



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Michael Connor, center right, discusses project details with Navajo Nation representatives Aug. 29 near Birdsprings, Arizona. The M71 bridge is one of 12 project sites selected to be part of a pilot program that partners the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with economically disadvantaged communities.

Army announces 12 projects in disadvantaged communities

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

BIRDSPRINGS, Ariz. — The responsibility of taking care of her disabled mother, tending to livestock and the fear of the constant flooding that may arrive with the next monsoon season weighs heavily on Brittanny Taylor, a Navajo Nation Birdsprings Chapter resident.

“Flooding in the last few years has been catastrophic for us,” Taylor said. “This past spring thaw, we got hit 13 times, lasting four months, flooding 24/7.”

For more than a decade, the Navajo Nation’s Birdsprings community has experienced signifi-

cant flooding during heavy rainfall, due to sediment and debris accumulation under a bridge that passes over the Little Colorado River in route to the reservation. Floodwaters unable to pass under the bridge, back up into the surrounding community — damaging homes, shutting down roads and putting lives at risk.

On Aug. 29, the community received some welcome news, as Michael Connor, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, announced the chapter’s bridge was selected as the first of 12 projects across the nation that will be 100-percent federally funded under a new pilot program.

Connor was in Arizona to bring the news to Navajo Nation, as well as announce the other 11 projects selected for the program during an event at the Birdsprings Chapter’s community center.

“Today’s event was an announcement of the initial projects selected under a pilot program, which allows us to do small construction projects — less than \$15 million — for economically disadvantaged communities,” Connor said. “We need to ensure all communities across the U.S. are treated equally, have the same access to

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WHITTIER NARROWS
NATURE CENTER

NATURE CENTER
CLEAN - UP

VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED

✓ Weeding

✓ Sweeping

✓ Picking Up Litter

✓ Bagging leaves

✓ Raking

What to wear...

✓ Long sleeve shirt

✓ Pants

✓ Sunscreen

✓ Baseball cap or sun hat

✓ Closed toe shoes

Registration on site

Forms provided by WNNC

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2023 Boating Statistics

564 Boating Deaths:

- 87% Not Wearing a Life Jacket
- 75% Operator = No Boating Instruction
- 83% on vessels less than 26 feet in length
- 65% during daytime when visibility was good

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Happy New Fiscal Year, spending time with family, district farewells

Hey, SPL Team! Happy New Year! Fiscal Year 2024 is in the books and fall is officially here (as of Sept. 22). Wow — where did the summer go? I'm actually writing this as we head into fiscal year closeout (not quite there yet — the ball is still on its way down) but want to start the column with a shoutout to the entire SPL team, and particularly to our Resource Management and Contracting teammates. Getting to success on this is no easy task. It takes the entire SPL village pulling in the same direction to make it happen — thanks for doing your part!

September was a GREAT month from my standpoint. Now that my family is here, we're trying to squeeze in as much California

COL. ANDREW BAKER
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

as we can. We started September off with a Labor Day family road trip up to San Francisco. My girls loved the Muir Woods, Pier 39 (saw the sea lions and enjoyed a robot-prepared coffee) and had a lot of fun seeing Alcatraz. We also tried some cioppino (three for four on that — daughter #2 is not a fan of squid), checked out Stanford University and Silicon Valley, and spent some time with Bay Area family. This past weekend we hung out in South Bay and saw Jane Goodall at an event (walking distance from our house!) along with a (sorta) convincing Bono impersonator. Only in LA!

I had a few opportunities to get out and see some of you where you serve

this past month. Our intrepid Deputy District Engineer for Programs and Project Management Justin Gay and I made it to Arizona where we signed two more Arizona 595 project partnership agreements with stakeholders at a great ceremony (and closed out what had been a significant backlog with the final one receiving South Pacific Division approval last week!), got up to Flagstaff to meet with city officials on the Rio de Flag project, and made it out to both Yuma Proving Ground and Fort Huachuca with the SPD commander, Col. James Handura.

It was awesome to see the teams at these far-flung locations (Justin and I put more than 1,000 miles on the rental car!) delivering the program. Big thanks to Rich Fontanilla, Bill Crockett, Jeff Owens and the rest of Arizona team for hosting us. I also got to get out to the Brown Field Border Station for the first time where I got to tour the project and interact with our U.S. Customs and Border Protection customers. To say they are happy with the product out there is an understatement ... although they let me know they are anxious to move in as soon as possible! Big thanks to Eric Strom, Chadi Wahby, Shaun Frost and John Drake for a great tour and follow-on discussion!

