

TOWER TIMES

February/March 2026



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TOWER TIMES

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Mission

The Rock Island District’s mission is to deliver vital engineering and water resource solutions in collaboration with our partners to secure our Nation, reduce disaster risk and enhance quality of life, providing value to the region and Nation.

Vision

A premier public service, engineering organization of trusted, talented professionals delivering innovative and sustainable solutions to the region and Nation.

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On the Cover

A visitor at the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center in Ottawa, Illinois, looks through a spotting scope to view bald eagles roosting in the trees downstream of Starved Rock Lock and Dam during Eagle Watch Weekend.

Photo by Jordan Raiff

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Springing into Action: Preparation is Key

Rock Island Team,
Temperatures are rising and the weather is turning as we approach spring. Today, like all days, is an appropriate time to reflect on the critical work we do every day and the importance of preparation as we ramp up for the busy season ahead. This time of year is always a transition point for the Rock Island District, and I am proud of the dedication and professionalism each of you bring to our diverse missions.

Spring is a season of action for us, and it starts with many of our lock and dam sites getting back into service for the navigation season. These facilities are the backbone of the Nation's inland waterway system, and the work you do to maintain and operate them is vital to keeping commerce moving. The annual lockmasters meeting is also just around the corner and is a key part of helping the team as a whole work more efficiently and effectively. Your expertise and commitment to the job and each other are what make this mission a success year after year.

Beyond navigation, spring also signals the reopening of our recreation areas across the District. These sites are where the public connects with the natural beauty of our region, and your efforts to prepare campgrounds, boat ramps, and other facilities are essential to creating safe and enjoyable experiences for visitors. Whether you are clearing trails, repairing infrastructure, or coordinating with partners, your work makes a difference in the lives of countless families who rely on these areas for relaxation and adventure.

Of course, spring also brings the potential for high water and flooding. This is when our emergency preparedness and response teams shine. I know many volunteers throughout the District are already registered for spring flood fight training, and the National Flood Fight Materiel Center is readying equipment for deployment at a moment's notice. This proactive approach is what sets us apart and ensures we are ready to protect lives and property if the need arises and represents why Rock Island District was given the designation of a National Center of Expertise. Your dedication to readiness and resilience is a cornerstone of our mission, and I have full confidence in your ability to rise to the occasion should high water become an issue.

Training and professional development are also key components of our spring preparations. Earlier this month, the Safety Office hosted Collateral Duty Safety Officer Training, providing valuable tools and knowledge to help ensure safety remains a top priority across the District. Additionally, the Operations Division will soon host its annual training for natural resource specialists and park rangers. These sessions are critical for equipping our teams with the skills and information needed to deliver on our recreation and natural resource management missions.

As we move into this dynamic season, I want to emphasize how much I and the other leaders in the District value the work each of you performs every day. Whether you are operating locks, maintaining recreation areas, preparing for emergencies, or planning for new projects, your contributions are vital to the success of the Rock Island District. I encourage you to take pride in the impact of your work and to continue supporting one another as we navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Thank you for your dedication, professionalism, and teamwork. Together, we are making a difference for the region and the Nation. Let's make this spring a season of success and accomplishment.

Continue BUILDING STRONG and ESSAYONS!

Appreciate you,



Col. Aaron M. Williams
Rock Island District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Col. Aaron M. Williams
District Commander

Workforce Management Office Enhances People-Centric Operations

By Jim Finn, Public Affairs Specialist

The Rock Island District is embarking on an exciting new chapter with the establishment of the Workforce Management Office (WMO), designed to elevate the commitment to its most vital asset: its people. Spearheaded by Angela Freyermuth, Workforce Management Office Chief, this initiative aims to transform how the District approaches workforce management.

The concept of the WMO emerged from a vision articulated by leadership during a division-level meeting, where the need for a dedicated workforce management cell within each district was emphasized.

“Commanders recognized that a dedicated team was needed to drive workforce initiatives to ensure mission success,” Freyermuth says.

This initiative aligns with the evolving goals of the Civilian Human Resources Agency (CHRA) and seeks to fill gaps left by discontinued functions.

The WMO serves as the cornerstone of USACE’s “Taking Care of People” initiatives, ensuring a seamless employee lifecycle from recruitment to professional development.

“Our goal is to streamline processes and empower our leaders with the data they need for strategic decision-making,” Freyermuth emphasizes.

The WMO consists of a dedicated team structured around the three “R’s” of the employment lifecycle: Recruitment, Retention and Retirement. By streamlining the entire employee lifecycle from efficiently recruiting and onboarding top-tier talent, to cultivating the next generation of leaders through robust development programs, the office ensures the District is powered by a capable and resilient workforce.

