

Photo by Dena O'Dell

Tanya Lewis, chairwoman for the Yavapai-Apache Nation in Arizona, left, and Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, right, sign a project agreement Dec. 16 for design and construction assistance for the Yavapai-Apache Nation Wastewater Treatment Plant in Arizona. The project aims to provide a sustainable treatment method that will improve overall health, sanitation and security for the Nation, the environment and all communities that rely on the Verde River.

LA District, Yavapai-Apache Nation sign agreement for sustainable wastewater treatment plant project

BY DENA O'DELL
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PHOENIX — A project agreement between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District and the Yavapai-Apache Nation was recently signed to solidify federal support for a wastewater treatment plant on the Nation's reservation at Camp Verde, Arizona.

Representatives from the Nation, the Los Angeles District and Arizona Congressman Greg Stanton's office celebrated the signing of the agreement during a Dec. 16 ceremony in Phoenix.

The Yavapai-Apache Nation is the second tribal nation in Arizona to receive federal funding for design and construction assistance for a project under the Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure Program.

The Section 595 program provides a federal investment in a state's critical water infrastructure projects addressing climate challenges, which include extreme heat, prolonged drought, wildfires and flash flooding. The program provides critical assistance to communities and tribal nations across Arizona to address their aging water and wastewater systems.

The planned project will replace a three-cell facultative lagoon facility, located on the Yavapai-Apache Reservation at Camp Verde, with a newly constructed wastewater treatment system with the goal of providing a sustainable treatment method that will improve the overall health, sanitation and security for the Yavapai-Apache Nation, the environment and all communities that rely on the Verde River.

"The Yavapai-Apache Nation, under the Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure Program, has worked a long time to make this specific project happen ... to get to this stage," said Col. Andrew Baker, USACE LA District commander. "This is a critical way point on an important journey that we are traveling together. We are excited to be here signing this project agreement today."

Tanya Lewis, chairwoman of the Yavapai-Apache Nation in Arizona, expressed her gratitude to both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Congressman Greg Stanton, stating this project will provide benefits to the Nation and its land.

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“Thank you for supporting this endeavor,” Lewis said. “It’s great ... for our people, for the land and for the preservation that we work very hard toward, as we should lead by example, which this will do for the Verde Valley, and, to also protect our last free-flowing river — the Verde River, which goes right through our homeland. That’s the overall goal, to make sure we protect Mother Nature and that we take care of it, before it takes care of us.”

Today, more than \$47 million in federal funds has been delivered through Congressman Greg Stanton’s Arizona Environmental Infrastructure Program to more than two dozen projects across the state, said Chelsea Rivas, district director for Congressman Greg Stanton with Arizona’s 4th District.

“We all know how important water is to our tribal communities, and today, we are thrilled to deliver \$3 million for the nation to construct a new wastewater treatment plant, which is a key part of the Nation’s effort to protect and preserve its water and meet its growing wastewater treatment demands,” she said. “By your example, I hope more tribal communities will take advantage of this authority to help address their water infrastructure needs.”

ABOUT THE SECTION 595 ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

The 595 Program is a section within the Water Resources Development Act of 1999 under

the Environmental Infrastructure, Resource Protection and Development Program. Congress authorized and appropriated funding for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers environmental infrastructure assistance for the design and construction of certain infrastructure in specified municipalities, counties and states.

The 595 Program is a cost-share program — using 75 percent federal and 25 percent nonfederal funds. The U.S. Corps of Engineers can engage in design, construction or both for projects under this program. This assistance supports different projects at publicly owned and operated facilities. Projects include construction of water distribution works, stormwater management, surface water protection and environmental restoration, among others.

Arizona and rural Nevada were not covered under Section 595 of the Program Water Resources Development Act of 1999 under the Environmental Infrastructure Resource Protection and Development Program. In December of 2020, a law was passed authorizing \$150 million to establish an Arizona and rural Nevada Environmental Infrastructure program through Section 595 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 that became Public Law 116-260 on Dec. 27, 2020. This law helped bring critically needed infrastructure to Arizona and Nevada’s aging and dilapidated water systems across their state.