This past month we said "so long" to two retiring SPL legends: Planning's Jon Vivanti and Emergency Management's Louis Munoz who, combined, have a total of 89 years of service to the federal government (68 in SPL)! These two are absolute fixtures on the SPL team, and we'll miss them greatly. Speaking of SPL legends, we had a number of great teammates move on this FY and are coincidentally looking to reinvigorate our distinguished civilian recognition program. Look for more on that, and if there's someone you'd like to nominate, please reach out to the awards committee.

I'll wrap this up with a wish to you and yours for a great transition to fall season. Thanks again for your service this past year, take care of each other, and be safe!

Proud to be SPL!

Col. Andrew Baker

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Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Mila Besich, mayor of the City of Superior, and Col. Andrew Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, sign a project partnership agreement under the Section 595 Program Sept. 16 in Phoenix. Projects under the 595 Program may include wastewater treatment and related facilities, water supply and related facilities, environmental restoration, and surface water resource protection and development. USACE can engage in design, construction or both for projects under this program.

Section 595 signing in Arizona

LA District signs agreements with two cities for water infrastructure projects

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PHOENIX — The mayors of Superior and Douglas, Arizona, along with a representative from Congressman Greg Stanton’s office, met with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ officials Sept. 16 in Phoenix to sign project partnership agreements for environmental infrastructure projects in the two cities.

“Securing our state’s water supply and protecting the long-term health of our rivers, including the Colorado, has been one of the congressman’s top priorities,” said Chelsea Rivas, district director for Congressman Stanton’s Office. “This includes making sure communities get support from the federal government to address their water-infrastructure needs.”

The Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure Program provides a federal investment in a states’s critical water infrastructure projects, addressing climate challenges, which include extreme heat, prolonged drought, wildfires and flash flooding.

“I am honored to be here today to sign these very important project partnership agreements under the Section 595 Environmental Infra-

structure Program and to reaffirm our commitment to support and assist communities in Arizona with pressing water-infrastructure needs,” said Col. Andrew Baker, commander of USACE’s Los Angeles District. “These projects bring critically needed infrastructure to water systems throughout the state. Without Section 595 authority, championed by Representative Stanton, we wouldn’t be here today.”

For the town of Superior, east of Phoenix, projects will focus on the Superior Wastewater Treatment Plant, as well as a new pipeline to discharge groundwater from a well into Queen Creek to restore and improve riparian habitats.

“Queen Creek was once a free-flowing creek that flowed continually,” said Superior Mayor Mila Besich. “Due to the degradation of the land and fissures in the earth, the creek rarely flows. This project will allow the town to restore this jewel of the area and attract tourism and wildlife back to this enchanting area.”

For the City of Douglas, a border city south-east of Tucson, the agreement includes support for the city and its \$400-million commercial port of entry. Construction plans include a new well, 500-thousand-gallon storage tank, distri-

bution pumps, a fire-flow pump, treatment system and 8,200-linear-feet of pipe.

“This project partnership agreement will allow the city to quickly contract and construct this critical infrastructure project, which will enhance and stimulate economic development,” said Douglas Mayor Donald Huish. “This signing and execution of the PPA will provide the city with \$1.95 million, when coupled with the nearly \$13.8 million in city, county, state and federal resources, will allow us to build out the port’s water and sewer infrastructure that will be critical to the success of the new and existing port of entry in our growing city.”

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

Both mayors expressed thanks to Stanton’s office for his leadership in the creation of the program.

For more information, visit the [595 Program website here](#).

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funding and receive the same consideration for critical-infrastructure projects. This program is a great example of that priority.”

Section 165(a) of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020, as amended by Section 8118 of WRDA 2022, authorized the Secretary of the Army to implement a pilot program to carry out up to 20 Continuing Authorities Program projects in economically disadvantaged communities, with the purpose of supporting the safety and economic viability of underserved and overburdened communities. The projects are 100-percent federally funded through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from monies received through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Nearly 200 applicants submitted their project proposals for the program. The 12 projects selected will range from environmental restoration to flood-damage protection.

Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, Los Angeles District deputy commander, who also spoke at the event, told the tribe it is because of their dedication and perseverance in advocating for its community that “we are standing here today.”