Currently, the WMO consists of permanent positions for Freyermuth as the Supervisory Workforce Management Specialist and Lynn Gibson as the District Recruiter. Additional positions include two Workforce Management Specialists, a Professional Development Specialist and an Administrative Support Specialist that will share time between the WMO and the Executive Office.

These positions are currently filled by employees on temporary details, but the goal is for the team to be permanently staffed in the near future. Together, they will work to ensure that the Rock Island District

remains a competitive and attractive workplace for top-tier talent.

In light of the current hiring environment, the WMO is committed to overcoming challenges and advancing its mission. Freyermuth encourages hiring managers to look within the organization for talent and utilize the [USACE Talent Marketplace](#).

“We’re taking concrete steps to fill critical gaps and enhance the services we provide to our District,” she states.

Phil Keller, Rock Island District Chief of Staff, believes the new team is a major benefit to the District.

“I’m biased, but the team now, with everything that’s gone on throughout the year, is really starting to show value, despite the difficult environment,” Keller states. “It has increased the trust and value in just the last six to seven months.”

As the Workforce Management Office continues its journey, it stands ready to enhance the operational effectiveness of the Rock Island District, ensuring that the organization is well-equipped to meet the complex challenges of the future. With a dedicated focus on workforce management, the WMO is poised to become an invaluable partner in nurturing and developing USACE’s most important resource: its people. 



USACE Command Sergeant Major Visits the Rock Island District

By Jim Finn, Public Affairs Specialist

Command Sergeant Major Douglas Galick, senior enlisted advisor at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters in Washington, D.C., visited the USACE Rock Island District in early February to gain firsthand insight into project sites and connect with employees.

During his visit, Command Sgt. Maj. Galick toured several key locations, including the Rock Island District's National Flood Fight Materiel Center at the Rock Island Arsenal, Locks and Dam 14, the Mississippi River Project Office in Pleasant Valley, Iowa, and Brandon Road Lock and Dam near Joliet, Illinois. At each site, his focus was on learning about the projects and hearing directly from employees about their experiences working for the Rock Island District.

As the senior enlisted advisor to the Commanding General and Chief of Engineers, Command Sgt. Maj. Galick plays a vital role within USACE Headquarters. He represents the interests of Soldiers and Department of the Army Civilians across the enterprise, serving as a bridge between headquarters leadership and field operations.

His visit to the Rock Island District provided an opportunity to see the diverse missions supported by the team up close. Along the way, Command Sgt. Maj. Galick shared messages from USACE Headquarters and expressed his appreciation for the dedication and hard work of the District's employees. 



During a visit to Locks and Dam 14 in Pleasant Valley, Iowa, in February, USACE Command Sgt. Maj. Douglas Galick receives an overview of the Rock Island District's navigation mission from the Mississippi River Project's Lock and Dam Section Chief Andy Barnes. *Photo by Jim Finn*

