

TOWER TIMES

Fall 2026

MOORING CELLS PROVIDE
COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTION

RESTORATION TO
REVITALIZE IN POOL 18

CORALVILLE LAKE
RIBBON CUTTING

LOCKS AND DAM 15
WEBCAM RETURNS



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
Rock Island District

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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On the Cover

A tow transiting Locks and Dam 15 as seen from the Government Bridge in Rock Island, Illinois, now streaming live from a new webcam atop the Mississippi River Visitor Center (lower right).

Photo by Jordan Raiff

View on the web: www.mvr.usace.army.mil/Media/Publications/TowerTimes.aspx

Building Trust Through Communication and Partnership



Col. Aaron M. Williams
District Commander

Rock Island Team,
As we wrap up a very busy summer, I am once again reminded of the resilience and dedication of our District workforce. The persistence you have shown remains as impressive today as when I first joined this team over two years ago.

As autumn approaches, our operational focus naturally shifts. We are nearing the end of the fiscal year; a time that often brings uncertainty and challenges. Our recreation season is winding down, and the slowdown of the navigation season is within sight. Although our environment and daily tasks change, the dedicated efforts of our incredible workforce do not. While significant work lies ahead, we remain fully prepared and committed to meeting the challenge.

This time of year also brings our recurring efforts to strengthen partnerships, build new ones and reassure stakeholders of our commitment to the many mission areas we serve. Early in my tenure here, it became evident that our successes depend heavily on strong collaboration with various entities.

Communication is the bedrock of trust. Regarding our District and our customers, we must share information often and with purpose. However, keeping people informed is not just about transmitting; it requires active listening. Like most things, effective communication is a two-way street.

There are times when operational realities mean we cannot share everything, and the same holds true for our partners. That is acceptable, provided we remain as transparent as possible and do so frequently. Without this steady flow of information, we introduce unnecessary hurdles to our mission.

The second key to our success is actively nurturing our external connections. We must put real effort into this because strong relationships are necessary to endure inevitable challenges. We will experience friction points with our partners and stakeholders. However, if our foundation of trust is solid, we will overcome these hurdles together. Enduring success is built on trust and communication.

In the coming months, our team will focus heavily on upcoming partnering meetings with key stakeholders across our five-state areas of responsibility. These engagements will bring together our local, state, and federal partners to align on shared goals. Experience has shown that these collaborative touchpoints are absolutely vital to our collective success.

Thank you for what each of you does every day, and for your continued commitment to communicating and building solid relationships with everyone you interact with.

Essayons!

Appreciate you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely of Col. Aaron M. Williams.

Col. Aaron M. Williams
Rock Island District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

NESP Mooring Cells Provide Cost-Effective Solution for Barge Traffic

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

Since the Rock Island District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was established along the Mississippi River more than 160 years ago, navigation has been central to its mission. Today, the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) is working to improve navigation efficiency in a variety of ways, including the construction of mooring cells.

“The purpose of a mooring cell is to allow towboats with barges transiting locks to wait at a safer spot closer to the lock,” said Colin Ewan, project manager for the mooring cell project. “Right now, when tows are waiting to use the locks, they are nosed into shorelines. Mooring cells allow the towboats to wait closer to the lock and shorten the turnaround time. It allows a tow leaving the lock to pass as another is entering in the opposite direction.”

Planning their locations was a crucial step in making this innovation a success.

“As part of NESP, we have authorization to build eight mooring cells,” said Ewan. “We identified sites in the project’s feasibility report and took them to industry representatives to ensure they were primary locations where the need was the greatest. A few sites were a bit different, and now we have four of them in the Quad Cities area: two in Pool 14, one in Pool 15 and one in Pool 16.”

So far, Ewan said local officials have been receptive to the mooring cells and their potential to improve industrial use along the waterways. Coordination has been key to making sure the cells are placed in locations where they won’t impact future development.

“After meeting with the Illinois Department of Transportation about their new bridge location, we ended up moving the planned location for the mooring cell at Pool 14 roughly 250 feet, which presented a unique challenge,” said Ewan.

Despite needing to adjust placement for new bridge construction, construction has proceeded smoothly.

“The cell in Pool 15 was completed three years ago and is fully in use. The two currently upstream of Pool 14 are under active construction and are expected to be completed this year,” said Ewan.

Continuing, he explained, “We have poured all the underwater concrete, placed the sheet piling, and we’re waiting for the delivery of the cell cap fabrications. This is a steel structure welded onto the steel structure in place where the barge is going to hit. While there is an impact rating on what is there, it’s not designed for repeated barge strikes. Essentially, this is an armor cap that has significantly stronger steel that they’re going to weld on top. This included the rebar for the check posts, where the bar comes in contact with the mooring cells.”

With check posts that will be 6 to 22 feet out of the water, depending on the location and water height, the cells are designed to provide benefits to barges during drought or near-flood conditions.

“The navigation industry has been incredibly supportive of this initiative as it drastically increases their efficiency,” said Ewan.

Estimates indicated these mooring cells will save an average of five to 15-minutes off each lockage, for a total of 215 to 220 hours of waiting time eliminated per year, per lock yielding an estimated \$300,000 in savings due to reduced queuing. 



A mooring cell being constructed in Pool 16 of the Mississippi River as part of the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program. Photo by Vontrice Jones

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Ben DeRoo Operations Project Manager: Tri-Lakes

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

Careers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are rarely a singular path. For Ben DeRoo, the operations project manager for the Tri-Lakes region of the Rock Island District, it has been a trail that started before he even knew what USACE was.

"Back in 2009, I was in college, going to St. Ambrose in Davenport, and there was a flyer about summer seasonal work as a park ranger," DeRoo said. "So, I made a phone call and started working in Muscatine as a summer hire. I didn't know what the Corps of Engineers was or what they did, but after I graduated, I was able to transition to a full-time position in the Thompson Ranger Office."

