineering students during an Aug. 6 tour at Prado Dam in Corona, California.



David Van Dorpe, chief of the Department of Veterans Affairs Project Execution Office, USACE South Pacific Division, third from left, talks to Cal Poly-Pomona incoming engineering students during an Aug. 6 tour at Prado Dam in Corona, California.



ABOVE: Sean Hutchison, deputy project manager for the Prado Spillway and Santa Ana River Mainstem project, discusses a real-world project for students to work on at school during a presentation Aug. 6 at the Prado Resident Office in Corona, California.

LEFT: Incoming Cal Poly-Pomona transfer students, faculty members and LA District employees pose for a picture Aug. 6 in front of the Prado Dam intake and control tower at Prado Dam in Corona, California.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division Regional Business Director Brian Kamisato, second from right, chairs a meeting with USACE and Department of Veterans Affairs leaders, contractors and project delivery team members Aug. 7 at the LA District's San Diego Resident Office at the Jennifer Moreno Veterans Affairs Medical Center in San Diego to discuss the final stretch of construction.

USACE leaders visit San Diego VA Medical Center to rally final push on Spinal Cord Injury facility

BY STEPHEN BAACK
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SAN DIEGO — Senior leaders with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Veterans Affairs met Aug. 7 at the Jennifer Moreno Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center campus to review progress on the nearly complete Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center.

Los Angeles District Commander Col. Andrew Baker joined South Pacific Division Business Director Brian Kamisato Aug. 7 to check in with the team on the ground, which included USACE and DVA Office of Construction and Facilities Management team-mates, the DVA San Diego Healthcare System and leaders from contracting partners Walsh and Archer-Western.

Meeting and tour attendees discussed the final

stretch of construction on the 197,000-square-foot facility as they knock down the final targets and solve problems together, all while reaffirming the purpose and shared goal behind the work: delivering for veterans.

"I'm most interested in ensuring we keep a common perspective between USACE, the contractor, Department of Veterans Affairs' Construction and Facilities Management and the medical center on all of this," Baker said. "I think this was a great opportunity to do that with all the players and synchronize on the work and any challenges ahead."

USACE's team consists of the LA District, which is leading the effort; the Albuquerque District, which is providing engineering support; the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville, and its Medical Center of Expertise; and the Program Executive Office

at the South Pacific Division, which provides guidance and standardization for Department of Veterans Affairs' projects.

This project, a collaboration between USACE and the DVA Office Construction and Facilities Management, is entering its home stretch, thanks to strong partnership.

"Projects like this demand strong teamwork and communication, and it's important we all understand the perspectives of one another," Kamisato said. "We must communicate transparently and often."

The nearly complete Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center, which is scheduled to open its doors to veterans later this year, will provide care to veterans and active-duty personnel with spinal cord injuries and dis-

['FACILITY' continued on Page 23](#)

['FACILITY' continued from Page 22](#)

orders, who live in the San Diego and Imperial counties in California, and in Arizona and southern Nevada.

Additionally, part of the larger project is the completed and fully operational seven-level parking structure that can accommodate more than 900 vehicles. The parking structure officially opened in September 2023.

The new SCI/CLC facility, which is replacing the current building at the campus, is a 197,000-square-foot, six-level, standalone structure. The current center is one of 25 spinal cord injury and disorder facilities at VA centers throughout the U.S. Each center has teams of experienced medical professionals trained to deal with the unique challenges that affect those with spinal cord injuries and disorders.

In addition to the new facility and its services, the new space will allow decompression of the main hospital. Follow-on projects will facilitate conversion of multi-patient rooms to single beds, and conversion of the existing SCI unit will support ambulatory care.

"We're going to deliver this as a team," Kamisato said. "This is not only a USACE project; this is everyone's project. I just think about the day when patients are starting to be seen in this new facility. I keep my eye on that because that's really what we're doing here."

Capt. Gregory Sacenti, project engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, center, leads a tour of the nearly complete Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center Aug. 7 at the Jennifer Moreno Veterans Affairs Medical Center in San Diego.



Photos by Stephen Baack

Now in its final phase of construction, the new Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center is pictured Aug. 7 at the Jennifer Moreno Veterans Affairs Medical Center in San Diego.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Veterans Affairs leaders, contractors and project delivery team members see the nearly complete therapy pool in the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center building Aug. 7 at the Jennifer Moreno Veterans Affairs Medical Center in San Diego.





Photo by Dena O'Dell

Marine veteran Christopher Scott Louie, center, cuts the ribbon during a ceremony celebrating the opening of the VA Long Beach Healthcare System's mental health in-patient and out-patient facilities Aug. 28 in Long Beach, California. Also pictured are, from left to right, Dr. Larry Albers, chief of psychiatry and mental health; Dr. Carolyn Clancy, assistant under secretary for health for Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks; Walt Dannenberg, VA Long Beach Medical Center director; Dr. Sharon De Peralta, chief of Patient Care Services, Mental Health; and Stephanie Young, VISN Interim Network director.