Lock and Dam 22 Fish Passage Project Taking Shape

By Sam Heilig, Public Affairs Specialist

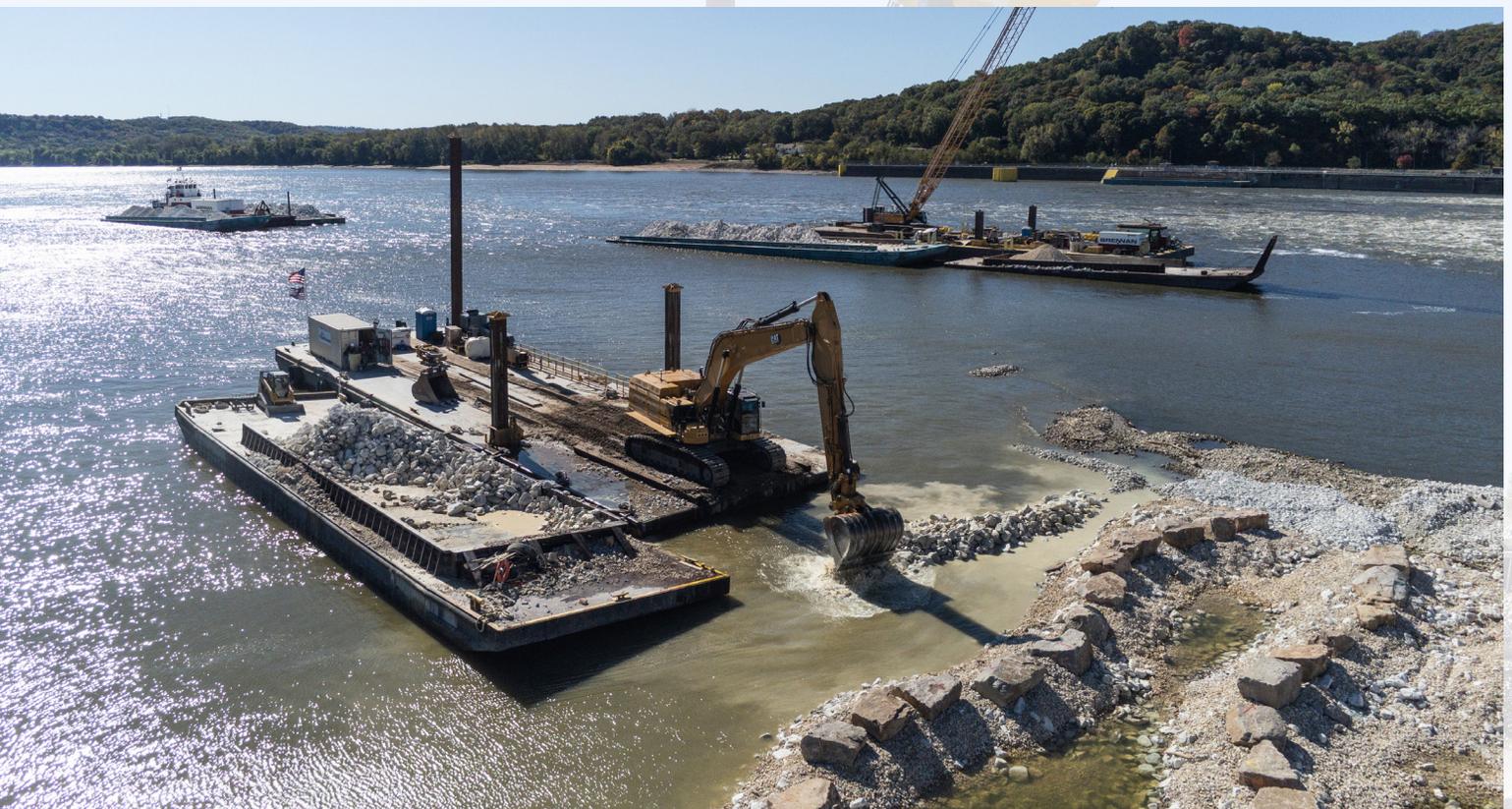
Construction of the Fish Passage Project at Lock and Dam 22 on the Mississippi River has progressed steadily since it began last May. Crews are nearing completion of the final two weirs in the rock ramp, making the fish passage structure fully visible for the first—and last—time before it becomes submerged under water when the project is finished.

“This is a rare opportunity to see the first structure of its kind in the Mississippi River before it becomes part of the future river ecosystem,” said Ty Jones, contracting officer representative for the project. “It’s been great seeing the project go from a drawing on paper, to a digital rendering, to a miniature model, and now to full-scale construction.”

Once the weirs are finished, the contractor will complete the remaining rock access berms that stabilize the ramp and weirs.

Concrete placement for the sill and downstream floor slabs in the intake structure is ongoing, and scaffolding has been installed along the underside of the dam to facilitate conduit placement. Much of the electrical work on the Missouri side of the project is complete, and fabrication of mooring dolphins and bulkheads is underway, with final shipments scheduled later this year.

The fish passage structure, located on the spillway portion of the dam, extends downstream into the tailwater area and is designed to reconnect fragmented river habitats. The structure will allow fish to move upstream to river and tributary areas that became limited when the lock and dam was constructed in the 1930s. The goal of this reconnection is to increase the size and distribution of migratory fish populations.



Since May, contractors have been meticulously placing rocks in a wave-like pattern beneath the spillway at Lock and Dam 22. This innovative design is part of the first-ever Fish Passage on the Upper Mississippi River, a project aimed at enhancing aquatic connectivity and ecosystem health.

Photo by Joe Stadele, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc.



For the first and final time, the wavy rock weirs below the spillway at Lock and Dam 22 are fully visible. Once the coffer dam is removed and the Fish Passage Project becomes operational, these structures will be submerged, quietly supporting the river’s ecological balance. Photo by Joe Stadele, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc.

Adaptive management strategies, including pre- and post-construction monitoring, will ensure the structure’s effectiveness and provide valuable insights for future fish passage projects.

“This project will benefit more than 30 native fish species, including paddlefish, shovelnose sturgeon, channel catfish, and smallmouth buffalo,” said Project Manager Dr. Alaina Pfenning-Butterworth. “By making it easier for fish to access spawning and feeding areas, we’re supporting biodiversity and restoring critical habitats.”

The Lock and Dam 22 Fish Passage Project is part of the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP), which aims to enhance the ecological health of the Mississippi River while maintaining efficient navigation.

Construction is expected to continue through 2027, with adaptive management and monitoring extending well into the future.

“The Lock and Dam 22 Fish Passage Project is poised to make a lasting impact on the health of the Mississippi River ecosystem while advancing NESP’s broader goals of protecting, restoring, and enhancing the environment,” Program Manager Marshall Plumley added.

For updates, visit the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District website at www.mvr.usace.army.mil/nesp/ld22-fish-passage. 

