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Rock Island District

WERT TIMES

November/December 2025

Nature-Based Mitigation Banking: Beaver Dams at New Melleray Abbey

Mission

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

Vision

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

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TOWER TIMES

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**USACE Rock Island District’s
Regulatory Division Western Branch
Chief Abby Steele packs a mixture
of dense mud and weeds into a man-
made structure known as a beaver dam
analog. Photo by Jordan Raiff**

Rising to the Challenge: The Rock Island Way

Rock Island Team,

As the calendar year comes to an end, it's natural to reflect on the past 12 months. This is my first full year as Rock Island's Deputy District Engineer and when I reflect professionally on 2025 one thing is for certain – challenges were abundant.

From hiring freezes to deferred resignations to the longest government shutdown in our Nation's history; Rock Island District experienced unprecedented challenges. Unsurprisingly, the District's workforce shined through adversity and delivered on its missions and commitments without fail.

It seems plausible that a workforce stretched thin by attrition would struggle to get the job done. But, in Rock Island District, it was quite the contrary. Our organization executed a \$315 Million program despite the challenges faced in 2025, meeting almost all tracked milestones. That program ensured nearly 15 million tons of cargo moved through our lock and dam system. It generated millions of dollars in emergency response nationwide and saw celebratory ribbons cut at a flood risk management project in Cedar Rapids and a habitat rehabilitation project at Beaver Island. Our regulatory division was the Nation's leader in permit review efficiency, and we continued to deliver on nationally significant programs like the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program, Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program and the Brandon Road Interbasin Project.

Those facts and figures aren't possible without people, and Rock Island District has the most dedicated and hardest working in USACE. Your collective devotion to the District and our missions was prevalent throughout the year. More than 100 of our teammates deployed in support of emergency missions across the country showing the selfless nature that is predominant across the workforce. Despite human resource hurdles brought on by turnover and hiring freezes, the Rock Island District workforce didn't miss a beat, once again proving to our partners, stakeholders and the Nation that we deliver on our promises.

To the entire Rock Island District team, please know how much I personally appreciate your tireless efforts. Being the Deputy District Engineer is an honor, and it's made most special by the people I work alongside. As we move into 2026, I am sure some challenges will remain and new challenges will emerge. Staying focused on what we can control will be key in tackling whatever comes our way. As a leader within this organization, I am lucky to have the confidence in knowing I work with an outstanding team of dedicated civil servants who make my job easier and rewarding.

On behalf of Col. Williams, thank you for all you do and CONTINUE BUILDING STRONG!



Brad Houzenga, P.E., S.E.
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RANGERS SHARE ILLINOIS WATERWAY HISTORY, EXPERTISE ON “LUNCH & LOCK” CRUISES

By Jim Finn, Public Affairs Specialist

For the past three summers, park rangers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, Illinois Waterway Visitor Center, have joined the crew of the *Sainte Genevieve* riverboat for “Lunch & Lock” river cruises along the Illinois River. These unique and popular outreach opportunities, offered approximately eight times a year, provide passengers with a scenic journey, and a chance to learn about the waterway’s vital role in navigation, ecosystem health and regional history.

The cruises, which last around three hours, embark from the *Sainte Genevieve* boat dock in Ottawa, Illinois, traveling downriver through Starved Rock Lock and Dam before returning, offering passengers a firsthand look at the engineering marvels that keep commerce flowing. Rangers Sarah Fisher and Bob Petruney, along with colleagues Julie McDonald and Kevin Ewbank, narrate the tours, fielding questions and sharing insights into the multifaceted mission of USACE.

“Getting to be out on the river for the day and talking to people on the boat is what I enjoy most,” said Fisher.

“Everyone has such interesting questions and unique experiences tied to the river. There are lots of teachable moments and every trip we see or learn about something new,” added Fisher.

Topics discussed during the cruises are diverse; ranging from the intricacies of navigation and the Inland Waterways Trust Fund to natural resource management and ongoing efforts to combat challenges like invasive carp. Rangers also delve into the history of the Illinois Waterway, the importance of flood risk management, and regional efforts like the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program which includes the local Starved Rock Breakwater Project.

“These tours help educate the public about the complex work we do – maintaining navigation channels, operating locks and dams and ensuring the waterway remains a viable transportation corridor,” Petruney explained. “Meeting and greeting the public from around the Illinois area and other states is a real highlight.”



Illinois Waterway Park Ranger Sarah Fisher narrates a tour of the Illinois Waterway during the Lunch & Lock series aboard the *Sainte Genevieve* riverboat. Photo by Jim Finn

The outreach program offers significant benefits to the Rock Island District, bridging the gap between often-unseen engineering work and the public it serves.