“We are honored to have this inaugural program in the Los Angeles District; however, it is because of all of you — the Birdsprings Chapter and Navajo Nation — who authored this application that made this opportunity happen,” he said. “We are honored to support you, proud of your selection into this program and are committed to working expeditiously to move this project through the study process and into construction.”

During his visit, Connor toured a flood-impacted area near the bridge, along with tribal leaders and representatives from the LA District.

Samuel McCabe Jr., Birdsprings Chapter president, discussed the challenges his commu-

nity faced with Connor, along with the potential solutions to remove debris and sediment around the bridge, which comes with a heavy price tag.

Under the pilot program, the fully funded project will focus on reducing the flood risk to two primary access roads and residential structures south of the bridge.

“I’m excited for this announcement,” Taylor said. “The unknown of what could happen in the next flood was on all of our minds — our homes, our livelihood and our families were jeopardized by this ongoing issue in the Birdsprings area.

“I would like to thank everyone who is involved with this project. I’m hoping with the Army Corps of Engineers’ help, we don’t have to fear the water anymore. This is going to help my generation and generations to come.”

For more information about the program and to view the selected projects, visit [USACE's website](#).



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Samuel McCabe Jr., Birdsprings Charter president of the Navajo Nation, discusses project details with Michael Connor, assistant secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Aug. 29 near Birdsprings, Arizona. The M71 bridge is one of 12 project sites selected to be part of a pilot program that partners the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with economically disadvantaged communities.

LA District hosts public meeting for Point Vicente Interpretive Center FUDS project

BY STEPHEN BAACK
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

RANCHO PALOS VERDES, Calif. — The Point Vicente Interpretive Center in Rancho Palos Verdes opened its doors for a public meeting Sept. 10 to help determine the way forward on the soil contamination Formerly Used Defense Sites, or FUDS, project.

The center serves as a natural history museum that sits atop a 26-acre parcel of land that previously served as an Army small-arms range from the 1940s through 1974. Along with the museum structures, the property now includes associated infrastructure, trails, parking areas utilities and park land along Rancho Palos Verdes’ ocean-view cliffs.

Although the center first opened in 1984, it was during excavation for a facility expansion in 1999 that officials discovered lead-contaminated soil from the former Army small-arms range, at which time the center was closed to allow for investigation and cleanup.

As the Department of Defense executive agent for FUDS projects, the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers managed the removal of soils containing lead at concentrations above 250 mg/kg, which was the cleanup standard at the time it was completed in 2002. Following the removal action, the facility expansion resumed, after which the Point Vicente Interpretive Center completely reopened in 2006.

USACE uses a risk-management approach to the remediation process, which it conducts in accordance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, or CERCLA. As part of this process, USACE completed a Remedial Investigation in 2024 to characterize site conditions, determine the current nature and extent of contamination and perform human health and ecological risk assessments based on current and reasonably anticipated land use.

“The risk assessment evaluates exposure scenarios and factors such as the current lead concentrations in the soil, as well as current and anticipated land-use to determine the type of receptors that will be present at the site,” said Daniel Huff, environmental specialist

and project manager with the LA District’s FUDS Program.

“There is a land use covenant, or LUC, in place that was established in 2006 between the California Department of Toxic Substances Control and the City of Rancho Palos Verdes,” Huff added. “The LUC restricts the use of the site as a recreational facility and restricts intrusive activities that might expose soils containing low levels of residual lead. Although not part of the risk assessment calculations, the restrictions included in the LUC support a higher level of certainty that the public and workers at the site will not be exposed to soils containing low levels of residual lead.

“Under the CERCLA process,” Huff continued, “based on the findings of the Remedial Investigation, we would develop a Feasibility Study to evaluate alternative remedies if an unacceptable risk was identified. In the case of the Point Vicente Soil Contamination project, the Remedial Investigation determined there was no unacceptable risk to hu-

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Pictured is a view from the Point Vicente Interpretive Center in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, Sept. 10.

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man or ecological receptors from exposure to lead at this site under current and reasonably anticipated land use. Because there is no unacceptable risk, there is no remedy to evaluate, and we moved directly to the proposed plan.”

Based on these findings, the proposed plan proposes “No Further Action.”

“In other words,” Huff said, “there’s no un-

acceptable risk, so there’s no remedy or further cleanup required.”

The Sept. 10 public meeting, one of later stages in the CERCLA process, is where the LA District presented the proposed plan and invited public input before USACE makes its final decision.

Huff said even though USACE works for years with partners and contractors to help make its decision, public input is always a

vital part of the equation.