VA Long Beach celebrates opening of mental health facilities

BY DENA O'DELL
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Department of Veterans Affairs officials celebrated the opening of two mental health facilities with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Aug. 28 at the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center campus in Long Beach.

The mental health buildings — constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Los Angeles District and its contractors — include an 80,000-square-foot outpatient facility and an 82,000-square-foot, 40-bed inpatient facility.

“This day marks the start of a new era in mental health services at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System,” said Walt Dannenberg, VA Long Beach Medical Center director. “It is an honor for us to renew our commitment to serve veterans.”

The Long Beach VA Mental Health System treats more than 20,000 veterans annually for mental health conditions.

U.S. Marine veteran Christopher Scott Lou-

ie, who served from 2008 to 2012, including a deployment to Afghanistan, provided special remarks during the ceremony.

“This center represents not just a structure, but a commitment to the well-being of the veterans and customers with the support and care we all try to provide,” he said.

After arriving at the Long Beach VA in 2012, Louie said he began prioritizing his mental health, which also led to a passion for dog training.

“The lessons I learned along the way have not only guided my professional path, but have also enriched my relationship with my wife, kids and my family,” he said, choking back tears. “For all of you here today, it is truly an honor to speak on behalf of those who have served and sacrificed for our country. Thank you for your dedication, compassion and supporting our veterans. Together, let us continue to foster a culture of healing and resilience.”

Officials broke ground on the facilities on

Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2018. The groundbreaking ceremony coincided with the medical center's eighth annual Veterans Day celebration, which also commemorated 100 years since the end of World War I.

Kevin Thomas, resident engineer with the USACE Los Angeles District's Long Beach VA office, said this was the first project that USACE collaborated on with the Department of Veterans Affairs Construction and Facilities Management.

“From a safety standpoint, this project became the model for how we manage safety on mega projects, not only in the Los Angeles District, but across the entire U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,” said Chris Rainwater, former chief of USACE Los Angeles District's Safety and Occupational Health Office. “We implemented some innovative techniques — a true emphasis on partnership and collaboration, far beyond words, ensur-

[‘OPENING’ continued on Page 25](#)

[‘OPENING’ continued from Page 24](#)

ing that a safety standard was enforced and a safety culture was established. That has been revolutionary across the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. We are very proud of that.”

Philip Serpa Jr., senior project manager with USACE Los Angeles District's Long Beach VA office, has worked on the project since USACE awarded the contract in 2017.

“A lot of hands have been on this project — a lot of hard work; a lot of effort,” he said. “This is a culmination of that — two beautiful buildings. It's just a testament of the hard work for USACE and its partners with VA.”

The Long Beach VA Healthcare System currently serves more than 50,000 veterans.

“This is for them (the veterans),” Serpa said. “These facilities will serve them for many years now. I am very grateful to have worked on these from the very beginning and very happy that they are going to be used.”

Consolidating the Long Beach VA mental health care facilities into two buildings will make it faster and easier for veterans to locate the services they need, said Dr. Larry Albers, chief of psychiatry and mental health at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, who spoke during the ceremony.

“To the veterans in attendance: ‘Welcome



Photos by Dena O'Dell

Marine veteran Christopher Scott Louie shares his story while speaking during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the Veterans Affairs Long Beach Healthcare System's mental health in-patient and out-patient facilities Aug. 28 in Long Beach, California.

home.” Albers said. “Thank you for your service. You are appreciated and deserve the highest quality care, and that is our goal.”

USACE Los Angeles District also is working on a three-story, 181,000 -square-foot Community Living Center at the VA Long Beach campus, which is designed to facilitate medical

care for veterans in need of additional support, particularly aging veterans. The Community Living Center will be a 120-bed facility consisting of 10 patient units with 12 beds each. Once the new center is complete, USACE will demolish the existing Community Living Center at the campus.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District project managers, engineers and safety specialists, who managed the construction of the VA Long Beach Healthcare System's mental health in-patient and out-patient facilities, pose for a picture following a ribbon-cutting ceremony signifying the opening of the facilities Aug. 28 in Long Beach, California.

National Public Lands Day

Volunteers unite to restore, celebrate Whittier Narrows

BY DENA O'DELL
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SOUTH EL MONTE, Calif. — More than 100 volunteers turned out on a misty Saturday morning Sept. 27 at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center to help remove trash, debris and invasive plants from the area.

The volunteers were participating in National Public Lands Day, marking the district's sixth year of participation, in partnership with Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation and numerous other organizations.

This year's event came full circle, as the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area was the site for the Los Angeles District's first National Public Lands Day in September 2019.

Col. Andrew Baker, USACE Los Angeles District commander, welcomed participants, thanking them for volunteering, and gave accolades to USACE Los Angeles District park rangers for coordinating the annual event.

"This is one of my favorite things that we get to do every year," Baker said, adding this is his third and final National Public Lands Day event with the district, as he has nine months left as the Los Angeles District commander.