Eagle Watch Weekend Returns, Showcasing Winter Eagles Along the Illinois River

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

During the harsh winter months, waterways along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers become home to thousands of bald eagles and other migratory birds. Events such as Eagle Watch Weekend at the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center provide a prime opportunity not only to learn about, but also to see, the nation's bird and others in their natural habitat. Held Jan. 24–25, the event offered activities and experiences not readily available away from the river.

Hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Rock Island District in conjunction with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Starved Rock Audubon Society and Explore Utica, the event was centered at the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center. Additional activities were held at the Utica Village Hall, Starved Rock Lodge and the Starved Rock State Park visitor center.

Although the rangers at the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center were geared up and ready for a great weekend of eagle watching, nature had other plans.

"Despite extreme weather and an extended power outage, we were able to come together and host a successful Eagle Watch Weekend," said USACE Park Ranger Sarah Fisher. "Our friends at Starved Rock Lodge graciously stepped up to accommodate our programming on Saturday. By Sunday, our power was

back on, and we moved our programming back to the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center."

One of the key attractions at both visitor centers was the live birds of prey program. Presented in conjunction with Wings and Talons, a nonprofit organization based in Itasca, Illinois, three volunteers led hourlong presentations featuring a red-tailed hawk, a barred owl and a great horned owl.

David Felice of Wings and Talons introduced the birds and spoke about the organization's mission.

"We are an all-volunteer nonprofit that cares for non-releasable birds of prey, and we do educational programming with them," Felice said. "The goal of the organization is to promote awareness and conservation of raptors, primarily through education."

While many people refer to their pets or livestock by name, Felice explained Wings and Talons takes a different approach.

"We refer to our birds by their species," Felice said. "Some of our birds were taken from the wild by people who tried to make pets out of them, and we want to reinforce the idea that these birds belong in the wild. Often, it's human interference—not the birds or their environment—that results in them being in captivity."

(Continued on page 11)



Wings and Talons volunteer Matt Sato presents a male barred owl to Eagle Watch Weekend attendees, as a female great horned owl on her perch and volunteer David Felice look on. Photo by Jordan Raiff



Wings and Talons volunteer Gavin Dunn securely keeps a female red-tailed hawk in place while the bird spreads its wings as Dunn details the multiple uses of the raptor's claws and wings. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*



Left: Wings and Talons volunteer Matt Sato supports a male barred owl. Right: A female great horned owl looks on intently at guests during Eagle Watch Weekend, as Wings and Talons volunteer Matt Sato talks about how she hears. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*



Left: A bald eagle studies the waters for fish while soaring with seagulls above the downstream side of the Starved Rock Lock and Dam. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*

Right: A juvenile bald narrowly misses a fish slowly making its way down the cold but ever-churning waters on the downstream side of the Starved Rock Lock and Dam. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*



The propane powered heater was a big hit outside the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center thanks to the sub-zero temps. Set up as a place to get warm while enjoying nature, spectators of all ages made use of both the heat and the spotter scopes that had been trained on known bald eagle nests and roosting areas. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*

(Continued from page 8)

Standing patiently on handlers' arms or perches, the birds drew focused attention from children and adults alike as volunteers answered questions from the audience.

While seeing birds of prey up close is always a thrill, observing them in the wild is an experience many visitors traveled hours to enjoy.

Located along the Illinois River at river mile 231, Starved Rock Lock and Dam, adjacent to the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center, provides an abundant food source for bald eagles and other birds during the winter months. As rivers and streams freeze farther north, migrating birds rely on the constantly churning waters below the dam, where fish remain accessible.

Fisher and other USACE park rangers set up spotting scopes along the second-floor balcony of the visitor center, allowing attendees to observe eagles nesting and perching along the river. Members of the Starved Rock Audubon Society rotated between indoor and outdoor stations to share their expertise

and ensure scopes were trained on known nests and roosting areas. A warming lamp was also available to help reduce weather-related discomfort.

For those unable to remain outdoors in sub-zero wind chills, several scopes were positioned inside the visitor center.

Despite the arctic blast and Saturday's power outage, attendance remained strong. Approximately 1,300 visitors attended programming at the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center, while an estimated 2,000 visited Starved Rock Lodge, 1,200 attended events at Starved Rock State Park and 800 participated at the Utica Gym.

For organizations such as Wings and Talons, events like Eagle Watch Weekend provide valuable opportunities to engage the public.

"We've done a lot of work on continuing education," Felice said. "How we interact with and care for the birds puts their total welfare at the forefront."

A major annual event for the region and USACE park rangers, planning for the next Eagle Watch Weekend is already underway.

"Planning for Eagle Watch Weekend starts every year in February," Fisher said. "We're excited to evaluate this year's programming and begin preparing for next year's event." 



Left: Both bald eagles and turkey vultures make their home atop the trees that separate Starved Rock State Park from the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center. The consistent moving water offers a veritable smorgasbord of fish for these raptors to dine on.

Photo by Jordan Raiff

Below: A mixture of bird enthusiasts (called ornithophiles) observes bald eagles and other birds in their natural habitat along the Starved Rock Lock & Dam from the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center.

Photo by Jordan Raiff



Safety Blocks: A Vital Tool in Lock Chambers

By Frances Candelaria, Public Affairs Specialist

Lock chambers are inherently dangerous environments, especially when dealing with large vessels, moving water, and heavy equipment. There are several safety measures in place to protect personnel and ensure safe operations. Crush blocks, also known as safety blocks, are essential devices used within lock chambers to protect individuals from life-threatening situations.

Measuring 14 inches wide, 14 inches long, and 12 inches tall, these aluminium cubes are internally braced to enhance their rigidity. Built watertight, they float in water, ensuring quick and effective deployment during emergencies.

Their primary purpose is to safeguard individuals who may fall into the water within a lock chamber, specifically in the dangerous space between a barge or vessel and the lock chamber wall. This area poses a significant risk due to the potential for being crushed as barges move within the chamber. Safety blocks act as a physical barrier, preventing barges from moving closer to the wall than the block's dimensions, thereby protecting the person in the water.

Safety blocks are utilized in emergencies when someone falls into the water between a barge or vessel and the lock chamber wall. Personnel stationed on the wall immediately throw one or more blocks into the water near the individual's location. This action halts the movement of the barge, which can shift due to water flow, wind, or other forces. Given the immense mass of barges, the safety block's intervention is critical to preventing fatal accidents.

Andy Barnes, Lock and Dam Section Chief, explained how critical these safety tools were during an incident at Lock 14 on September 28, 2025.

"An industry deckhand tripped while walking on the deck of a barge and fell into the water within the lock chamber," Barnes said. "Recognizing the immediate danger, a lock operator, Dave Allardyce, quickly deployed a crush block into the chamber near the deckhand's location. Fortunately, the deckhand had fallen close to a ladder recess and was able to climb back onto the barge deck, wet but unharmed."

This quick action prevented a potentially fatal accident, highlighting the critical role these blocks play in emergency situations.

The exact timeline of safety blocks' introduction within the Corps' facilities is unclear, but they have been in use for many decades. While records of their usage are not formally maintained, incidents requiring

safety blocks are fortunately rare. Within the Rock Island District, such occurrences are estimated to happen about once a year across the Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway.

Each step of establishing proactive safety protocols is vital in mitigating risks and ensuring that personnel are protected in such challenging environments. By combining other safety measures with the blocks, Rock Island District's lock chambers are significantly safer for workers and visitors. 



Lock operator Dave Allardyce is awarded the Rock Island District Safety Award by USACE Rock Island District Commander Col. Aaron Williams after Allardyce's quick thinking and a crush block saved the life of a deckhand who had fallen into the water.
Photo by Frances Candelaria



Despite looking like an ordinary cement block, these aluminum crush blocks are rigid, watertight, and built to save a life. *Photo by Frances Candelaria*



Rangers Balance Safety and Stewardship in Hazard Tree Removal at Saylorville Lake

By Sierra Phipps, Natural Resource Specialist

Visitor safety is a top priority for USACE park rangers at Saylorville Lake and across the country. Protecting visitors from falling trees while maintaining the ecological integrity of public lands is just one of the many ways rangers help to support public safety. Hazard trees—those weakened by disease, age, or structural instability—pose a significant risk in high-use areas such as campgrounds, picnic sites, and trail corridors. Their removal is necessary, but the process is far more complex than simply cutting them down.

Before any tree is removed, certified rangers must conduct systematic inspections. They evaluate structural defects, root stability, crown condition, and signs of fungal decay or insect infestation. These assessments ensure that only trees presenting a genuine hazard are targeted, minimizing unnecessary disturbance to the forest.

Once a hazard tree is identified, removal is carefully planned. Rangers employ chainsaws, rigging systems, and in some cases heavy equipment to safely dismantle the tree. Operations are scheduled during low visitor use periods to reduce risk. Safety zones are established and marked for visibility, and crews follow strict protocols to prevent collateral damage to surrounding vegetation and infrastructure.

Rather than discarding the felled timber, the team at Saylorville Lake offers it to the public through their firewood program. Anyone interested in collecting the wood for personal use can obtain a free permit from the Saylorville Lake Administration Office by calling 515-276-4546. This practice provides campers and other users with a sustainable source of wood, reduces the need for external harvesting, and ensures

that the material continues to serve recreational purposes. By repurposing hazard trees, parks close the loop between safety management and visitor benefit.

Tree removal is not the end of the story. Following hazard mitigation, rangers initiate replanting projects to restore canopy cover and maintain biodiversity. Native species are prioritized to support wildlife habitat and ensure long-term forest resilience. These reforestation efforts offset the ecological impact of removals and demonstrate a commitment to sustainable land management.

Hazard tree removal exemplifies the dual mission of park rangers: safeguarding visitors while

stewarding natural resources. By combining technical forestry practices with community-oriented programs like firewood distribution and replanting, the rangers at Saylorville Lake achieve a balance between immediate safety needs and long-term ecological health of the project. 



Saylorville Lake's firewood program offers felled hazard trees to the public for use as firewood. Participants must obtain a special permit to collect and use the timber, ensuring safe and sustainable resource management.

Photos by Sierra Phipps

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Heather Anderson Incoming Chief of Engineering and Construction

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

People who choose to work for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers come from a wide range of backgrounds and educational paths. Heather Anderson, who was recently announced as the incoming chief of Engineering and Construction Division for the Rock Island District, is no exception.

In 1993, Anderson was working as a phlebotomy technician while studying engineering at the University of Iowa when an unexpected encounter set her career in motion.

"I drew blood from Doyle McCauley, who was the DPM [Deputy for Programs and Project Management] here at the time," Anderson said. "I saw his form read 'civil engineer,' and I told him I was going to school to be a civil engineer. He suggested I come interview for a student position. I was just striking up a conversation with someone I was sticking with a needle."

That brief exchange led to opportunities Anderson could not have anticipated over the next 33 years — and counting.

"As an intern, I was able to work during the winter closure at Lock and Dam 14 while it was being rehabbed," Anderson said. "It was a cool experience as a young engineer to be out on a project site right away and be part of a major maintenance closure. I was in awe of the fact that I was walking on the bottom of the Mississippi River because the lock had been dewatered. That was probably the best hands-on learning experience I had on a project."



Rock Island District's incoming Chief of Engineering and Construction Division Heather Anderson monitors construction of a mooring cell near Lock & Dam 22 in Saverton, Missouri. *Courtesy Photo*

When work began on the Fish Passage Project at Lock and Dam 22, Anderson was selected as the project's first engineering technical lead.

She also worked extensively on Environmental Management Program projects — now known as Upper Mississippi River Restoration program, and early days of NESP (to include floating guidewall design and Fish Passage at Lock and Dam 22) — as well as Lock Major rehabilitation and Major maintenance projects.

Anderson credits much of her professional growth to the mentorship she received within USACE.

"When I was a junior engineer, the senior engineers always treated me like an equal, even though I had so much to learn from them," Anderson said. "This has been a fabulous place to grow up as an engineer."

Although she's never deployed outside of the District, Anderson has supported multiple flood response missions within the District.

"I was here for the Great Flood of 1993, and I was part of the flood response in the late 1990s in the Rock River area," Anderson said. "During that 1993 event, I didn't go into the field because I was pregnant, so I supported the mission from the office. Since 2008, I've worked primarily in the Emergency Operations Center, providing reach-back support and as Technical Manager for PL94-99 recovery efforts until 2016."

Anderson and her husband raised three children. Balancing professional and personal responsibilities while completing her education and building a career which required careful prioritization.

"Time management was huge," Anderson said.

After 33 years with the Rock Island District, Anderson has been responsible for an extensive list of projects. Still, she said her greatest professional pride comes from mentoring others and building up a team.

"Seeing people I hired, or recommended to the Corps, and what they've gone on to do has been incredibly rewarding," Anderson said. "The projects are huge, and contributing to them is meaningful. But knowing I've helped build a team that will carry on the work long after me — that's been the most fulfilling part."

For those considering their future careers, Anderson offered perspective on engineering's broader impact.

"A lot of fields offer a wide range of career paths," Anderson said. "If you love problem-solving, troubleshooting and math, engineering is a great way to use those skills to benefit the larger population. The impact you make is generational. The projects we work on are incredible, and the team is motivated not by personal gain but by public service." 

Right: USACE Rock Island District incoming Chief of Engineering and Construction Division Heather Anderson in her current office. *Courtesy Photo*



Below: While visiting a project site in Milan, Illinois, in 2006, Heather Anderson takes a moment to enjoy nature. During her time with the Rock Island District's Engineering and Construction Division, she's had the chance to see a lot of projects grow. *Courtesy Photo*



Above: During a site visit to Coralville Lake in 2019, Heather Anderson served with other members of the Rock Island District team to look at ways each of the District's Divisions could best support one another and the District's missions. Pictured from left to right, Andy Barnes, Lt. Col. (Ret.) Rachel Honderd, Heather Anderson, and Brett Call. *Courtesy Photo*



Left: Running with members of the USACE Rock Island District in the Quad Cities Marathon has been a long-time hobby for Heather Anderson. In 2009, they won the Corporate Challenge Team relay. Pictured from left to right is Cory Delong (Ret.), Tom Mack, Heather Anderson, and Jim Bartek. *Courtesy Photo*

DEPLOYMENT SPOTLIGHT: Jeff McCrery

“People are the mission, and we’ve got to protect the people”

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

Signing up to deploy as a civilian member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a decision dedicated volunteers such as Jeff McCrery view as a calling, not just a duty.