"I'm always surprised by how few people realize that USACE actually has park rangers and engages in natural resource work," Fisher noted. "People often see USACE as purely engineering and infrastructure, and don't realize the breadth of activities that we have a hand in. It's an opportunity to put a face to the name of a large organization that they don't always know much about."

Fisher emphasized the importance of connecting with the public on the river itself.

"At least on the Illinois Waterway, there are not many opportunities to be directly on the river interpreting the resource and project to visitors. Individuals coming into the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center get a different perspective than a visitor physically on the river. It's a way to connect the guests with a tangible experience and immerse them in the unique history of the river."

The partnership the Illinois Waterway rangers has built with the Sainte Genevieve is proving to be invaluable.

"We have a wonderful relationship with the Sainte Genevieve, and there is a mutual respect between our organizations," Fisher said. "The Sainte Genevieve staff looks to us for updates on river conditions and alerts us to any conditions that we may need to be aware of. For instance, last summer they alerted us to unsafe recreational boating practices in a no wake area along the waterway. We were able to step up boat patrols in the area to encourage safe and responsible recreation."

Moving forward, the Illinois Waterway rangers plan to continue partnering with the Sainte Genevieve staff to share information on the Illinois Waterway's historical significance and importance as a transportation artery.

"They help ensure that the project is seen as a valuable asset to the region and that USACE maintains the public trust necessary to effectively manage the Illinois Waterway System," Petruney concluded. 

Can you name where this photo was taken?



Last Issue's Winner



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

Answer: South Overlook Boat Ramp at Lake Red Rock
Winner: Carl Schoenfeld

Celebrating a Legacy of Flood Risk Management and Teamwork

By Sam Heilig, Public Affairs Specialist

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Silver Jackets, a nationwide flood risk management initiative supported by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in collaboration with federal, state and local agencies. Over the past two decades, Silver Jackets has become a model for interagency teamwork, bringing together diverse organizations to address flood risk and natural hazard priorities across the nation.

Adding to this year's celebration was USACE Rock Island District's Program Manager, Jim Homann, being named as the 2025 National Silver Jackets Coordinator of the Year, a prestigious recognition of his exceptional leadership and contributions to the program.

"Being named National Silver Jackets Coordinator of the Year is an incredible honor," Homann said. "This recognition reflects the hard work and dedication of our entire team and our partners who make Silver Jackets a success. Together, we've accomplished so much over the years, and I'm excited to continue building on this legacy."

Silver Jackets began as a pilot initiative in 2005 and 2006 in three states—Ohio, Indiana, and California—through the combined efforts of USACE, FEMA, and other federal agencies. The goal was to create interagency teams at the state level to develop and implement solutions to natural hazard priorities. These early collaborations led to the establishment of the National Flood Risk Management Program in 2006, which aimed to integrate and synchronize flood risk management efforts across federal, state, regional, and local agencies.

Illinois and Iowa were among the first states to adopt the program nationally. Following the devastating Midwest flooding in 2008, Interagency Levee Working Groups were organized in both states to coordinate levee recovery efforts and establish a collaborative approach to long-term restoration of flood risk management systems. These groups eventually transitioned into state Flood Risk Management Teams, now known as Silver Jackets teams. The Rock Island District serves as the lead USACE district for Illinois and Iowa, while also supporting efforts in Missouri and Wisconsin.

"The 2008 Midwest flooding was a turning point for flood risk management in our region," Homann said. "It showed us the importance of collaboration and the need for a unified approach to recovery and mitigation efforts. That spirit of teamwork has been the foundation of the Silver Jackets program for nearly two decades."

Silver Jackets teams are state-led interagency groups that bring together federal, state, tribal, and local agencies to collaboratively address flood risk and other natural disasters. Each state sets its priorities, and participating agencies contribute their expertise, programs, and resources within the constraints of their budgets and authorities. No single agency has all the answers, but together, they develop comprehensive solutions to complex challenges.

"The Silver Jackets program is unique because it brings together diverse agencies to tackle flood risk management in a way that no single organization could achieve alone," Homann explained. "It's about leveraging resources, expertise, and relationships to make a real difference."

Interagency Nonstructural Projects (IANS), often referred to as Silver Jackets projects, are a key component of the program. These projects focus on nonstructural flood risk management efforts and align with state Hazard Mitigation Plans. Funding for IANS projects is provided through the national Floodplain Management Services program, with proposals typically submitted early in the fiscal year and projects announced by August.

