

New England District team commemorates Surry Mountain Lake Dam's 75th anniversary

By Ann Marie R. Harvie, USACE New England District

For the last 75 years, Surry Mountain Lake Dam in Surry, New Hampshire has stood at the ready to protect New Hampshire residents from flooding. The District team members who operate the project held a 75th anniversary event on October 1 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., to commemorate the opening of the dam.

“Among the participants that came to the event was a gentleman that worked at Surry Dam in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s,” said Park Ranger Eric Chouinard. “He shared some of his stories and experiences with us.”

During the event, Chouinard and Park Ranger Alicia Lacrosse each gave a presentation.

“The first was a history presentation,” said Chouinard. “I discussed life in the small town of Surry before the dam’s construction, a brief overview of the history of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the highly important Flood Control Act of 1936 which paved the way for the construction of Surry Dam, the reasoning behind why the town of Surry was chosen as the location for a flood control dam as opposed to other locations in Cheshire County, a brief history with pictures of the flood of 1936 and the hurricane of 1938, which both contributed to the construction of the Surry Dam.”

Chouinard’s presentation also featured many historical construction photos. A presentation on invasive plants was given by Lacrosse.

“The invasive presentation identified many of the species of local interest, such as Glossy Buckthorn, Japanese Knotweed, Autumn Olive and Eurasian Milfoil,” said Chouinard. “The presentation also discussed common techniques for the management and prevention of continued spreading of invasives on project lands, including the use of herbicides.”

Later in the day, Project Manager John Asseng and Park Ranger Christie Baker gave guided tours inside the Surry Gatehouse.

“The tours allowed participants to view the emergency standby gate and gain information about how Flood Damage Reduction Operations are conducted within the local watershed,” said Chouinard. “In addition, they received information regarding the historic floods of record at Surry Dam.”

The single largest storage event in the dam’s lifetime occurred in 1987 which also saw the only emergency spillway channel release in 75 years, according the Chouinard. “The second highest pool of record occurred in 2005 but did not reach spillway crest,” he said.

New England District records show that construction began in August in 1939 and was completed in October 1941. An opening ceremony took place in June 1942. Harry Lawton served as first damtender for the project. The \$2.8 million project consists of an earth fill dam with stone slope protection, 1,800-foot-long, 86-feet-high. The dam has a capacity of 10.6 billion gallons of water. Since its completion, the dam has prevented \$149.5 million in damages.

Karl Hakala, the Upper Connecticut River Basin Operations Manager, participated in the event.