“Everyone should try a deployment at least once,” McCrery said. “I encourage everyone to embrace the opportunity and get their feet wet. It’s a powerful experience, and from the first one, I was hooked.”

McCrery serves as the Rock Island District’s environmental compliance coordinator and sustainability program manager. In his day-to-day role, he ensures the District remains in compliance with Environmental Protection Agency regulations and federal codes.

“I work districtwide with all the locks and dams, lake projects and outgrants to ensure compliance,” McCrery said.

When deployed, however, McCrery has served in a variety of roles, including his most recent deployment as a member of the safety cadre.

When McCrery began his career with USACE in environmental engineering, he spent 12 years in that section. During early deployments, he served as a quality assurance specialist overseeing debris removal, housing and commodities, and later as a quality assurance supervisor.

“I started in the early spring of 1994,” McCrery said. “Since that time, I’ve deployed 10 or 12 times. The very first time I deployed I had no idea what I was getting into. I just saw it as the chance to do something different and challenging.”

Out of his many deployments during his more than 30 years as a USACE employee, McCrery said one stands out.

“It was in response to hurricanes Ivan and Charley in 2004,” McCrery said. “I was deployed to the Gulf Coast of Florida, in the Fort Myers and Naples areas. I felt very honored to be asked to contribute to the cleanup and rebuild after a natural disaster.”

While civilian deployments within USACE are often relatively short, some missions offer the opportunity for personnel to deploy multiple times in support of the same disaster.

In November, McCrery was asked to respond to Hurricane Helene in Asheville, North Carolina. He was stationed about two hours north, in Boone. A year earlier, he had deployed to Savannah, Georgia, in response to the same storm.

“When I was asked to come back a second time for Hurricane Helene, I couldn’t believe it was still going on,” McCrery said. “When I left Georgia, they were wrapping the mission up. It goes to show the amount of devastation a storm like this can cause to a community and its infrastructure.”



Jeff McCrery conducts potable water quality assessments on contractor-installed lines during the construction of a temporary housing site while deployed in response to Hurricanes Charlie and Ivan in Southeast Florida in December, 2004. *Courtesy Photo*

Deploying in the aftermath of a disaster is inherently dangerous. As a member of the safety cadre, McCrery is responsible for ensuring safety remains the top priority.

“There are always people who don’t buy into safety, and they take some convincing,” McCrery said. “We take a cooperative approach with everyone and try to explain that safety is for their own good. We know the job has to get done, but we don’t do it at the expense of safety. At the end of the day, we want everyone to go home safely. People are the mission, and we’ve got to protect the people.”

For those considering deployment, McCrery offered two pieces of advice: hydration and reintegration.

“During long, hot days in Florida or the heat of California, I’m always reaching for water,” McCrery said. “When I land, the first thing I do is pick up a few cases of water and keep them in the back of my vehicle to hand out to anyone who needs it — contractors, members of the public or fellow USACE employees.”

Reintegration after deployment is equally important, he said.

“When you have a wife and kids at home and you’re gone for 30, 60 or 90 days, that readjustment period is crucial,” McCrery said. “You had your routine, and your spouse had theirs. When you come

back and reinsert yourself into that routine, there is always a period of adjustment, and you have to be cognizant of that.” 



Jeff McCrery analyzes plot maps to differentiate between safe zones and those in need of additional remediation while deployed in response to Northern California Wildfires in 2017.

Courtesy Photo

Can you name where this photo was taken?



Last Issue's Winner



Send guesses to: jordan.n.raiff@usace.army.mil

Answer: Coralville Lake's Veterans Trail
Winner: Richard Busch

In Memory of Teresa Neff

Feb. 19, 1956 - Jan. 3, 2026

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

On Jan. 3, 2026, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, lost one of its own when Teresa Machteld Neff passed away in her sleep. Despite declining health due to congestive heart failure, those who worked beside her said you would never have known it.

Neff's supervisor, Richard Busch, chief of construction for the Rock Island District, said she was integral to everything the construction division accomplished.

"Her passing was so sudden," Busch said. "Last summer she was planning to retire in October. Then she pushed it back to December. She was preparing for her last day in March and passed during the holidays. When she wasn't able to make it in, she sent a note to everybody, so they knew what was going on."