The Rock Island District's role in Silver Jackets has evolved significantly over time. Initially, the focus was on long-term restoration and recovery of flood risk management systems following the 2008 flood. This included building relationships with partners and helping them prepare for the next flood event. Today, the District continues to foster connections with partners while promoting a holistic approach to flood risk management.

"Our role has always been about supporting state priorities and building strong partnerships," Homann said. "Over the years, we've shifted from focusing solely on recovery to creating proactive, comprehensive strategies for flood risk management."

The District's role is shaped by state priorities, ensuring that its efforts align with the needs of Illinois, Iowa, and other supported states.

Over the years, the Rock Island District has supported several impactful Silver Jackets projects, including:

- Illinois Structures at Flood Risk (SAFR) Website: This ongoing project provides a robust database and analysis tools to help cities, counties, and emergency managers plan and prepare for flooding.
- Statewide Comprehensive Flood Mitigation Strategy in Iowa: This project assists Iowa communities in developing a framework for effective flood mitigation.
- Iowa Levee Workshops: A series of workshops throughout Iowa provides local entities with training and resources to evaluate and manage the operation, maintenance, repair, replacement, and rehabilitation of levee systems.
- Hannibal Flood Risk Management Project in Missouri: This project included levee breach analysis, storm sewer inundation analysis, and dam reach analysis to improve flood event emergency management in Hannibal, Missouri.

The Rock Island District is currently working on the Upper Rock River Inundation Mapping and Risk Assessment in Illinois, which supports the SAFR website, and the Iowa Levee Workshops. The District is also wrapping up a Statewide Comprehensive Flood Mitigation Strategy in Iowa.

Looking ahead, the District plans to continue strengthening partnerships in each state and focus on innovative, collaborative approaches to address flood risks and natural hazards. As funding resources become more limited, collaboration among agencies will be crucial to developing effective solutions.

"The future of flood risk management depends on collaboration," Homann said. "No single agency has all the answers, but together, we can create solutions that protect communities and save lives. As the Silver Jackets celebrate 20 years, we're reminded of the power of teamwork and the importance of working together." 



During a workshop held in Pekin, Illinois, in August, Terra McParland, a state of Illinois Silver Jackets Coordinator with the Department of Natural Resources, demonstrates to workshop attendees how the Structures at Flood Risk website can be used to help identify and manage flood risk in Illinois communities.

Photo by Jim Homann

Nature-Based Mitigation Banking: Beaver Dams at New Melleray Abbey

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

In a unique collaboration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and New Melleray Abbey have partnered with nature's engineer, the beaver, to establish a mitigation bank aimed at restoring ecosystems and enhancing water quality. This innovative project harnesses the beaver's natural ability to shape landscapes, supporting healthy wetlands, improving water quality, and boosting biodiversity. Located just outside Dubuque, Iowa, in the small town of Peosta, New Melleray Abbey is home to a small congregation of Trappist monks who specialize in crafting caskets from wood sourced from their surrounding forests, reinforcing their deep connection to nature.

John Schroeder, the Abbey's forester, submitted a proposed beaver dam permit application to the Rock Island District's Regulatory office, which piqued the interest of Abby Steele, the Regulatory Division's Western Branch Chief.

"I was taking a course at Utah State University on 'Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration (LTPBR),' which aligned perfectly with what the Abbey was proposing," said Steele.

"LTPBR is an innovative, low-cost stream restoration method being implemented in the western U.S. that utilizes beavers. The concept involves installing Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs) to attract beavers to streams, allowing them to carry out restoration work naturally. I approached John to see if he had considered using these techniques for mitigation banking to create a source to offset impacts to Waters of the U.S.," Steele added.

Steele noted that she had already conducted extensive research on Catfish Creek, which flows through the monastery's property, and discovered that Schroeder had previously been informed that creating a mitigation bank was not feasible, although not by her office.

Schroeder explained that his primary goal was to implement positive environmental changes on the Abbey's property, particularly focusing on improving water quality. Eager to explore mitigation banking as a viable option, he stated, "I began considering what steps I could take to help restore the monastery's streams, which are surrounded by row-crop agriculture."



Representatives from the USACE Rock Island District and the New Melleray Abbey work together to gather materials needed for a beaver dam analog (BDA). Bundles of thin trees and branches with leaves are cut and placed along the banks of the stream to later be woven between black locust stakes that have been installed across the waterway. Once constructed, these man-made structures will form a penetrable but sturdy wall for the BDA, much like what a beaver would engineer naturally. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*



Using pieces of wood that show evidence of prior beaver activity near the stream, Dr. Emily Fairfax of the University of Minnesota discusses how the edged tips allow the sticks to penetrate the banks of the stream and hold the beaver dam analog in place despite the consistently flowing waters. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*



Volunteers pack in mud on top of the rocks to form the base of a beaver dam analog as the water levels begin to rise due to the introduction of branches and juvenile trees to form the outer walls. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*



Dr. Emily Fairfax of the University of Minnesota guides and instructs the group on the crucial details as they work towards their first beaver dam analog. Compressing the structure and ensuring the weak points are shored up as Dr Fairfax is point out here is crucial in ensuring the longevity and success of a BDA.

Photo by Jordan Raiff



Volunteers reinforce the walls of the beaver dam analog with rocks, small branches, leaves, mud and other materials from the banks of the stream. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*

Dr. Fairfax and others step back to look at the rate of water ponding and the water retention from the newly constructed beaver dam analog. As the water levels rose the beaver dam analog began to lightly leak, much the same as it would if a beaver had constructed it in nature. *Photo by Jordan Raiff*

Reflecting on his initial years at the Abbey, Schroeder recognized the challenges posed by the streams' frequent changes. "In the past three years, we've experienced significant flooding. A stream needs to function and adapt, so how do we facilitate that? Beaver dams are a natural solution. I wanted to explore options beyond simply introducing beavers into the watershed," he said, which led him to learn about LTPBR.

Despite previous setbacks, Schroeder submitted a new permit application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and discovered that mitigation banking was indeed a viable option. Both he and Steele were committed to the project's success, ultimately engaging Dr. Emily Fairfax from the University of Minnesota to help advance their efforts.

"I ran a beaver restoration workshop at the University of Minnesota during the 'Partnership for River Restoration in the Upper Midwest' annual conference a few years ago, where I met Nicole Church from Snyder and Associates," Dr. Fairfax explained. "The Abbey had reached out to her to facilitate a mitigation banking project. We discussed building BDAs and implementing restoration in a more nature-focused, self-sustaining manner, rather than relying on constant human intervention. Nicole later contacted me about the monastery project and inquired about BDAs as a potential solution."

To kickstart the project, Dr. Fairfax spent time at the Abbey for on-the-ground planning. "We organized a 'Build Like a Beaver Day,' where I helped identify optimal locations for the BDAs based on mapping existing natural beaver dams in the watershed and observing local beaver behavior," she said.

Determining the best locations for the BDAs required understanding beaver behavior.

Dr. Fairfax sought answers to critical questions: Where do beavers prefer to dam? Do they favor small tributaries or main streams? How do they cluster their dams? By answering these questions, she aimed to capture the ecological fingerprint of beavers in northern Iowa's driftless region. With this knowledge, Dr. Fairfax and her team could replicate these conditions in the streams, increasing the likelihood that other beavers would perceive the Abbey property as an ideal habitat for dam-building.

"I want the environment to be as familiar to them as possible," Dr. Fairfax emphasized.

However, such land use changes can raise concerns among farmers regarding potential impacts on their land. Steele acknowledged that while beavers are abundant in Iowa, their presence can conflict with agricultural interests. "Beavers dam up streams, flood areas, and can inundate crop fields, leading to trapping or dam removal in many cases," she explained. Fortunately, beaver populations have begun to recover, thanks to improved land management practices, their natural adaptability, and conservation efforts like those underway at the Abbey.

As these initiatives progress, farmers and local residents can expect to see positive changes in the ecosystem.

"Mitigation banking takes on a new dimension when employing nature-based solutions like LTPBR," Steele noted. "This approach has been successfully used in the West, particularly to address drought issues. Beavers are a keystone species; their dam-building activities reshape entire ecosystems, creating wetlands, restoring water flow, and providing critical habitats for a variety of plants and animals at risk in Iowa. Their presence supports species such as fish, amphibians, birds, and other mammals, making them essential for enhancing biodiversity and overall ecosystem health." 



A weathered piece of wood found under some grass along the streambanks at the New Mallery Abbey shows signs of previous beaver activity in the area. The gnaw marks on the left side of the wood are clear indicators that beavers had previously called the streams home. With the beaver dam analogs in place, they are more likely to return. Photo by Jordan Raiff

WE WORK THE WATERWAYS

By Frances Candelaria, Public Affairs Specialist

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District partners with organizations and programs across a wide range of initiatives. One such partnership, the “We Work the Waterways” program, recently held an outreach and discovery day at Scott Community College in Bettendorf, Iowa. The event introduced area high school students to lesser-known local career opportunities related to the river.