Photo by Dena O'Dell

From left to right: Darrell Buxton, chief of the Civil Works Branch, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District; Ricardo Pacheco, vice-chairman for the Yavapai-Apache Nation in Arizona; Tanya Lewis, chairwoman for the Yavapai-Apache Nation; Col. Andrew Baker, commander of USACE Los Angeles District; Rick Arvey, project manager with USACE LA District; and Chelsea Rivas, district director with Congressman Greg Stanton’s office, pose for a picture Dec. 16 at the USACE LA District’s Phoenix office after signing a project agreement for design and construction assistance for the Yavapai-Apache Nation Wastewater Treatment Plant in Arizona.

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Enjoying holiday time together, reflecting on accomplishments

SPL Team,

I hope this edition of *The NewsCastle* finds you in a great place spending time with those who matter most to you and enjoying a well-deserved break! Shannon and I will be in Southern California for the majority of the season. I love this time of the year! The kids are out of school and super excited for Santa, our house is all lit up and smells like a pine forest, holiday parties and food abound, college football bowl season is getting ready to be in full swing (Go Army!), and LA traffic is (relatively) reasonable for a change! For me, it doesn’t get much better than this.

For those keeping track, we survived



COL. ANDREW BAKER
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

our trip to the Grand Canyon over Thanksgiving weekend. Five adults and two kids in a late-model VW Tiguan, about 1,000 miles, three days — no problem! The only thing we would have done differently would be to program more time at the canyon next time ... and maybe arrange for a larger vehicle. We managed a 6.5-mile

hike around the rim trail and about a half-mile venture down the Bright Angel trail into the canyon — not bad for when you’ve got a 6- and 8-year-old in tow!

As we head into the holiday season in earnest, please take at least a moment to reflect on all we accomplished at SPL this year and to be proud — and please take care of yourself and your teammates! The

holidays can be wonderful, but they also can bring stress to our lives. Please reach out to a teammate if you’re struggling, and don’t hesitate to check in with each other!

I love our work here in the Los Angeles District — and we accomplished so much in 2024. Our program continues to provide innumerable benefits for our friends and neighbors, and all those living within our district borders. It also provides for our national defense, supports and honors our veterans, and serves traditionally underserved communities and groups. It takes hard work and dedication to deliver, and everyone on our team plays a vital role. Thank you for all you do, and all the best for a happy and healthy 2025!

Col. Andrew Baker



LA District public affairs specialist describes emergency response mission experiences



Photo by Nakeir Nobles

Dan Collins, public affairs specialist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, drives to a debris site in Montgomery County, Georgia, to capture photo and video content in support of Hurricane Helene response efforts. Collins, who has also supported the border wall mission and Hawaii wildfire recovery efforts, said while each USACE deployment may be different, they have notable underlying similarities.

BY NAKEIR NOBLES
SAVANNAH DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

When a disaster happens, one can usually count on seeing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the scene, assisting residents to get back to normalcy as quickly and safely as possible. From supporting relief efforts after the 9/11 terrorist attacks to supporting the current Hurricane Helene mission in the agency’s Savannah District, USACE’s role in a disaster remains consistent as it adapts to ever-changing demands of each mission.

Public affairs specialist Dan Collins from USACE’s Los Angeles District has been with USACE nearly 10 years, understands the similarities and differences of missions as he has supported the border wall construction, the Hawai’i Wildfires and currently the Hurricane Helene debris removal mission in Savannah District.

Collins says although each mission is different, they all have notable similarities.

Collins explains, “For most of us who volunteer to deploy, we do so with one main purpose

in mind — we want to help. We want to leave the mission better than we came,” he said.

In the missions Collins has supported, there always seems to be someone experiencing it for the first time.

“It’s rewarding to see someone apply their knowledge in a real-world disaster situation. They can apply their skills as well as gain new, valuable experiences to carry with them throughout their career,” he said.

Each mission allows team members to share experiences and learn from each other. Collins’ specialty is videography, and he likes to share his knowledge with other PAOs. Just as he shares knowledge, he gains insights from them in other areas of public affairs. “It’s a win-win,” Collins said. “I teach them, they teach me, and we are better prepared for the next mission.”

Other similarities Collins cites is the potential to develop lasting friendships, whether it’s with your teammates or the residents from the communities you serve. Deployments, Collins said, are somewhat like a family gathering.

“You often run into someone you may have met on a previous mission. It’s like a family gathering.” In Savannah District’s EOC he says, “There are several people here who know each other from past missions.”

In contrast, comparing the border wall mission with the current debris removal mission, Collins said a major difference is the environment. The border wall mission was all desert. You could easily drive miles and not see anything but tumbleweeds and dust. The convenience of a gas station was nearly nonexistent.

“You had to be prepared because the wall ran from Texas to San Diego,” and if you ran out of gas, Collins said, “that was not good.” Here in Savannah, gas stations are nearly everywhere you look.

When you are supporting a mission in a public affairs role, many assume the only thing you do is take photos, write stories, and produce videos. Those things comprise a lot of what

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Photos by Nakeir Nobles

Dan Collins, public affairs specialist with the Los Angeles District, applies his video skills while supporting Hurricane Helene response efforts in Georgia. Collins, who has also supported the border wall mission and Hawaii wildfire recovery efforts, said the missions are different from each other but have notable similarities. Here, Collins sets up his equipment to record a holiday greeting from staff, who are also deployed to support the hurricane response mission.



Dan Collins, right, a public affairs specialist with the Los Angeles District, assists a quality assurance specialist complete the necessary administrative tasks before being assigned a service area while supporting Hurricane Helene response efforts in Georgia.

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PAOs do, but that’s not all.

Sometimes on deployment, you come across someone who needs a listening ear. While at the border wall, Collins said there were patrols on post who see a lot of desert and not many people. And when they see another human, they want to talk. “And I would listen,” he said.

On this current mission there are new quality assurance specialists attending in-processing sessions and sometimes things can get hectic.

“During these sessions, a lot of questions are being asked and the participants may need assistance with administrative tasks,” he said. “While I initially attend the in-processings to gather content, I often find myself stepping in to help. I will assist the incoming QAs with completing various forms, which not only supports them but also frees up the presenters to address other needs.”

In both similarities and differences, mission success relies on adaptability and the commitment to help and make a difference.

“For all their differences, every deployment brings opportunities to learn, grow, and connect,” Collins said. “No matter where we go or what the situation is, we’re united by our dedication to helping others.”

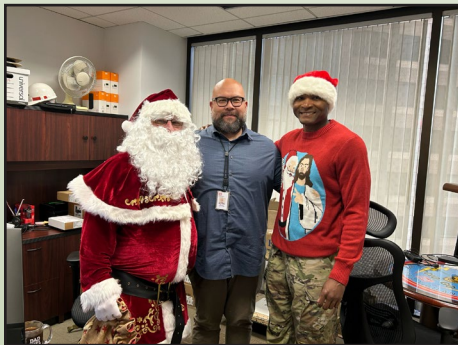
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is working in partnership with the local, state, and federal response to the Hurricane Helene.

Santa Claus delivers quality cheer to SPL employees safely, on time, within budget

Santa made an early trip from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers North Pole District all the way down to the Los Angeles District headquarters building Dec. 16 in downtown LA to deliver holiday cheer (and sweets) to members of the SPL team!



Courtesy photos



ALL PHOTOS: Santa delivers holiday cheer and sweets to LA District employees throughout the district headquarters building in downtown LA.

Managing the winter blues in December
Uplifting strategies to cope with holiday blues

BY DECEMBER WINTERS
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSE
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT SAFETY OFFICE

The holiday season often sparkles with cheer, celebrations and togetherness. Yet for many, this time of year brings a mix of emotions, including feelings of loneliness, stress or sadness. The good news? You can navigate these challenges while still finding moments of joy and light. Let's explore some practical and uplifting strategies to make the season more manageable — and even delightful.

1. Reframe your expectations: It's easy to get caught up in the idea of the "perfect" holiday, filled with picture-perfect decorations, endless cheer and harmonious gatherings. Let's toss that script out! Instead, focus on small, meaningful moments that bring you comfort and joy — whether it's sipping your favorite tea, enjoying a quiet evening or connecting with one close friend. Your holiday doesn't have to look like anyone else's to be fulfilling.

2. Create new traditions: If old traditions feel heavy or don't resonate anymore, it's time for something fresh. Bake cookies in fun shapes, host a game night or volunteer at a local charity. New traditions can infuse the season with energy and purpose while steering your focus toward things that matter most to you.

3. Stay connected: Even if you're feeling low, reaching out to others can lift your spirits. Call an old friend, join a community group or engage in online forums where people share similar interests. Connection, even in small doses, reminds us that we're not alone.

4. Practice gratitude: It might sound cliché, but gratitude is a powerful mood booster. Take a few minutes each day to jot down one or two things you're thankful for. These could be as simple as a kind word from a stranger or the warmth of a cozy blanket. Gratitude shifts your focus to the positive, creating a ripple effect on your overall mood.

5. Move your body: Physical activity is a proven way to combat feelings of sadness or stress. You don't have to run a marathon — a

brisk walk around the block, stretching to your favorite music or even dancing in your living room can work wonders. Moving your body releases endorphins, the natural chemicals that make you feel good.

6. Nurture your spiritual side: For many, the holidays are a time of reflection. Whether through prayer, meditation or spending time in nature, nurturing your spiritual side can bring peace and perspective. If you find solace in lighting a candle, journaling your thoughts or walking along the beach, make space for these practices.

7. Give yourself permission to feel: It's OK to feel what you're feeling. Suppressing sadness or stress often makes these feelings more overwhelming. Instead, acknowledge your emotions without judgment. Once you've named them, you can find healthy ways to process and move forward.

8. Set boundaries: The holidays can bring social obligations and family dynamics that drain your energy. Learn to say "no" when you need to and prioritize what truly matters to you. Setting boundaries is not about shutting people out — it's about protecting your well-being.

9. Do something kind: Acts of kindness not only brighten someone else's day but also give you a sense of purpose and joy. Pay for someone's coffee, write a heartfelt note or donate to a cause you care about. Kindness is a gift that keeps on giving.

10. Seek support when needed: It's important to pay attention to the duration and intensity of the symptoms and seek professional help if needed. If these feelings persist beyond the holiday season and start affecting your daily life, it may indicate depression rather than just holiday blues. If your feelings of sadness or anxiety feel too overwhelming to manage alone, reaching out to a professional can be a vital step. Therapy is a courageous and empowering tool that can help you better understand and navigate your emotions.

Embracing the light within

Remember, the holidays don't have to be perfect to be meaningful. By focusing on what brings you comfort and joy, setting boundaries and connecting with others, you can create a season that uplifts and nurtures you. Even in the face of challenges, there is light to be found. You might discover it in a kind gesture, a quiet moment or a new tradition — and sometimes, that's enough to make the season bright.



Courtesy artwork

The winter holidays can bring a mix of emotions and a lot of pressure to celebrate a certain way, but if you can decorate your tree with this list of strategies and reminders, it can make the season a lot more manageable — and even delightful.

LOS ANGELES DISTRICT



YEAR



REVIEW

JANUARY

Members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District project-delivery team managing the ongoing Marina del Rey Harbor dredging project join partners with the LA County Department of Beaches and Harbors to see dredging operations in action Jan. 9 at the harbor's entrance channel in LA County, California.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Col. Andrew Baker, Los Angeles District commander, left, and Jason Uhley, Riverside County Flood Control District general manager and chief engineer, discuss the Murrieta Creek Flood Protection and Environmental Restoration project Feb. 2 in Murietta, California.

FEBRUARY



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

MARCH

Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commanding general and 55th chief of engineers, center, receives a brief about LA District projects during a March 19 visit to the district's Prado Dam Resident Office in Corona, California. Also pictured is Justin Gay, LA District deputy district engineer, left, and Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander, right.



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Lt. Col. Sean Karrels, battalion commander with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, left, cuts the ribbon on a two-bay hangar that will be used for training during an April 9 ribbon-cutting ceremony at Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona. Representing the Los Angeles District was Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, Los Angeles District deputy commander, third from left.

APRIL



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

MAY

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District leaders pose for a photo following the Digital Test and Training Range ribbon-cutting ceremony May 16 at Nellis Air Force Base near Las Vegas. From left to right are Shaun Frost, chief of the LA District's Construction Division; Justin Gay, LA District deputy engineer; and John Oshima, chief of the LA District's Military Construction Division.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Tolleson Mayor Juan Rodriguez, center, and Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander, right, sign a project partnership agreement June 10 between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Tolleson for a Section 595 Environmental Infrastructure project, while Representative Greg Stanton with Arizona's 4th Congressional District, left, along with other City of Tolleson officials, look on during a signing event and press conference at the USACE Phoenix office.