Neff began her federal career in May 1987 as a clerk-typist after seeing a job posting while working for a cleaning service in a federal building. She remained in that role until 2002, when she relocated and later joined the Rock Island District. Over the years, she earned several promotions and spent her final decade serving as an administrative support assistant.

Her title only told part of the story.

"She was our No. 1 admin support lead and helped coordinate the other offices," Busch said. "She made sure our credit card purchases, travel orders and timekeeping were done correctly. She tracked our roster — where people were and whether their contact information was up to date — as well as PR&C for all credit card purchases."

After more than 38 years in federal service, Neff had become a steady presence and a source of institutional knowledge. Even now, Busch said, her impact continues to surface.

"We're still finding things she was doing," he said.

Beyond her administrative expertise, colleagues remember her for the way she cared for her team.

"She not only cared about her job, she cared about her people," Busch said. "She would decorate for Christmas. She would bring in chips and dip, doughnuts or pizza — never expected, just because. She did that kind of thing all the time."

"She loved giving little knickknacks," Busch added. "I was on vacation for the last two weeks between Christmas and New Year's. When I came back, this miniature 'Now Serving' counter and ticket machine were on my desk. She thought I might need it."

Busch said that at her service, family members spoke about her constant thoughtfulness and appreciation for others — the same qualities her colleagues saw every day at work.

These traits were echoed by USACE Rock Island District Commander Col. Aaron Williams.

"Teresa was a longstanding and valued employee here at the Rock Island District. She was an eclectic personality who was known and loved by many. Teresa's legacy is enduring and she is greatly missed by all who knew her."

The Rock Island District is deeply saddened by her loss. Her memory will resonate across the district for years to come. 



• AROUND THE DISTRICT •



Above: In January, Mississippi Valley Division Commander Maj. Gen. Kimberly Peeples joined Rock Island District Deputy Commander Lt. Col. Matthew Fletcher and other members of the Rock Island District team for a tour of ongoing construction at the Cedar Rapids Flood Risk Management Project in Iowa.

Right: During her visit to the Rock Island District, Maj. Gen. Peeples took time to recognize employees at the District's quarterly awards ceremony and addressed the workforce, offering answers to questions and sharing insights from the Division-level perspective.

Photos by Frances Candelaria



USACE Family News

Obituaries



Richard D. "Dick" Bielenberg Sr, 84, of Morrison, Illinois, passed away Dec. 29, 2025. In 1979 Bielenberg began his career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and he served with the USACE Rock Island District until his retirement in 1999.



Teresa Machteld Neff, 69, of Davenport, Iowa, passed away Jan. 3, 2026. In 2002, Neff began her career with the USACE Rock Island District. She's served the last 10 years as an administrative support assistant for the District's Construction Office.

IF YOU HAVE FAMILY NEWS YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE TEAM, SEND IT TO:
JORDAN.N.BAIEFF@USACE.ARMY.MIL
AND WE'LL INCLUDE IT IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE TOWER TIMES.

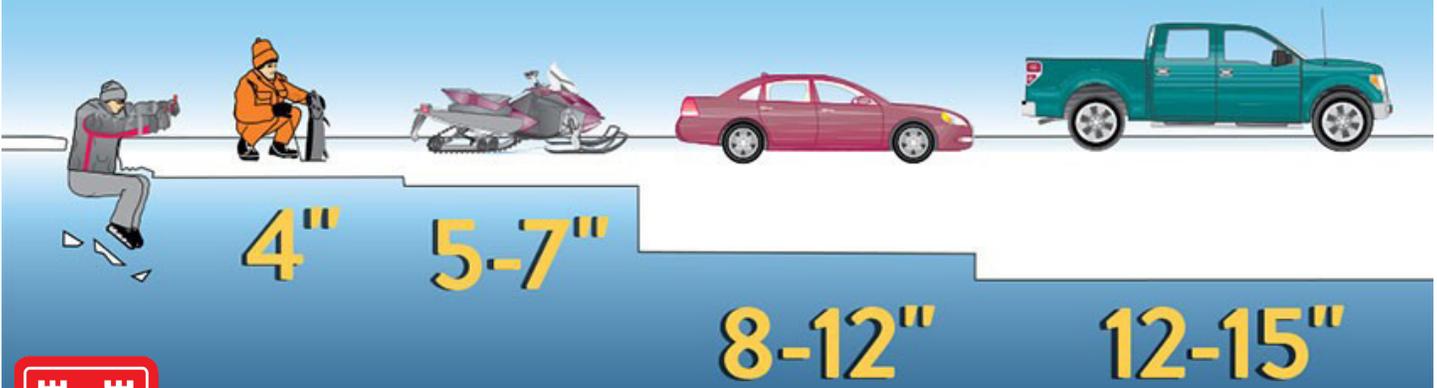


Births

Josey Harms was born to Jillian and Kyle Harms. He entered the world weighing 7 pounds, 4 ounces.

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