Kelly Thomas, deputy operations manager for the Mississippi River Project Office, brought visual aids of various “hats” to highlight how the Project’s three main missions — navigation, recreation and environmental stewardship — create numerous career pathways for different interests.

“One of the things that people don’t understand about the Corps of Engineers is that we have a recreation mission,” Thomas said as he let students hold a USACE park ranger hat. “Here on the river, we have 26 recreation areas. We have campgrounds, day-use areas, boat launches, a visitor center, those types of things. Annually, we have 1.1 to 1.2 million visitors that come to our recreation areas.”

Thomas also connected the program’s emphasis on environmental stewardship with the Project’s forestry operations, where staff manage 60,000 acres of land with a focus on timber harvest and improvement, cultural resources and endangered species.

One of the unique aspects of USACE work is the constant nature of river operations. As MRPO Plant and Facilities Supervisor Cory Wildermuth emphasized during the presentation, the locks are “managed 24/7, 365 days a year, so you have guys at locks every single day, every hour. All the time.”

Thomas reinforced the point, simply stating, “The locks never close.”

This constant operation creates numerous employment opportunities — from lock and dam operators managing daily boat traffic to maintenance workers ensuring infrastructure remains functional — and many people have no idea that USACE is involved. As Thomas noted, “We respond to national emergencies, so if a hurricane hits or a tornado, we will respond to help clean up that debris, do blue roof missions, those types of things.”

The event underscored the importance of the Rock Island District’s partnership with the “We Work the Waterways” initiative, which helps expose young people to waterway-related industries. Students explored meaningful work that combines technical skills, environmental responsibility and public service — ensuring the Quad Cities region will continue to have a skilled workforce capable of maintaining and protecting the Mississippi River system that has shaped the area’s identity and economy for generations. 



Kelly Thomas, deputy operations manager for the Mississippi River Project Office, speaks with local high school students about the many career paths available at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District. Thomas spoke with multiple groups of students during an outreach and discovery day for “We Work the Waterways” program hosted at Scott Community College. Photo by Francis Candelaria



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

Megan Phlamm- Civil Engineer

For many people, the question of what to do with their life is one of the most difficult to answer. Not for Rock Island District civil engineer Megan Phlamm.

"Both my parents worked for the federal government, and I knew I wanted to work somewhere with opportunities to grow and a place that worked on things I was interested in and passionate about."

A 2020 graduate of Bradley University, Phlamm began with the District in May 2018 in the Cost and Specifications Division. In 2022, an opportunity opened to move into the Eastern Area Office, and she seized it.

According to Phlamm, this position provides her with a real, hands-on opportunity as the main on-site point of contact during construction. "I coordinate between our team and the contractor," she said. "My job entails tracking the contractor's progress in the field, ensuring quality and schedule are being met, and coordinating both technical and administrative requirements to keep the contracts running from start to finish."

Performing specialized work as a construction project engineer, Phlamm said the most rewarding aspect of her role comes at its conclusion. "When a project is done and going back through the photos from preconstruction and seeing the changes. It's kind of amazing to see a design go from drawings to real life."

A native of Moline, Illinois, Phlamm now resides just outside Joliet, Illinois, with her husband and their two dogs. In her downtime, Phlamm enjoys golf, traveling, all things Disney, and baking — sourdoughs and macarons are her specialties! Enjoying these activities is made easier in part by her favorite thing about working for USACE: the "work-life balance."

Getting life advice from Phlamm boils down to one simple statement: "Be the kind of person who learns fast, helps others, and keeps promises. The rest will follow."



ROCK ISLAND DISTRICT TACKLES EMERGENCY AT CHICAGO HARBOR LOCK WITH INNOVATIVE SOLUTION

By Jordan Raiff, Editor



A worn hinge pin showcasing extraneous wear and tear due to a lack of grease being moved across the pin. *Photo by Mike Barry*

Working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers presents unique opportunities when vital aging infrastructure needs repair. Composed of specialized individuals performing highly technical and tactical tasks to the highest standards in rapid time with little room for error, teams in the USACE Rock Island District are frequently setting the standard and coming to the aid of those in need.

In September, the Chicago Harbor Lock, which is operated by the USACE Chicago District, experienced an emergency closure, and Rock Island District dive coordinator Mike Barry and his crew were called to respond.

"Chicago contacted us. They still rely on Rock Island to provide all their maintenance support to the Chicago Harbor Lock. They had contacted the maintenance crew and said their gates were making a noise and wanted us to come investigate," explained Barry.

Once onsite, the maintenance crew and dive team determined the gudgeon pins on the gates were not getting adequate grease. Although this situation might present a small problem for some locks, this situation was different.

According to Barry, the Chicago Harbor is the busiest lock in the nation for lockages.

"It's huge on tourism, and they do over 8,000 lockages per year. So, for that lock to not be operational impacts their tourism greatly," said Barry. "With the lock not being operational, this means they have to cancel tours and other work."

To avoid disruption to tourism and navigation in the area, Barry indicated they typically work from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. during a night closure. His team sprang into action as soon as the site was ready, to expedite the process.

"We suspected it was a grease issue based on past experience," said Barry.



Newly regrooved gudgeon hinge pin. The spiral cuts allows the grease to be distributed around the entire pin and not only on the front side. *Photo by Mike Barry*

The dive team first used hydraulic rams to jack up the gates, taking half the weight off the hinges. The maintenance crew then pulled the pins from the top and confirmed the problem.

"The backside of the pins were dry," said Barry.

According to Michael Walsh, Operations Project Manager for the Illinois Waterway Project Office, "Once the pins were removed and it was evident grease flow in the bushing was an issue due to misaligned grooves between the bushing and pin, our engineers and the Rock Island Illinois Waterway Fleet did a great job working a solution to add additional grease grooves to the pin to help the grease be distributed better throughout the bushing."

"We did this to two of the gates making the most noise," explained Barry. "We pulled the pins out, measured the roundness of them, checked them for tolerances, and they seemed good on the bushing and pin."

To people familiar with the Illinois Waterway and the USACE Rock Island District, the crew's response and their dedication to the mission came as no surprise, said Barry.

"The Illinois Waterway maintenance crews are a highly skilled group of individuals, so they can pretty much do anything," Barry said. "They run cranes and have the capabilities to determine what needs to be done. They also do machinist work, maintenance work, and repairs in-house. They dive, they weld, they do it all. It's kind of amazing the capabilities we have in Rock Island. The guys on the maintenance crews are mostly also divers. We were on another job when we got the call to go to Chicago. In three days, we were on site and working. They crawl out, take the dive hat off, put the hard hat on, and are working topside on everything. It was great to see these guys jump back and forth from water to land."



Having a dive team like this is just another way the Rock Island District is setting the standard for USACE. Something Barry and many others are grateful for.

"Chicago District is very appreciative of Rock Island District for their continued heavy maintenance support and quick response time," said Walsh.

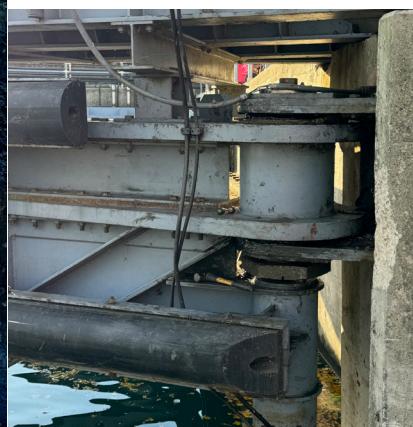
"I'd like to acknowledge everyone on the dive team. Having a dive team in-house with USACE is incredible. If we had to use external contractors, it's hard to tell how long it would take to get this kind of emergency work done, and the dollar amount for emergency work would have been astronomical compared to what we do. Our dive team and maintenance crews are as highly skilled as anyone in the nation. We had the right people for the job, that's for sure," emphasized Barry. 



Left: USACE Diver Mark Hoewing before his decent into the water.
Photo by Mike Barry



Right: Garrett Orrico makes his way into the water.
Photo by Mike Barry



Left: Before repairing the pin, the assembly shown here was grinding metal-on-metal
Photo by Mike Barry

Once the pin was removed, the gudgeon hinge pin gate bushing was cleaned and fully inspected before being regreased for the pin to be installed. Photo by Mike Barry

DEPLOYMENT SPOTLIGHT: Supporting Critical Missions Abroad: Inside the Forward Engineer Support Team-Advanced

By Jim Finn, Public Affairs Specialist

When U.S. Army engineers are called to deploy for critical infrastructure support overseas, a Forward Engineer Support Team-Advanced answers the call. Comprised of a dynamic eight-person team, FEST-A is a vital component of the Field Force Engineering program, which provides engineering expertise where it's needed most. The team's mission is to deliver rapid and efficient engineering solutions in environments where in-house capabilities are unavailable, typically involving high-pressure, fast-paced work in foreign countries.

The FEST-A team is a specialized unit comprised of an Army officer, a noncommissioned officer, and six U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel from districts across the United States. The team is deployed to various global locations, with missions typically lasting six months.

A key member of one of those teams is Rock Island District Civil Engineer Andrew McClanahan, who has participated in various deployments. For McClanahan, his most significant deployment occurred in the Philippines with the 565th FEST, where he and his team worked to improve military infrastructure under the United States' Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the Philippine government.



Rock Island District Civil Engineer Andrew McClanahan (third from right) and his Forward Expeditionary Support Team – Advance teammates pose for a photo with Armed Forces of the Philippines Air Force personnel during a recent deployment to the Philippines.

Courtesy Photo

"What I found particularly unique for the mission was how close we worked with the Armed Forces of the Philippines leadership in the field," said McClanahan. "Not only were we engineers doing a job, we were also representatives of the United States, helping build professional relations with our allies and peers."

FEST-A's mission in the Philippines centered on providing 35% level design for infrastructure improvements at various military bases. This included projects like road and airfield upgrades, building new barracks and training facilities, and enhancing base security. These tasks were executed in coordination with AFP engineers and Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command – Pacific, who played an integral role in planning and execution.

Deploying for the FEST-A mission is not for the faint of heart. The team is tasked with executing engineering projects with limited oversight and a rapid operational tempo, where the emphasis is on delivering quality results under pressure.

"The challenge is how quickly we have to work," McClanahan explained. "In USACE, we take a very deliberate approach to design, with plenty of opportunities for in-depth review and consideration of an optimal approach for a given situation. But in theater, the expectation is that we execute high-quality work at a pace that leaves very little time for the level of detailed analysis us engineers prefer. We had to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. The motto we kept in mind was from General Patton - 'a good plan ready to execute today is better than a perfect plan next week.'"

This "ready, set, go" mindset often forced McClanahan to adapt quickly, learning new skills on the fly to ensure mission success. From learning new software tools for specific tasks to diving into local construction practices, the pace of work continuously pushed McClanahan and his team to innovate and apply engineering principles in real-world scenarios.

As McClanahan reflects on his time in the Philippines, the evolution of FEST-A's role continues to take shape. Rock Island District Mechanical Engineer Dan Nuti is currently deployed as part of the 565th FEST-A team, the same one McClanahan was part of. Nuti is continuing the mission of providing engineering capabilities while also helping to train AFP engineers on different tools the FEST team uses, such as the Advance Route Recon Kit, a tool that helps determine optimal transit routes for military convoys. Rock Island District employees Arianna Roldan and Brendan Killarney are also preparing to join future FEST-A missions, contributing their expertise to global engineering support.

As McClanahan and his fellow engineers continue to serve, their mission is clear: deliver timely, effective solutions in challenging environments, all while strengthening the bonds between the U.S. and its allies. 

Right: Rock Island District Civil Engineer Andrew McClanahan (right) discusses a site layout with Armed Forces of the Philippines personnel and Forward Expeditionary Support Team – Advance teammates during a recent deployment to the Philippines.

Courtesy Photo



Below: Rock Island District Civil Engineer Andrew McClanahan (second from right) and his Forward Expeditionary Support Team – Advance teammates pose for a photo with Armed Forces of the Philippines Navy personnel during a recent deployment to the Philippines.

Courtesy Photo





FY 2025 Year In Review



\$315 M EXECUTED IN PROGRAMS

NAVIGATION

119.4 Million Tons

of cargo passed through locks in the Rock Island District in FY25

Maintenance Fleets provided emergency repairs and heavy lift crane support at Chicago Locks, Lockport Lock, Mel Price, and Locks 6, 7, and 25.