JUNE



Photo by Dena O'Dell

JULY

Justin Gay, deputy district engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, left, speaks with Mark A. Macarro, Pechanga Band of Indians chairman, during a meet-and-greet between the Tribal Council and the LA District July 24 in Temecula, California. District representatives visited with the tribes' members to strengthen and demonstrate USACE's commitment to meeting its federal trust responsibilities.



Photo by Areca T. Wilson

Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Michael Connor, center left, joins Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, LA District deputy commander, to discuss project details with Navajo Nation representatives Aug. 29 near Birdsprings, Arizona. Connor announced 12 projects, with a bridge project over the Little Colorado River in Birdsprings being the first, as part of a pilot program that partners USACE with economically disadvantaged communities, tribal nations and other nonfederal sponsors to develop water resource projects.

AUGUST



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

SEPTEMBER

Jonathan Hallemeier, LA District interdisciplinary study manager and study team lead planner, speaks during a public meeting on the ongoing San Diego County Shoreline (Oceanside) Mitigation Study Sept. 16 in Oceanside, California. The study aims to mitigate shoreline erosion and other impacts, resulting from the construction of U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton Harbor.



Photo by Areca T. Wilson

Representatives with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, City of Norco, California Office of Emergency Services, Riverside County, along with U.S. Rep. Ken Calvert of California's 41st Congressional District and contractors, gather for the Upper Norco Bluffs Emergency Repair Project groundbreaking ceremony Oct. 3 in Norco, California.

OCTOBER



Photo by Stephen Baack

NOVEMBER

Project partners break ground on a solar-over-canal system during a ceremony Nov. 14 for the Gila River Indian Community in Chandler, Arizona. The project, one of the first in the Western Hemisphere, is designed to conserve water and generate renewable energy for the community's tribal irrigation facilities.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Tanya Lewis, chairwoman for the Yavapai-Apache Nation in Arizona, left, and Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the LA District, right, sign a project agreement Dec. 16 for design and construction assistance for the Yavapai-Apache Nation Wastewater Treatment Plant in Arizona. The project aims to provide a sustainable treatment method that will improve overall health, sanitation and security for the Nation, the environment and all communities that rely on the Verde River.

DECEMBER



Photo by Dena O'Dell

2024 LA District Shoutouts



SHOUTOUT \ˈshaʊt-, aʊt\ *noun (slang)*: a public expression of gratitude, praise or acknowledgement directed toward a person or group.

Give one! A job well done, kindness, encouragement, etc. Real-time acknowledgement. Easy! For LA District employees: Click the ["Submit a New Shoutout"](#) tab on the [SPL SharePoint page](#). Admire on SharePoint and future editions of *The NewsCastle*!

Mike Greenway, Ewelina Zielinska-Thomas, Lisa Perks and Daniel Powell

“In recognition of their remarkable work as the USACE field representatives during the Border Wall panel removal process in support of the termination of the former Border Wall Construction Program.”

Phillip Serpa Jr.

“Project Management on a mega project is a challenging endeavor (to say the least). Add on the responsibility to coach, teach, and mentor a team as a supervisor, and it becomes even more challenging. Phillip is one of the kindest, most professional, and calmest leaders in the SPL, and he deserves a GIANT shoutout!”

Hanna Weyland

“Hanna did a fantastic job creating an informational brochure about the Sepulveda Dam Basin that was used during National Public Lands Day!”

Doland Cheung

“Doland is being recognized for his tireless efforts while serving as lead project manager for the San Clemente shoreline project. This is a high visibility project requiring constant updates and RFIs from the region and HQ. THANK YOU!”

Tiffany Troxel

“Thank you, Tiffany, for providing such quick yet thorough legal feedback (and for being so responsive) on a very important official matter we were able to successfully navigate as a team!”

Christopher Rainwater

“Just wanted to recognize Chris Rainwater for ALWAYS going above and beyond and leading by example. His selfless service is apparent in everything he does.”

Richard Rivera

“I nominate Richard Rivera (Visual Information Specialist) who played a critical role in creating/maintaining the district organizational chart and placemat to tell the SPL story. The placemat is vital during key leader engagements, and the org chart clearly illustrates who works in what division/branch/section.”