"We do a lot of great things in the Corps," he said. "I like to say that we have a righteous mission — everything we do makes somebody's life better in some way, whether it's flood-risk management, keeping people safe in and around areas that might be prone to floods; whether it's military construction — we do so much work

for our nation's defense; we do a lot of work for the veterans administration, building hospitals for our veterans.

"This is something we can do that has a direct impact ... we're going out there cleaning up trash — that really has an impact on all our neighbors and communities, so thank you to all the volunteers. It really means a lot, and, hopefully, it is as meaningful for you as it is for me."

During this year's event, volunteers removed litter and debris from the San Gabriel River area upstream of the Whittier Narrows Dam and removed invasive plants and weeds along walking trails at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center.

Husband and wife duo Cliff and Gabi Mclean, both members of the San Gabriel Mountains Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, were two of the many volunteers.

While Cliff picked up trash and debris along the trails, Gabi assisted local Girl Scouts and parents with identifying native plants in the area and removing invasive ones.

Gabi said she and her husband volunteered because they care about the land and about the people who benefit from it.

"It's a very urban area, and the river is creating this beautiful island of natural habitat," she said. "Not everyone has the money to drive into the mountains. I care about people that benefit from the plants. That's what brings me out here."

Volunteers, like the Mcleans, had many varied reasons for participating in the event.

Ruby Hunter and her daughter, Lily, a Girl Scout with Troop 2203, out of the Temple City/El Monte area, wanted to do something different and give back to their community.

Andre Sanchez of Pico Rivera said he was passionate about native plants and wanted to help clean up the area.

Florina Covarrubias of South El Monte also wanted to help her community out.

Steve Huber, a member of the Whittier Area Audubon Society, said he and his organization are interested in habitat restoration for endangered species in the area.

Some, like Sarah Hall, heard about the event through a flyer USACE published seeking volunteers.

Her son's Boy Scout Troop — Troop 438 out of Whittier — felt like this was a great opportunity to teach the boys about environmental stewardship.

"We are out here because the boys need to work in the environment, and, for some, for their rank, they need their conservation hours," Hall said. "Some of them are here because they were available, and we talk about how good it is to give back to the community to clean up our

[‘NPLD’ continued on Page 27](#)



Members of the Scouts of America Troop 438 walk along the San Gabriel Bike Path after picking up trash and debris in the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area during the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's National Public Lands Day event, in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation and multiple other agencies, Sept. 27 in South El Monte, Calif.

[‘NPLD’ continued from Page 26](#)

environment; to keep our environment safe. It's a really good opportunity for us to be here. I'm so glad that we discovered the ad to come and do this. We look forward to coming and doing this again ... we want this to grow."

USACE Los Angeles District Park Ranger Marlene Schmitt, who coordinated this year's event, said planning began several months ago.

"We literally started planning for this event three months ago," Schmitt said. "We reached out to lots of different organizations and partners," adding many of them participated, which made the event a huge success.

About 105 volunteers participated in this year's event, she said, with volunteer hours equaling \$14,203 in savings to the federal government. Participants removed more than 4,800 pounds of litter, debris and invasive plants from the area.

"It was a success," said USACE LA District Park Ranger Nick Figueroa. "They brought their A-game and just killed it out there today!"

Those participating in the event received a fee-free coupon for a one-day entrance or day-use fee at any participating federal agency's park, forest or recreation area that charges either type of fees.

ABOUT NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY

National Public Lands Day, which occurs annually on the fourth Saturday in September, was established in 1994. It is organized annually by the National Environmental Education Foundation and is the nation's largest single-day volunteer effort for public, fostering a strong connection between people and the environment, and educating and cultivating environmental stewards."



Gabi Mclean, a member of the San Gabriel Mountains Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, second from right, educates Ruby Hunter of Temple City, left; her daughter, Lily, Girl Scout Troop 2203, Temple City/El Monte, second from left; and Emma Shideler of Los Angeles, right, about native plants during the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's National Public Lands Day event, in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation and multiple other agencies, Sept. 27 at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center in South El Monte, California.

VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS:

Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation; Whittier Area Audubon Society; California Native Plant Society – San Gabriel Mountains Chapter; Whittier Narrows Nature Center Associates; State of California Conservation Corps – Pomona and Los Angeles Centers; South El Monte High School; Los Angeles County Department of Public Works; Los Angeles County

Sheriff's Department – Mounted Enforcement Detail; Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department – Parks Bureau; Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board – Region 4: Los Angeles; National Environmental Education Foundation; L.A. Works; Girl Scouts of America; Boy Scouts of America; San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps; Global Safety; Juan Matias Sanchez Adobe; and Yesteryears Anza Trail (Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail).



Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, LA County Department of Parks and Recreation, Whittier Narrows Nature Center and multiple partner agencies and volunteers pose for a picture Sept. 27 during the start of USACE LA District's National Public Lands Day event, in partnership with LA County, at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center in South El Monte, Calif. About 100 volunteers participated in the event.



#BeThere
Your action could save a life



www.DSPO.mil

SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH



Design by DEOMI - Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute