Crosscurrents

Serving the St. Paul District since 1977
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American Wetlands Month

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
St. Paul District

Barbara Walther, regulatory branch senior ecologist, reviews an aerial map at the district office in St. Paul, Minn., May 1.
Photo by Patrick Moes

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Submissions should be in Microsoft Word format for all written copy and photos should be no smaller than a 5 x 7 at 300 dpi. All photographs appearing herein are by the St. Paul District Public Affairs Office unless otherwise accredited.

The mission of ***Crosscurrents*** is to support the commander's internal information program for the St. Paul District and its stakeholders.

Crosscurrents also serves as the commander's primary communication tool for accurately transmitting policies and command philosophy to the St. Paul District community and its customers.

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Comments from the top

Col. Daniel C. Koprowski
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
St. Paul District Commander

For more than 40 years, the Corps of Engineers has been committed to being a good steward of the environment. In St. Paul District, we have a particular responsibility because of the vast water resources that exist in our area of responsibility. The history of this district is entitled "Steward of the Headwaters," after all, which highlights our missions to protect water resources for commerce, recreation and for future generations. We are all, in our various roles with the Corps, stewards of the environment in which we operate, whether it be the Headwaters or elsewhere in the district.

During the past decade, the Corps' stewardship efforts have expanded to embrace sustainability. The Corps' sustainability efforts underpin all that we do, and sustainability is one of the seven Environmental Operating Principles. These principles are paramount to our future, and they are central to the day-to-day work of our regulatory branch.

Our regulatory staff is committed to protecting the nation's aquatic resources while allowing fair and balanced permit decisions. Although they often don't get the recognition they deserve, our regulators work hard, processing more than 6,000 permitting decisions a year for the people of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Their jobs are often difficult, since they deal with complex problems for which there is often no good solution. Regulators deal with people on all sides of an issue, and their decisions inevitably please some, while angering others. That places a premium on doing things the right way, every time.

Our planning and natural resource sections also work to protect and provide stewardship for the environment. With approximately 25,000 acres of land along the Mississippi River, a number of district teams are continuously working with a variety of federal, state and local partners to ensure the district maintains the Mississippi River for the next generation.

In honor of American Wetlands Month, I want to personally thank each and every one of you for the work that you do to protect the environment through economic and environmentally sustainable solutions.

The month of May is also National Military Appreciation Month. But more notably, the month is important because we remember those that have paid the ultimate price for the freedoms we enjoy. On May 26, we will celebrate Memorial Day and honor those service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Please take a moment this holiday to think about what that means. The kind of commitment displayed by those we remember on Memorial Day has seen this country through some of its darkest hours, and will sustain it into the future.

Memorial Day is also the unofficial start to summer, and with it the outdoor activities that many of us enjoy. That said, it is also the '101 critical days of summer.' Please remember to make smart decisions whether you are out fishing, cycling, hiking, camping or boating, and don't become complacent. If you happen to head out on the water, remember to wear your life jacket. If you plan to have a drink, ensure you have a designated driver. I hope everyone has the opportunity to spend some well-deserved time off with friends and family this summer, and remember to take care of each other so we can continue doing what we do best – being Stewards of Headwaters.

Engineering and construction employee recognized for work, receives division award

Story by Patrick Moes

Scott Baker, engineering and construction, was recently recognized for his work along the Mississippi River.

Baker was selected as the Mississippi Valley Division Construction Management Excellence Award recipient. The annual award recognizes construction personnel exhibiting excellence in construction management and contract administration activities.

"Scott's [Baker's] leadership in the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program has set the standard division wide for his ownership and commitment..."
Tom Johnson, St. Paul District Eastern Area Office chief

An employee from each of the division's six districts competed for the award, and Baker won with a unanimous vote. He will now compete against other division winners for the Corps of Engineers national award.

"Scott's [Baker's] leadership in the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program has set the standard division wide for his ownership and commitment to provide a quality product that has exceeded our customer's expectations," said Tom Johnson, St. Paul District Eastern Area Office chief. "His professionalism and dedication to construction quality is unsurpassed and has earned the respect of our partnering agencies, contractors and district staff."

Baker was nominated for the award, in part, for fostering a spirit of cooperation and partnership with the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program. He has served as the contracting officer's representative for numerous projects to include the Pool 8 and 9 island construction.

Additionally, Baker serves as the assistant flood engineer for Minnesota and Iowa and performs as a subject matter expert in contract administration procedures, submittal reviews, contract modifications and negotiations.

Scott Baker, engineering and construction, was recently selected as the Mississippi Valley Division Construction Management Excellence Award recipient. Baker will now compete against other division winners for the national award.
Photo by Patrick Moes

Engineer wins state award

Story by George Stringham

Kurt Heckendorf, engineering and construction, was recently selected by the Minnesota Geotechnical Society as its Young Engineer of the Year for 2013.

Heckendorf, who holds a Master of Science degree in civil engineering from Virginia Tech of Blacksburg, Va., was recognized for his work in the district's geotechnical design and construction program. His work, in which he deals with soils and subsurface geology, was key to the completion of the Devils Lake, N.D., flood risk reduction project and the emergency repairs made to Rapidan Dam in Mankato, Minn., in 2002. He has also been a valued member of several additional projects and studies, to include the Fargo, N.D./Moorhead, Minn., metropolitan area flood risk management study.

Heckendorf's work can be seen far beyond the district's boundaries, though. Heckendorf volunteered to deploy to Iraq in 2003 and 2004, where he was a member of early reconstruction efforts and often worked in hostile conditions. In 2012, he deployed to Brazil for six months, where his geotechnical expertise was used on navigation and stream bank protect projects.

"Kurt [Heckendorf] is all about turning opportunities into accomplishments," said David Rydeen, geotechnical engineering branch chief. "When the Corps recruits college graduates, we promise that there are opportunities all over the world for them to take, if they are interested. Kurt listened."

Kurt Heckendorf, engineering and construction, receives the Minnesota Geotechnical Society Young Engineer of the Year Award from Steve Merriman.

Maj. Christian Thompson, left, deputy district engineer; congratulates Dave Rydeen; engineering and construction; Mike Knoff, engineering and construction; and Steve Eggers, regulatory, are the St. Paul District 2014 civil servants of the year.
Photo by Shannon Bauer

District selects top three civil servants of the year

Story by Shannon Bauer

District staff, friends and family gathered at the Crown Plaza Hotel in St. Paul, Minn., to honor the district's best at the Federal Executive Board's 37th Annual Civil Servant of the Year luncheon.

The award recipients representing the district's 2014 class are; Steve Eggers, regulatory; Mike Knoff, engineering and construction; and Dave Rydeen, engineering and construction. The recipients were selected after a lengthy competition within the district.

"These three outstanding individuals exemplify the spirit, dedication to mission, and professionalism that will continue to move the district from good to great," said Maj. Christian Thompson, deputy district engineer "They have clearly made a difference this past year, and I am proud to have the opportunity to serve with each of them."

Steve Eggers

Position Title: regulatory branch senior ecologist
Total Years with St. Paul District: 35
Total Years with Corps of Engineers: 35
Previous Positions/Employment: Sparta Floral Company
Education: Bachelor of Science in biology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Hobbies: Nature photography, English setter bird-dogs, hunting, fishing, camping, WWII war birds
Residence: Burnsville, Minn.
Comments: "In spring 1978, I was a typical college student: broke. I needed a summer job, preferably in my field of interest, biology. As luck would have it, St. Paul District had a cooperative internship program with the university. That summer job evolved into an immensely rewarding career — all the more so because of the great team regulatory branch has had during all these years."

Michael Knoff

Position Title: engineering and construction, hydraulics and hydrology branch chief
Total Years with St. Paul District: 15
Total Years with Corps of Engineers: 29
Previous Positions/Employment: All Corps-- Gavins Point Project operations manager (Omaha District 1995-1999); River and Reservoir Engineering Section chief (Omaha District 1992-1995); hydraulic engineer (Omaha District 1985-1992)
Education: Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in civil engineering
Hobbies: bicycling
Residence: Cottage Grove, Minn.
Comments: "I've spent my entire career with the Corps of Engineers and cannot imagine working in an organization with more dedicated and competent employees. I'm truly honored to be nominated as a civil servant of the year by such an organization."

David Rydeen

Position Title: engineering and construction geotech and geology section chief
Total Years with St. Paul District: 38
Total Years with Corps of Engineers: 38
Education: Bachelor of Science in civil engineering, University of Minnesota 1976; Master of Science in civil engineering, Uinversity of Illinois, 1984
Hobbies: Working at the cabin, barbecuing for family and friends, watching ball games
Residence: Maplewood, Minn.
Comments: "Working for the Corps of Engineers has been a tremendous opportunity to work with a great group of people while helping to improve conditions throughout the district, the region and the country. I have particularly enjoyed working with the recently hired professionals, as they develop expertise to lead into the future."

Curt Larsen, operations, created the Model Vessel Curt Larsen on his personal time, and it will be used to help explain how the district's 13 locks and dams operate.
Click on the photo to view the video on the St. Paul District YouTube website.
Photo by Patrick Moes

Col. Dan Koprowski, St. Paul District commander, left, Jenny Koprowski, and Curt Larsen, operations, celebrate the christening of the Model Vessel Curt Larsen at Lock and Dam 2, near Hastings, Minn., April 16.
Click on the photo to view more photos on the St. Paul District Flickr website.
Photo by Patrick Moes

District welcomes new towboat with a christening ceremony

Story by Shannon Bauer

The district celebrated the arrival of its newest vessel, the Model Vessel Curt Larsen, with a christening ceremony at Lock and Dam 2 in Hastings, Minn., April 16.

Jenny Koprowski, wife of the district commander, Col. Dan Koprowski, sponsored the vessel by breaking a bottle of confetti on the bow. "It was a great honor to be asked to do this," said Koprowski. "I will remember this day for years to come."

The MV Larsen was commissioned as a working boat by the public affairs office in 2013 to assist in the accomplishment of the district's community relations mission. The Larsen will tow demonstration loads in the district's lock model acquired from the Rock Island District. The Larsen is 10 inches long by 5 inches wide with a 1-inch draft. Its flat deck barge is 11.5 inches long by 5.5 inches wide with a 0.5-inch draft. The vessel is not self propelled but manually powered.

It was named after Curt Larsen, district lock operator, who manufactured the boat out of his home in St. Paul, Minn., on his own time and at his own expense. Larsen created the vessel to be able to float in the lock model and withstand being played with by thousands of children for a number of years.

"We felt the best way to thank Larsen for his work was to name the vessel after him," said George Stringham, public affairs. "We are grateful for his efforts because the previous boat used to sink."

The district's lock model, where the vessel will be used, received a facelift from Lock and Dam 1 operators Sam Mathiowetz and Amy Thomas in preparation for receiving the Larsen. Mathiowetz repaired the model's seepage issues, and Thomas gave it a new paint job.

Regulatory 101: Science, people and America's waters

Story by Shannon Bauer

"When everybody is equally unhappy, we probably did our job right," joked Tamara Cameron, regulatory branch chief. "Nobody ever says, 'Thank you for making me get this permit.'

"Some of the special interest groups believe we don't go far enough in protecting wetlands," she added. "Some of the developers believe we go too far."

Constant conflict, never ending challenges and a tremendous volume of work does not always make for a fun job but being in regulatory does have its rewards. Serving the public and preserving wetlands in and of itself is rewarding, said Cameron.

The regulatory branch is funded separately and works independently from other departments in the district; but in recent years, there has been more interaction between regulatory and the rest of the district. The reason for this, explained Cameron is that with the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement getting more complicated, regulatory staff are more often reaching out to other areas of expertise within the district, such as hydraulics and hydrology. Additionally, a number of the support offices, such as Office of Counsel, provide ongoing assistance to the branch.

The regulatory mission includes protecting the nation's aquatic

Tom Hingsberger, regulatory, talks about wetland impacts of a proposed project during a public meeting in Duluth, Minn., Jan. 16.
Photo by Patrick Moes

Brad Johnson, regulatory, talks about cultural resources impacts of a proposed project during a public meeting in Aurora, Minn., Jan. 22.
Photo by Patrick Moes

Tamara Cameron, regulatory chief, oversees the Corps' regulatory requirements in Minnesota and Wisconsin.
Photo by Shannon Bauer

resources while allowing reasonable development through fair, flexible and balanced permit decisions. They manage the nation's permits under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. Under Section 404, a Corps permit is required for the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. Under Section 10, a Corps permit is required to do any work in, over or under a navigable water of the United States.

The regulator's role is to take the permit from cradle to grave, said Cameron. This could mean everything from determining jurisdiction, reviewing wetland delineations, determining wetland boundaries, reviewing the application, minimizing and mitigating wetland impacts and enforcing permit requirements.

Cameron currently has a staff of 53; 60 when all the positions are filled. These individuals work in the district's headquarters building and at eight field sites and serve the people of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Their workload is consistently in the top five for all 38 districts and is comparable in size and scope with Alaska and Jacksonville districts. On average, they complete around 6,000 regulatory actions a year.

Cameron is the only engineer in her branch. Most of the people who work in regulatory are biologists, ecologists, geologists, natural resource managers or natural scientists. What is nice about working in regulatory, she said, is that there is a clear career progression from entry level to chief. "You can start right out of school, or even in school as a student intern," she said. "One of our entry level positions is the environmental protection technician, or EPT, which ranges from GS-5 to GS-7. They are absolutely indispensable to our work." Both graduating college students and EPTs with a qualifying degree can apply for a regulatory project manager position, which ranges from GS-7 to GS-11, and then senior project managers or senior ecologists, which are at the GS-12 level. "There are regulatory offices across the country, and many, to include the St. Paul District, are recruiting right now," said Cameron. "Plus, it is a field that continues to grow."

Cameron herself started with another agency, the Department of the Navy, right out of school. She did environmental compliance work for the Navy and the Marines, including waters and wetland permitting, and served a short stint with the Federal Highways Administration providing environmental support, prior to joining the Corps in 2002. She came to the St. Paul District as a senior project manager to oversee a permit application by the Crandon Mining Company. When that review ended, she took a variety of assignments from Robert Whiting, regulatory chief, until she was selected to replace him when he retired in 2009. "I thought I knew a lot about

The sky is reflected on the water of a deep marsh.
Click on the photo to visit the St. Paul District's webpage devoted to American Wetlands Month.
Photo by Steve Eggers

Seagulls and pelicans prepare to land on water that is part of a wetland.
Photo by Steve Eggers

Doug Bruner, regulatory, talks with a private citizen during a public meeting in Aurora, Minn., Jan. 22.
Photo by Patrick Moes

Wetlands have many positive impacts on the environment to include flood risk reduction and habitat.
Photo by Steve Eggers

the permitting process by obtaining permits, but you don't realize just how much there is to know until you actually do the permitting," she said. "There is so much more to know than just regulations – there are decades of court decisions, memorandums to the field, guidance documents and additional federal requirements. There are a lot of rules and regulations to comply with.

"The regulatory environment is also a lot more complicated now than it was at the beginning of the Clean Water Act," she continued. "It's never stagnant, and the rate of change has been at a rapid pace, especially since 2008, mainly because of a number of court cases and rule changes."

In order to be a successful regulator, Cameron said her staff needs to have a combination of technical, interpersonal and project management skills. "They deal with people from all different socio-economic and professional backgrounds and levels of sophistication in terms of understanding the permitting process," said Cameron. "They also deal with people from a number of different agencies and Congressional offices. It's a challenging job. The exceptional workload per project manager requires juggling a lot of competing priorities. They spend a lot of time telling people what they can and can't do with aquatic resources, so they have to deal with a lot of conflict in their daily workload."

Cameron said her staff is particularly good at dealing with the public and being able to explain the permit process in a way that is easy to understand. "The staff really does great work, and they don't often get recognition for it," she said. "In fact, there seems to be a culture of taking pride in never getting recognized." Lately, however, a few of them have been called out. The last three Mississippi Valley Division Don Lawyer nominees were all St. Paul District regulators. This particular award recognizes the Corps regulator of the year. Tim Smith, was also selected as the national recipient.

A Corps regulator's life: Challenges and opportunities

Story by Steve Eggers

Corps regulators have many duties and responsibilities. They work with federal laws, including the Clean Water Act; Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, National Environmental Policy Act; Endangered Species Act; and National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Effectively implementing these rules requires training and experience.

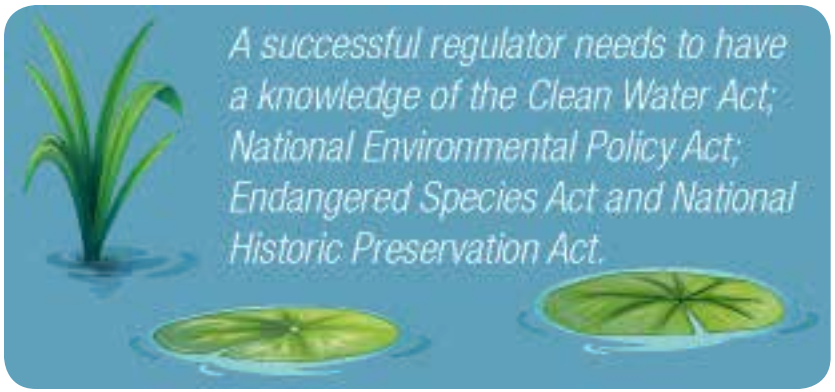
The dominant day-to-day focus is implementing Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, which regulates discharges of dredged and fill materials in waters of the United States. This not only includes rivers and lakes, but also wetlands. Projects requiring these permit authorizations include highway construction, residential and commercial development, flood damage reduction projects, agricultural improvements, mining, commercial cranberry facilities and wetland restoration. Minnesota and Wisconsin are wetland-rich states – approximately 10.6 million acres and 5.4 million acres, respectively.

St. Paul District regulators spend about 90 percent of their day on wetland issues: delineating wetlands, determining the extent of Section 404 jurisdiction, evaluating wetland functions, identifying alternatives to minimize wetland impacts, assessing potential wetland impacts, and reviewing compensatory mitigation to offset unavoidable wetland losses. To do this, a Corps regulator needs to be proficient in, for example, interpreting aerial photography, soils mapping and topographic mapping using tools such as GIS. Delineating wetlands (i.e., identifying the boundary between wetlands and non-wetlands) requires a special set of skills involving application of "field indicators" in accordance with the *Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual (*1987) and regional supplements.

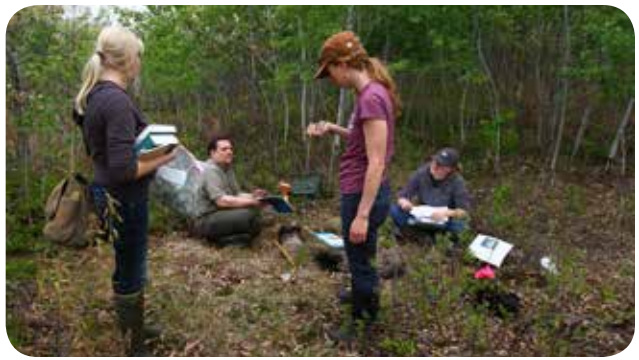
The St. Paul District oversees a large system of wetland mitigation banks, which are generally larger acreage wetland mitigation sites constructed in advance of wetland impacts. In accordance with the Federal Mitigation Rule (2008), proposed mitigation bank site reviews involve a formal interagency review team with a Corps regulator as the chair. Siting, specifications in design, planting, performance standards, monitoring and long-term legal protection are scrutinized for each bank site proposal.

Senior Corps regulators serve as instructors for courses in wetland delineation, hydric soils, compensatory wetland mitigation and wetland plant identification. The St. Paul District has provided instructors for courses presented by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse and the University of Minnesota Wetland Delineator Certification Program.

At the national level, district regulators serve as a member of both the National Advisory Team for Wetland Delineation and the National Technical Committee for Wetland Vegetation. The former has drafted a new edition of the Corps wetland delineation manual, while the latter has provided guidance on implementation of the National Wetland Plant List.



Graphic by Wendy Medlin



District regulators practice wetland delineations.
Photo by Steve Eggers

District and state regulators discuss wetland delineations during a training exercise.
Photo by Steve Eggers

Wetlands provide more than scenic views of nature

Story by Patrick Moes

Have you ever wondered what wetlands actually do for society or the environment?

Barbara Walther, senior ecologist, said these areas, a place between water and land, provide value to both communities and Mother Nature. She said wetlands support many benefits that range from habitat for plants and animals to water purification. "Wetlands provide a number of functions on the landscape," she said. "Some of them are important to people directly, and a number of them are important just because of the function they provide."

Those functions can be seen on a daily basis. Walther said one of the major roles of wetlands is water quality. "Wetlands are nature's coffee filter," she said. Polluted water can enter a wetland system; and, through the processes in the wetland, it can come out fairy clean. Walther said cleaner water means there is less of a need to treat water for drinking purposes, and it helps to provide for a better overall ecosystem. "The treatment is minimized because of the wetlands," she said.

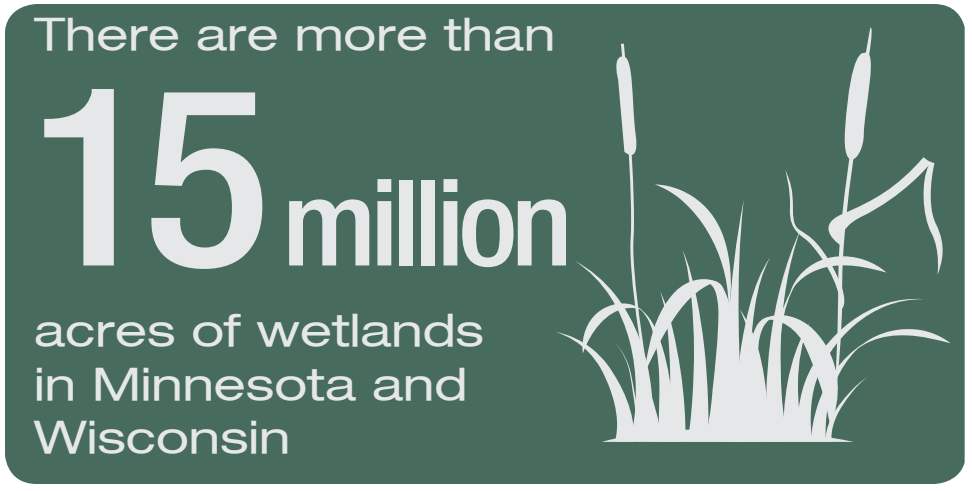
In addition to clean water, wetlands provide other valuable benefits to both the environment and society. Walther said wetlands provide flood management and storage. She said during times of flooding, wetlands act like a sponge and absorb waters that would otherwise impact rivers and communities downstream. She added that wetlands can store excess flood flows, reducing impacts to the environment and communities living near wetlands.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, "An acre of wetland can store 1–1.5 million gallons of floodwater. The ability of wetlands to store floodwaters reduces the risk of costly property damage and loss of life—benefits that have economic value to us."

Wildlife is also another resource that receives value from wetlands. Often referred to as the nurseries of nature, "75 percent of commercially harvested fish are wetland-dependent. Add shellfish species and that number jumps to 95 percent," according to the EPA. Walther said many animals use wetlands not only for raising their young and protecting them, but also for the food sources found within these unique ecosystems.

A carex lacustris is a type of wetland plant found in the Upper Midwest.
Photo by Steve Eggers

An arethusa bulbosa, commonly referred to as the dragon's mouth orchid, is a rare wetland plant.
Photo by Steve Eggers



Graphic by Wendy Medlin

Graphic by Wendy Medlin

Tim Smith, regulatory, left, discusses regulatory reports with Jill Batke, former Corps regulator, May 22, 2012.
Photo by Bianca Jones

Corps, partners develop plan to protect wetlands

Story by Patrick Moes

Northeast Minnesota is known for its views of Lake Superior, outdoor recreation opportunities, the call of the loon and its pristine wetlands.

More than 80 percent of the wetlands in this region have been untouched since Minnesota earned statehood in 1858. With so many wetlands unchanged, a major challenge has developed for the Corps of Engineers and its partners. The Corps requires permit applicants to replace wetland functions that are lost or degraded during the construction of a project with at least an equal amount of wetland functions within the same watershed or to the fullest extent possible.

Despite the goal of compensatory wetland mitigation within the watershed, Tim Smith, regulatory technical services section chief, said permittees have had difficulties finding suitable locations due to the lack of damaged or destroyed wetlands within the region that typically provide opportunities for improving or adding to wetland functions. An interagency report, "Siting of Wetland Mitigation in Northeast Minnesota" was recently authored by the members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency; the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. The report will be used by the agencies as a tool to work together to protect the wetlands within the region.

Smith said the report is the culmination of a coordinated effort for improving wetland compensatory mitigation to better serve the public and the environment. The joint approach outlined in the report recognizes the need to offset potential wetland losses in the region from a watershed perspective that focuses on the unique wetland characteristics associated with northeastern Minnesota. Further, he said, the report focuses on the ultimate goal of restoring wetlands that provide the greatest ecological benefit to the region and the state.

Tamara Cameron, district regulatory chief, added that this report "represents a huge step in the right direction for a coordinated interagency approach to wetland mitigation in Minnesota."

The report authors provided several recommendations to improve wetland mitigation while maintaining the ecological integrity of northeast Minnesota watersheds. Key recommendations are:

- Clarification of wetland mitigation search criteria;
- Alternative mitigation options in northeast Minnesota;
- Revisions to wetland mitigation siting criteria; and
- Program improvement.

Watershed planning offers hope to challenging problems

Story by Shannon Bauer

The district recently finished one of its first comprehensive watershed reports, the Sunrise Watershed Study, solely for environmental purposes and the benefit of watershed managers.

Previous watershed studies focused mostly on the end product being a Corps' project, said Elliot Stefanik, district biologist.

The district initiated the study in 2008 in partnership with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Minnesota's Chisago County. The goal of the study included developing a report that local watershed officials could use to lower the Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMLD, of phosphorus for the Sunrise and, ultimately, the St. Croix River, of which the Sunrise is a tributary.

Encompassing more than 360 square miles, the Sunrise River basin is located near portions of four east-central Minnesota counties – Isanti, Anoka, Washington and Chisago. After flowing into the St. Croix River, one of the first eight river systems in the country to be designated as a national treasure and given protection under the Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Sunrise water ends up in the Mighty Mississippi.

According to a 1999 study completed by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Corps, the Sunrise River contributes the highest phosphorus and sediment levels to the St. Croix River. Recognizing the importance of the study and the need to protect the watershed, the district and its partners used a model developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to simulate base conditions in the watershed and then changed the conditions to see what changes could make the biggest improvements.

Stefanik said the report, available on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's website, makes a number of recommendations that are better suited to state or local agencies for implementation.

"What we found in the study is that the local communicates will need to make major changes to the landscape to make a difference to the TMLD," he said. "They have some big challenges to overcome and some hard decisions to make."

Stefanik said he believes there is a need for more watershed studies like this, and he hopes the Corps will do more of them in the future. "The Corps has a lot of good people that can help look at some of these wider watershed problems and hopefully contribute to finding some solutions."

Elliot Stefanik, planning, collects water samples from the Sunrise River during a site visit to the watershed in 2010.

Photo by Shannon Bauer

Floodplain forests provide habitat, recreation and mitigation

Story by Patrick Moes

The St. Paul District environmental stewardship section has been busy lately planting trees near Bay City, Wis.

The reforestation project began as a way to mitigate floodplain forest and wetlands that were lost due to the nearly $70 million dollars in renovations to Lock and Dam 3, near Red Wing, Minn. The project greatly improved navigation safety, but the construction forced the district to remove about 70 acres of wetlands, said Tom Novak, Lock and Dam 3 project manager.

Ray Marinan, St. Paul District natural resources specialist, said the forest mitigation project is all about providing a diverse floodplain forest which will benefit both society and the environment. He said the land where trees are now growing was used for agriculture just a few years ago. He said the young forest was planted in two phases and there are already signs of progress. "We're interested not only in producing trees and making a forest here, but we're looking at the benefits of that for wildlife so we also try to plant a food source," said Marinan.

In another area of the reforestation project, Marinan cleared debris from a bird's nest located within a red oak tree He pointed out that the project is already creating habitat for nesting birds. "That's proof that our work is having a positive benefit already," he said. "In just the few has had a lot of interest from the public. It didn't take for people to realize that 'hey there is public land that we use and access.'"

While the forest is well on its way to becoming suitable habitat for a variety of trees and animals, as well as providing outdoor recreation opportunities to the public, Marinan said many people were involved in making the project possible. From Corps of Engineers navigation specialists, planners, project managers, environmental and regulatory specialists, to partner agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, everyone has been focused on watching the forest mature into its own ecosystem.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District manages about 25,000 acres of land along the Mississippi River. For more information, please visit the St. Paul District website.

Ray Marinan, natural resources, discusses the floodplain forest mitigation project near Bay City, Wis., April 8.
Click on the photo to watch the video on the St. Paul District YouTube website.
Photo by Patrick Moes

Wetlands support flood risk reduction

Story by George Stringham

While wetlands play an important role in providing habitat for a myriad of species and serve as a filter for aquifers, they also play an important role in reducing the impacts of floods.

Wetlands act as natural buffers. They slow and absorb significant amounts of floodwaters, and it all helps reduces the frequency and intensity of floods.

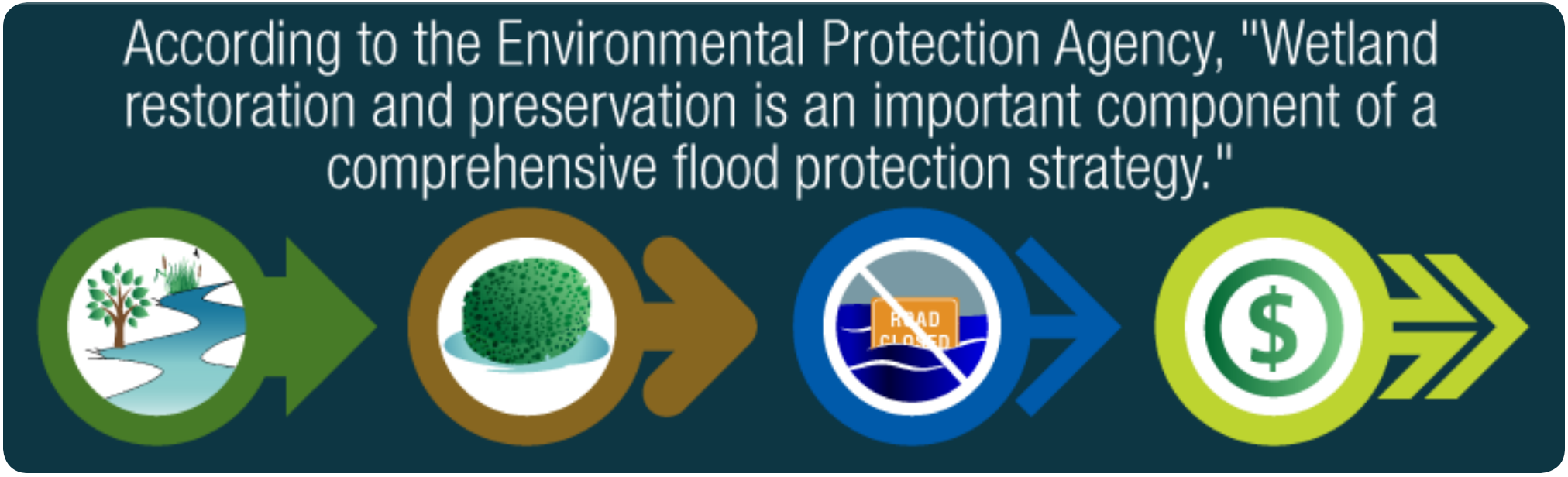
Since flooding, both inland and coastal, is the most common natural hazard in the United States, wetlands play an integral role in managing this risk, particularly through planning approaches that consider the entire watershed.

"When people think of wetlands, they often think of the habitat they provide to wildlife and recreation opportunities they provide to humans," said Jeff Olson, regulatory branch section chief. "Many wetlands act like sponges, absorbing rainfall and controlling its release into streams and rivers."

A strong argument can also be made that the most significant economic benefit wetlands provide is flood control and management. A study by the Wetlands Initiative concluded that restoring wetlands along the 100-year flood plain of the Upper Mississippi River could increase storage capacity to 39 million acre-feet of flood water. This is a similar volume to the Mississippi Flood of 1993 that caused $16 billion in damages.

In coastal regions, wetlands also significantly mitigate the impacts of storm surges and waves. The nation's vital gulf coastal landscape and associated infrastructure experienced crippling damage as a result of wind, tidal surge, and flood related impacts during the 2005 hurricane season.

Whatever the reasons for protecting and restoring our wetlands, whether it is to provide habitat for wildlife, improve water quality or provide recreational opportunities, our wetlands are an important part of our ecology, concluded Olson.



Graphic by Wendy Medlin

Brad Labadie, operations, left, and Bob Ayotte, real estate, passed out more than 100 water safety packets during a fishing tournament in Excelsior, Minn., April 26.
Photo by George Stringham

Brad Labadie, operations, right, helps a young kid learn how to drive a boat during a fishing tournament in Excelsior, Minn., April 26.
Click on the photo to see more images on the St. Paul District Flickr website.
Photo by George Stringham

Kids learn about safety while driving boats, catching fish

Story by George Stringham

A few district employees had a captive audience during a fishing contest at the Bayside Marina on Lake Minnetonka, in Excelsior, Minn., April 26.

The staff used the opportunity to talk about the importance of water and boating safety while also supporting the Victoria Lions Club. The club hosted its third annual crappie contest, a fund raising event with proceeds helping to send 15 children to the American Diabetes Association's Camp Needlepoint in Hudson, Wis., for a week this summer.

The cool morning air didn't hold the kids back, either. The fishing contest wasn't scheduled to begin until 11 a.m., but children were lined up at 10:30 a.m., waiting their turn to learn about water and boating safety.

"The hook we had to get them interested was our little, electric boat," said Brad Labadie, park ranger at Eau Galle Recreation Area in Spring Valley, Wis., and a district water safety expert. "Teaching water and boating safety at an early age is so important, and if we can do it in a way that is enjoyable or memorable, that's even better. We hope that they will take this [message] and pass it on to friends and family."

The fishing contest went from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. During the event, more than 100 water safety packets were handed out and nearly 70 kids operated the district's water safety boat. Labadie said he taught the kids a wide range of boating and water safety tips while also enjoying a short excursion on the bay.

Labadie wasn't alone in delivering his water safety messages. Eight members of the Victoria Lions Club, the contest's sponsor, volunteered to help specifically with the water safety program.

"I am very fortunate to have a Corps family that sees the importance of support to the community with action, not just words," stated Bob Ayotte, real estate specialist and member of the Lions Club. "Brad [Labadie] is a case in point, a deliberate professional who smiles the entire time he's giving!"

The district works throughout the recreation season with fun, interactive programs to educate the public, ranging from young children through adults, on the importance of enjoying water resources safely and the importance of always wearing a life jacket or some sort of flotation device.

After countless polar vortexes, first tow reaches St. Paul, Minn.

Story by Patrick Moes

The district welcomed the first tow of the year to St. Paul, Minn., April 16.

Corps lock operators locked the Motor Vessel Angela K through Lock and Dam 2, near Hastings, Minn., around 5 p.m., with 12 barges.

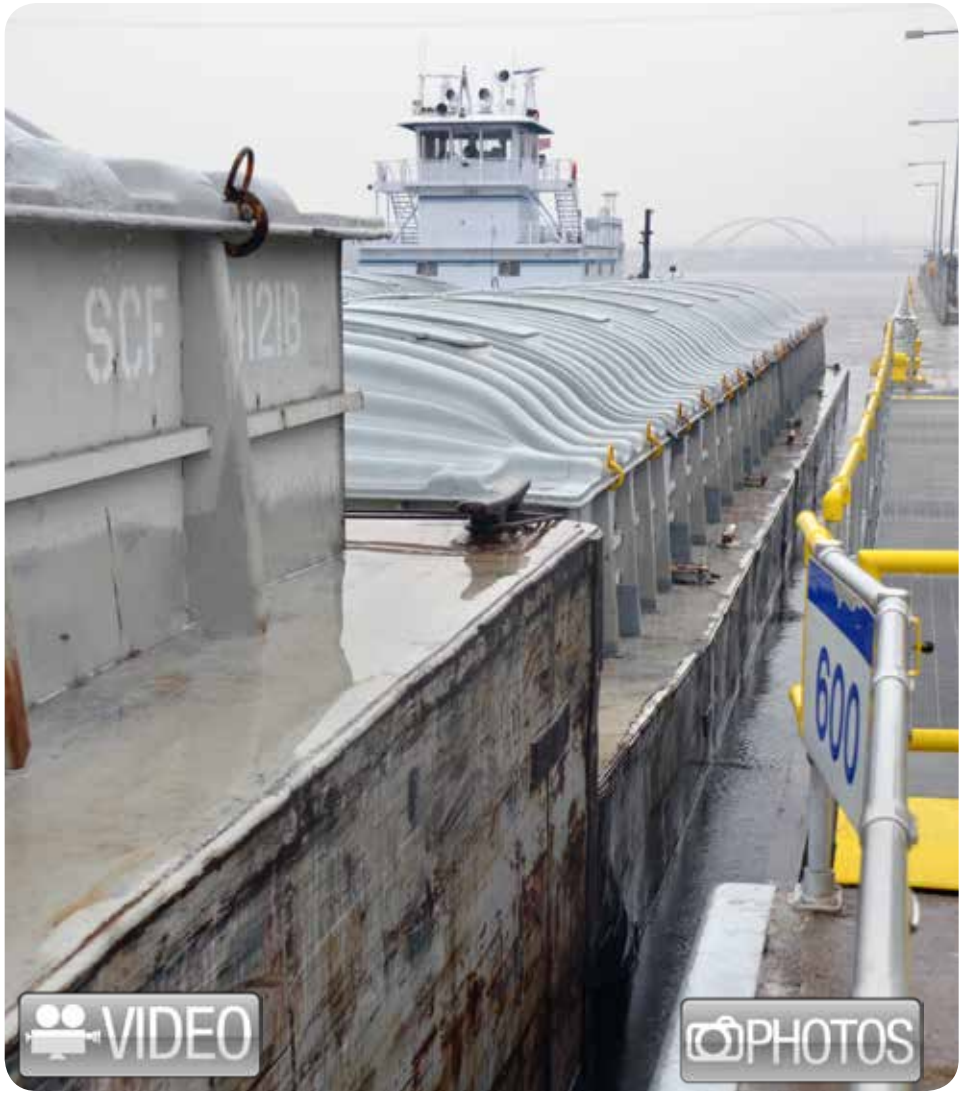
Col. Dan Koprowski, district commander, said the first lock to reach St. Paul signifies the unofficial start of spring for the Upper Midwest. With the arrival of the first tow to Lock and Dam 2, all 13 locks and dams along the Mississippi River within the St. Paul District boundaries are now accessible to commercial and recreation vessels.

"It's a commercial resource, it's a recreational resource, it provides an enormous economic benefit, but it's also a quality of life issue,"
Col. Dan Koprowski, St. Paul District commander

Kristin Moe, operations, said the arrival of the M/V Angela K is the latest non-flood related start to navigation in St. Paul since 1970. She said March 22 is the average start to navigation in St. Paul.

While the start to the navigation season is more than three weeks later than average, Koprowski said the inland navigation system is in many ways a national treasure. "It moves goods and services in a much more economical and environmentally friendly and sustainable way," he said, adding that more than 11 million tons of commodities were moved within the district during the 2013 navigation season.

Koprowski said that while navigation is one of the primary missions for the St. Paul District, the Mississippi River adds a lot in terms of economic value to the region. He said the 13 locks and dams from Minneapolis to Lock and Dam 10 in Guttenberg, Iowa, provide an important resource to the communities along the river. "It's a commercial resource, it's a recreational resource, it provides an enormous economic benefit, but it's also a quality of life issue," he said. "The river is an important part of people's lives here on the Upper Mississippi and our locks and dams are a part of that."



The Motor Vessel Angela K locked through Lock and Dam 2, near Hastings, Minn., April 16. The tow boat was the first vessel to reach St. Paul, Minn., during the 2014 navigation season, and it means that each of the district's 13 locks and dams on the Mississippi River are now accessible to both commercial and recreation vessels.
Click on the video and photo buttons to view more content
Photo by Patrick Moes

District retires Grand Forks, N.D., office

Story by Shannon Bauer

After more than 15 years of maintaining a presence in Grand Forks, N.D., the St. Paul District closed its doors there recently for the last time.

With the completion of the $450 million flood control project for Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, Minn., in 2007 and the moving of the district's western area office from Grand Forks to Fargo, N.D., in 2012, the district decided closing the Grand Forks office made sense. "The office served its purpose extremely well but now lacks sufficient projects to finance its long-term viability," said Jim Peak, construction chief. "The Grand Forks office space lease was expiring this year, and we were facing relocation in any event. This was the logical time to take action on the closure.

"The closure was primarily driven by economic realities, similar to those faced widely across government today," he continued. "As the scope and funding of our construction has decreased, we must reduce costs."

The district opened the Grand Forks Western Area Office in 1998 to oversee district work in the region. The Grand Forks resident office, co-located with the western area office, was opened a year later to directly oversee construction in Grand Forks and its surrounding area. With the massive amount of effort needed to complete the flood control project there, the district also opened an East Grand Forks Resident Office in 2001.

Virginia Regorrah, former East Grand Forks resident engineer, said, at its peak, the western area office had five resident offices and 37 people. "The office was down-sized through a variety of personnel actions, including retirements, early retirements, non-renewal of temporary employees and students and completion of contracts for quality assurance specialists," she said. "Among the permanent employees, a small number moved to other locations in the St. Paul District. Most found other employment both inside and outside the federal government."

Peak said the district continues to oversee its western area work out of its new western area office in Fargo. "It's never easy to move, but we are excited about future possibilities in the Fargo area," he said. "We will be well positioned to transition into the Fargo-Moorhead challenge if the project is authorized and funded."

Maj. Christian Thompson, deputy district engineer, right, presents a certificate of achievement to Ann Mershon, civilian personnel chief, and her staff, at the district office in St. Paul, Minn., April 23. ***Photo by Shannon Bauer***

Personnel office among the best in the Army

Story by Shannon Bauer

The St. Paul District civilian personnel office received some great news recently.

The office, led my Ann Mershon, received the highest customer satisfaction results for their type of office within the entire U.S. Army.

Maj. Christian Thompson, deputy district commander, presented the staff with the certificate of achievement April 23. The personnel staff include Jolene Haines, Tyree Cobb, Connie Gholson, Ann Mershon and Warren Obar.

Editor's Note

Do you have news you want to share with the district? Send your announcements of births, weddings, graduations, etc., to *Crosscurrents.* cemvp-pa@usace.army.mil.

Taps

Steve Sing, passed away Feb. 21. Services were held Feb. 26 at the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Fountain City, Wis. Sing worked in the channels and harbors section in Fountain City.

Congratulations

•Congratulations **Bobby Jackson**, natural resources, and his wife, **Samantha Rose Wright Jackson**, on their marriage April 26 in Birmingham, Ala.
•Congratulations **Brandon Olson**, operations, and his wife, **Julie Hansen**, on their marriage April 13 in Onalaska, Wis.
•Congratulations **Kat McCain**, planning, on the addition of a new member into the family April 30. **Carya McCain** was 5 lbs., 15 ozs.
•Congratulations **Judy Denzer**, operations, and **John Perry**, operations, on their selection to participate in the Lockmaster Leadership Development Program.
•Congratulations **Joe Lakey**, operations, on his selection to head lock and dam operator at Lock and Dam 7, near La Crescent, Minn.; **BJ Nissalke**, operations, on his selection to head lock and dam operator at Lock and Dam 8, near Alma, Wis.; and **Eric Thiese**, operations, on his selection to head lock and dam operator at Lock and Dam 10, near Guttenberg, Iowa.
•Congratulations **Keith Schindler**, operations, on his selection to lock and dam operator at Lock and Dam 7, near La Crescent, Minn.
•Congratulations **Nick Nomer**, operations, and his wife, **Karen**, on the birth of their daughter, **Reese Anna Domer**, March 6. She was 6 lbs., 3 ozs., and 17.5 inches.

•Congratulations **Jane Flewellen**, engineering and construction, and her husband, **Jared**, on the birth of **Hudson William Flewellen,** April 24. He was 8 lbs., 4ozs., and 21 inches.

•Congratulations **Bob Edstrom**, project management, and his wife, **Christiania**, on the birth of their son, **Robert George Edstrom**, March 29. He was 5 lbs., 15 ozs., and 18.5 inches.

Seasonal/New Hires

Jarrod Brown, lock and dam operator, Lock and Dam 5, Minnesota City, Minn.
David Francksen, survey technician, operations, Fountain City, Wis.
Victoria Whitehead, administrative assistant, project management, district office.
Greg Larson, ecologist and rehired annuitant, operations, district office.
Tyree Cobb, Jr., human resources assistant, civilian personnel office, district office.
Lisa Buchli, civil engineer, engineering and construction, district office.
John Dehnke, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 8, Genoa, Wis.
Joel Hermann, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 4, Alma, Wis.
Tyson Martin, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 10, Guttenberg, Iowa.
Steven Sulflow, maintenance, operations, Watson, Minn.
Alex Webb, attorney, office of counsel, district office.
Melanie Nelson, regulatory program assistant, operations, district office.
Evan Stewart, economist, planning, St. Louis.
Aaron Brown, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 6, Trempealeau, Wis.
Evan Stewart, geologist, planning, Rock Island, Ill.

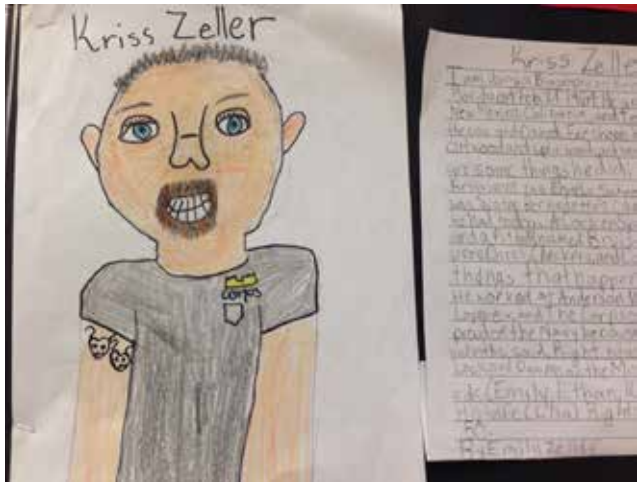
Retirements

Gregory Baecker, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 4, Alma, Wis.
Rodney Berg, Jr., lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 7, La Crescent, Minn.
Marlene Blevins, administrative assistant, executive office, district office.
Daniel Boone, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 8, Genoa, Wis.
Kenneth Fleshner, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 9, Lynxville, Wis.
Patrick Foley, civil engineer, engineering and construction, district office.
Gregory Kann, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 10, Guttenberg, Iowa.
Paul Kosterman, civil engineer, project management, district office.
Vern Reiter, safety specialist, district office.
Linda Krueger, human resources officer, civilian personnel office, district office.
Michael Ott, lock and dam operator, operations, Lock and Dam 7, La Crescent, Minn.
Greg Sherwood, staff accountant, resource management, district office.

Honoring military service

Kriss Zeller, Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam head operator, was recently highlighted by his daughter, Emily who is in 3rd grade, with a biography and artistic drawing that is on display at the Paperjack Elementary School in New Richmond, Wis. Zeller served in the U.S. Navy 21 years as a boatswain's mate.

Courtesy photo



A photo and story about Kriss Zeller by his daugter, Emily.

Photo by Marsha Mose

Staff supports Habitat for Humanity

Teri Alberico, left, readiness operations center; Shua Xiong, project management; Chris Erickson, project management; and Abimbola Agboola, project management, volunteered at a Habitat for Humanity event Feb. 22.

Courtesy photo

Hole-in-one

Barbara Walther, regulatory, shot a hole-in-one at Loggers Trail Golf Course in Stillwater, Minn., May 13.

Courtesy photo

Sprinting to the finish

Mark Theis, Army Corps of Engineers Information Technology, and his daughter, Ashley, completed the Run or Dye 5-kilometer road race in St. Paul, Minn., April 26.

Courtesy photo

Mark Theis, right, Army Corps of Engineers Information Technology, and his daughter, Ashley.

Regulator recognized for mitigation work

Chris Knotts, regulatory

Chris Knotts, regulatory, was recently recognized by the Federal Highway Administration for his work on the Moses Creek Mitigation Site project, near Stevens Point, Wis.

According to the award citation, several government agencies, to include the district, partnered to restore the wetlands in an urban community using innovative and collaborative approaches that included student involvement, environmental education courses, recreational access and interpretive signage.

Courtesy photo