57 Thousand Cubic Yards of Material Dredged from six small boat harbors

****NEW****
Inland Navigation Design Production Center

LEVEE SAFETY INSPECTIONS: 44

REGULATORY

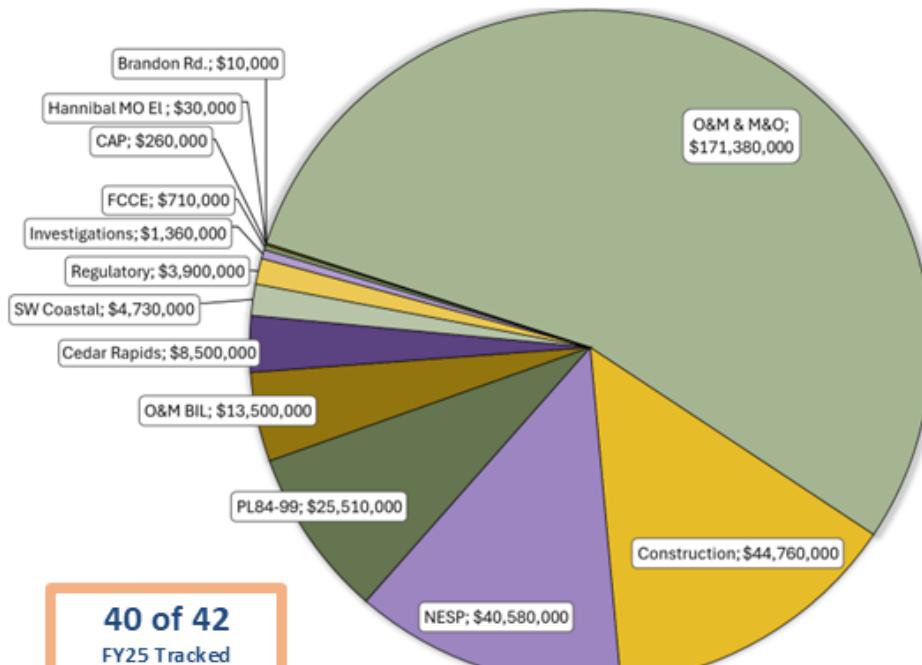
#1 in the Nation for General Permit Review Efficiency

96% General Permits Reviewed within 60 days



790 Permitting Decisions Completed

Average Days for Mitigation Bank Review: 398
(1/2 the national average)



40 of 42
FY25 Tracked Milestones Completed on Schedule

KEY CONTRACTS

- **\$3.75 Billion** - Modifications to ACI Debris Removal Contracts
- **\$48 Million** – SW Coastal Storm Risk Management Screening Phase 5-year A-E IDIQ
- **\$25 Million** - National Flood Fight Materiel Center Gabion Basket 5-year IDIQ
- **\$22 Million** - Lock and Dam 19 Nose Pier Replacement and Bulkhead Recesses
- **\$15.5 Million** - Brandon Road Interbasin Project (BRIP) – Increment 1-B



Regional Programs/Projects

- Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program
- Upper Mississippi Restoration Program
- Brandon Road Interbasin Project
- Southwest Coastal Louisiana Storm Risk Management & Ecosystem Restoration Project

National Recognitions

- Silver Jackets Coordinator of the Year
- Chief of Engineers Safety Individual of the Year
- USACE Innovation of The Year Award (INDC)

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EMERGENCY RESPONSE & PREPAREDNESS

NATIONAL FLOOD FIGHT MATERIEL CENTER 18 USACE Districts Supported
Sandbags = 2.6M
Poly Sheeting = 118K linear feet
Gabion Baskets = 169K linear feet

Critical Missions: Central U.S. Flooding, Muscatine Island Levee Supplemental Pumps, Juneau - Alaska Mendenhall Glacier Outflow



106 Employees Deployed for Emergency Missions to support recovery efforts for the Maui Wildfire, California Wildfires & Hurricane Helene.

•AROUND THE DISTRICT•



Program Manager Jim Homann was honored as the Silver Jackets Coordinator of the Year, receiving a flag flown over the USACE Mississippi Valley Division Headquarters in Vicksburg, Mississippi. In a letter accompanying the award, Division Commander Maj. Gen. Kimberly Peeples praised Homann's leadership, noting his instrumental role in onboarding new team members and revitalizing the Illinois Silver Jackets partnership. She highlighted his two decades of effective project management and mentorship, stating, "Your contributions to the SJ/FRM mission have been valued at MSC and HQ levels. Thank you for your exemplary service."

Obituaries



Richard J. "Whitey" Fleischman, 91, of Davenport, died Sunday, September 14, 2025. Dick proudly served our country in the Air Force, stationed primarily in North England. Dick retired as a civil engineer for the Rock Island District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers after 34 years in 1994. During his career with the Corps of Engineers, he worked on numerous water resource development studies and projects in the Upper Mississippi River Basin. He was a member of the Society of American Military Engineers.



Michael "Mike" James Smith, 84, of Davenport, Iowa, passed away on Wednesday, November 5, 2025. He served his country in the United States Navy from 1959-1962. While in the Navy, he was stationed in Scotland. For most of his adult life, Mike was an Engineering Technician at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He retired in 2004 after 36 years of service.

Births



Briar Grace Sattler was born to Ming and Tate Sattler. She entered the world weighing 6 pounds, 4 ounces.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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