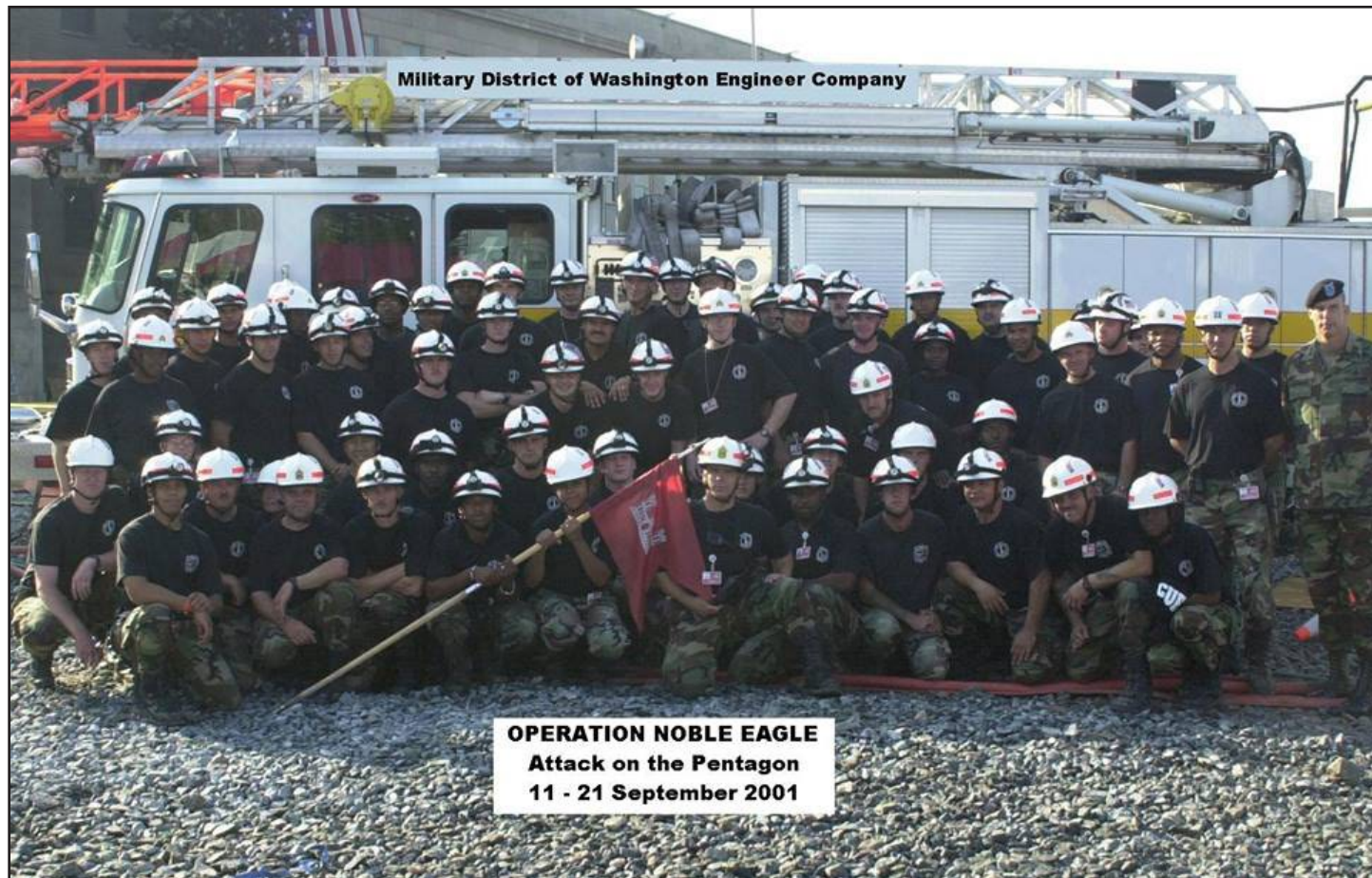
“When I hear a concern expressed by a member of the public, I can put myself in their shoes and can say, ‘Well, I might be concerned about that too,’” Huff said. “It could be that I just need to explain something differently or maybe they’re looking at something in a different way that we hadn’t thought of — which could be a valid consideration that we need to take into account when we make the decision about this.”



LEFT: Daniel Huff, Los Angeles District Formerly Used Defense Sites Program project manager, speaks during the Sept. 10 public meeting at the Point Vicente Interpretive Center in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. RIGHT: The cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean near the Point Vicente Interpretive Center are pictured Sept. 10 in Rancho Palos Verdes.



Patti De La O, program director with contractor BSX, speaks with attendees of a public meeting Sept. 10 at the Point Vicente Interpretive Center in Rancho Palos Verdes, California.



Courtesy of Aaron Barta

Retired Col. Aaron Barta, then a company commander with the Military District of Washington Engineer Company, second row standing, second from right, poses for a picture with his unit in September 2001. The unit was responsible for responding to recovery efforts following the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the Pentagon in Washington D.C. Barta served as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' LA District commander from 2018 to 2020.

Former LA District commander reflects on 23 years since 9/11 recovery effort

BY DENA O'DELL
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

(Editor's note: This story was first published in 2018 and updated Sept. 11, 2024).

LOS ANGELES — It was a Tuesday. Twenty-three years ago.

The day of the week — not the date of the month — stands out the most for retired Col. Aaron Barta.

Tuesday. A planned training day. A normal drive into work.

By mid-morning, all of that would change.

Tuesday would soon alter the course of Barta's life and redefine the next 20 years of his Army career and the nation.

It was Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001. This is his story:

The inside of the building was dark, smoky, damp and hot.

It was still smoldering from the fires that

raged within it just hours before, when Col. Aaron Barta, then a captain and commander of the Military District of Washington Engineer Company, and his team stepped into the battered Pentagon Sept. 11, 2001.

The company's mission was to respond to a terrorist attack in the nation's capital as a search-and-rescue team. What the Soldiers on the team soon realized was their mission would not be one of rescue, but instead, one of recovery.

Barta, who is now the commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, reflected on his own personal experience as the events of that day unfolded — the day that became known as one of the worst terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

As a young, 27-year-old company commander, Barta was listening to the radio on his way to work Sept. 11, 2001, on what he thought would be a normal day. It was Tuesday — a planned training day — and his team was poised

and ready to go.

That's when Barta heard the news. A plane had hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. At first, he thought it was a freak accident. Then, a second plane hit the South Tower. That's when he realized it was not a coincidence and the day would become anything but normal.

It wasn't until Barta arrived at work that he learned about a third plane hitting the Pentagon.

Although his team had trained for such an event — at its own facility at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and with Federal Emergency Management Agency teams in Washington, D.C. — it had never actually had a mission like this, and Soldiers in the company weren't sure if they ever would. However, immediately after the third plane hit, the company was mobilized.

Barta traveled with the advanced team by

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helicopter to Fort Lesley J. McNair in downtown Washington, D.C., while the unit's main body remained at Fort Belvoir for the time being, for fear more attacks on the Washington, D.C. area were possible.

“Once we got over the horizon, above the trees, we could see smoke (from the Pentagon) coming up in the distance,” Barta said.

The scene at the Pentagon was chaotic, he said, with people everywhere — trying to figure out what was going on and how they could help.

The first time the team was allowed into the building to search for victims and to assess the damage was around 2 or 3 p.m., Barta said.

“We entered through the Pentagon from the side with the other fire-and-rescue teams to do an assessment of what was in there,” he said. “What a lot of people don't realize was the internal part of the Pentagon was on fire, which was raging through the building, sparked from the jet fuel (from the plane) and all of the debris. We weren't able to get in there until the fire was put out.”

Not being able to get into the building immediately was frustrating, he said.

“In our minds, we had trained that we were going right into the building to do rescue operations,” Barta said, “and we couldn't because of the fire.

“Not only was there fire smoldering from all of the jet fuel and the equipment, but we had a lot of broken pipes that were spraying out scalding hot water, busted sewer pipes, water from

the fire trucks coming into the Pentagon ... and (the building) was still full of smoke. It was very hot in there, so we had on monitors to tell us if the oxygen was too low. In some places, we weren't able to get too far.”

The team worked throughout the night.

As the Soldiers got closer to the epicenter of the disaster, various stages of what had occurred just hours before began to take shape. The plane hit on the first level of the Pentagon.

“As we walked to the second, third and fourth levels, you could see the various stages of the smoke and heat damage to the building,” he said.

On the third floor, doughnuts sat on a table, uneaten, and purses were abandoned at desks, as employees had tried to flee the building.

“On the fourth floor, people had taken their coats and purses,” he said. “Going to the fifth floor, it looked as if they had just closed up shop.”

After 48 hours, the team's mission was changed to that of recovery. For the next 10 days after the attacks, the Soldiers, along with their counterparts, worked around the clock to methodically remove debris from room-to-room, first with shovels and wheelbarrows, and later with backhoes and machinery.

As a Soldier, preparing for events like this is something he or she trains for, Barta said, but as a human, it's not something a person could ever be prepared to see.

However, his experience during the event helped him gain a better understanding and appreciation of the capabilities of other agencies.

“It was the first time I had been put into a complex, multi-organizational problem,” he said. “Figuring that out during the event helped me understand how you can take multiple organizations that had never worked together and quickly create a single work element. It also was my first exposure to the personal dynamics of human psychology and a stressful environment. I really learned — from senior leaders to people executing on the ground — how they work under stress, and I recognize those (factors). Under stress, it really comes down to human dynamics.”

As he looks back on the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Barta described it as a wakeup call for the nation.

“The day represents a wakeup call that the world order was changing,” he said. “Now it was undeniable that we have to, as a global society, reassess the definition of our values; that values, peace and those types of terms are not universal ... that was the day where people recognized that.”

He also said he saw a nation become more united, with a greater appreciation for its national defense — not just military defense, but also how local emergency responders came to the nation's defense.

“We recognized the importance of the police, fire and medical personnel, what role they play and how much they put themselves at risk,” he said. “I think people took them for granted (before Sept. 11). They are part of our national defense at the local levels; engrained in American values. Recognizing their contributions was probably the most significant thing that came out of it.”

In memory of the Military District of Washington Engineer Company's role in the Sept. 11, 2001, recovery efforts at the Pentagon, the unit was re-designated as the 911th Technical Rescue Engineer Company Sept. 11, 2006. The company is assigned to the 12th Aviation Battalion, Army Aviation Brigade, Military District of Washington.

After serving as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander from 2018 to 2020, Barta is now retired from the military and works as a vice president of business development for a company in Texas.



U.S. Army photo

Recovery teams respond in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the Pentagon in Washington D.C.

Joint press conference



Courtesy photo

Trevor Snyder, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District LA County Drainage Area program manager, speaks during a joint press conference Sept. 4 in Azusa, California. Snyder spoke about the LA District's efforts in collaborating with multiple agencies to clean up homeless encampments along the San Gabriel River over the last three years, as part of the North San Gabriel River Committee. The press conference also included State Senator Susan Rubio and representatives with the cities of Azusa, Duarte and Irwindale, California.

New Employee
Corner:
Kristin Smith

What is your name and title?
Kristin Smith, biologist.

Where are you from?
Peoria, Arizona.

Why did you decide to work for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers?
I enjoyed working with USACE when I was in the private industry and was looking to focus more on projects related to water resources.

What do you like most about your team?
I enjoy the diversity of skill sets most with my team. Everyone has their own niche, but still have enough experience and willingness to learn to take on new tasks and freely share existing knowledge with others.

What do you like most about working for USACE?
USACE has a vast array of opportunities and flexibility to choose the pathway that aligns best with your overall career goals.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Kristin Smith joined the Regional Planning Section of the Environmental Resources Branch on July 1. Her duty station is at the Phoenix office. She comes to us with more than 13 years of experience in environmental resource assessment, permitting and compliance. Kristin has a strong background in wildlife biology and aquatic (freshwater) ecology. Her expertise includes Clean Water Act Sections

401 and 404, including aquatic resources/wetland delineations, Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, California's Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreements, state and federal Endangered Species Act consultations, and biological resources sections required under the National Environmental Policy Act and California Environmental Quality Act. Kristin enjoys fly fishing, bird watching,

running, hiking and snowboarding. She recently started an Arizona freshwater large branchiopod (crustaceans for you non-biologists!) collection to assist with samples needed for various experts in the Southwest. She also holds her Endangered Species Act Section 10(a)(1)(A) Recovery Permit to conduct wet season surveys for all listed large branchiopods in California and southern Oregon.

Around the District

"I enjoy working for USACE because it allows me to proudly serve the nation and the public by providing engineering services to strengthen national security and reduce risk from disasters."

Mike evaluates, plans and executes construction tasks and flood-control methods at Painted Rock Dam. He specializes in earthwork to maintain flood reservoir operations. Mike is native of Southern California. He has been with the USACE since 2013.



Michael "Mike" Moran
Heavy Equipment Operator



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FOR ALL

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH



OCTOBER