Seeing a new opportunity on the horizon, DeRoo moved to resource management as a budget analyst.

"It was an interesting opportunity to diversify and learn something completely outside my normal comfort zone. It opened my eyes a lot to the diversity of the work USACE does."

After five years, DeRoo moved into project management.

"I moved into project management working in O&M [Operations and Maintenance] as a project and program manager, where I did all the non-routine projects for the lakes," he said. "I also supported work along the Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway. A big chunk of my workload was the non-routine projects that were getting completed, like repairs, new offices, facilities, improvements and work at the reservoirs," DeRoo explained.

Together, these experiences have set DeRoo up for success in his new role.

Encompassing the oversight of three flood-control reservoirs in Iowa: Coralville Lake, Lake Red Rock, and Saylorville Lake, DeRoo needs to know the ins

and outs for each location to the macro level.

"We have three business lines at each project: flood risk management, environmental stewardship and recreation. In Saylorville, we also have water supply. It's really about taking care of our infrastructure and managing the reservoir at appropriate levels."

According to DeRoo, this all comes down to asking direct questions and staying on top of preventive maintenance.

"Do we have our recreation and public day-

use areas open? For environmental stewardship, what are we doing for our land management practices? Are we conducting timber stand improvement, maintaining food plots and prairies that we take care of and mow? We have about 70 land management areas across the three reservoirs," DeRoo said.

Performing his job with pride, DeRoo keeps the priorities on target.

"This is where people who come to recreate spend their time, whether it be boating, hiking, camping, fishing, etc. So, we take great pride in making sure those areas and opportunities stay open and

the land accessible without having to cut or reduce our services to the public."

To those looking to take the next step or start with USACE, DeRoo had some advice.

"Go into new opportunities with an open mind. Listen to who you're going to be working with, whether it be supervisors or employees. Try to understand what their challenges are, but also sit back and observe to see what the challenges dictate on a day-to-day basis." 🏠



Ben De Roo presiding over the ribbon cutting for the Coralville Lake's newly renovated Administration Building and Visitor Center. Photo by Jim Finn

Hidden by Earth, Revealed by Water: Exploring the Devonian Fossil Gorge at Coralville Lake

By Sam Heilig, Public Affairs Specialist

Just a short drive from Iowa City lies one of the Midwest's most unique geological treasures. Managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, the Devonian Fossil Gorge at Coralville Lake preserves a 375-million-year-old ocean floor.

During the Devonian Period, the region that is now a landlocked Midwestern state was positioned south of the equator and covered by a warm, shallow tropical sea. Today, managing this site is a unique part of the USACE environmental stewardship mission, offering visitors a rare opportunity to step back in time.

The gorge was not uncovered by careful paleontological excavation, but rather through the sheer force of nature during critical flood risk management operations. The site was unexpectedly revealed during the devastating floods of 1993.

Heavy rains forced Coralville Lake to overtop its emergency spillway for the first time. The spillway

operated as designed to protect downstream communities, channeling a massive amount of water, up to 17,000 cubic feet per second for 28 days, down the hillside.

This powerful surge of water destroyed a local road and campground, washing away up to 15 feet of soil and eroding several layers of limestone from the area below the spillway. When floodwaters receded, a remarkably preserved section of limestone bedrock was exposed, and ancient marine fossils were revealed.

"When the water finally stopped flowing over the spillway, rangers went down to assess the scour and infrastructure damage. What they found was a preserved prehistoric ocean floor, completely stripped clean of topsoil. It was a stark reminder of the sheer power of water, and an incredible discovery for the public," said Doug Vogel, manager at Coralville Lake.

The gorge captured people's imagination. When the site initially opened to the public on Labor Day



Outdoor educational displays at the Devonian Fossil Gorge explain how catastrophic floodwaters carved out the site, exposing a 375-million-year-old prehistoric ocean floor below Coralville Lake's emergency spillway. Photo by Sam Heilig

weekend in 1993, it drew tens of thousands of curious visitors. Recognizing the immense educational value of the site, the USACE Rock Island District partnered with a local citizen committee that raised nearly \$500,000 to protect and enhance the area.

By 2001, the site was officially dedicated as an educational park, outfitted with an entry plaza, accessible walkways, and 20 guided discovery points.

However, nature was not done shaping the landscape. In 2008, another massive flood required use of the emergency spillway, and a good portion of the educational park was washed away.

Following the 2008 floods, the Rock Island District led rehabilitation efforts to adapt the park to the newly exposed space. Sidewalks were rebuilt and markers were reinstalled to highlight the various points of interest.

Today, visitors to the Devonian Fossil Gorge can walk across the prehistoric sea floor. Because these fossils predate the dinosaurs by nearly 200 million years, there are no dinosaur bones on-site.

Instead, the limestone is rich with incredible evidence of ancient marine life. Visitors can see preserved crinoid stems, brachiopods, and dense patches of colonial corals like the honeycomb-shaped Favosites and the six-sided Hexagonaria.

“Our mission here goes beyond just maintaining the grounds; it is about preserving a 375-million-

year-old snapshot of Earth’s history. We love seeing visitors point out a fossilized coral under their feet, but we rely heavily on the public to help us protect the site by leaving every fossil exactly where they found it,” said Vogel.

Things to know before visiting:

- **The park is free to enter. The entry plaza and upper walkways are fully accessible, though the uneven bedrock of the gorge floor itself requires careful navigation.**
- **As with all federal lands managed by USACE, regulations strictly prohibit the removal of or damage to any natural features. Violators are subject to fines, so visitors are urged to take only photographs and leave the fossils intact for future generations to study and enjoy.**

Learn more by visiting: <https://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/coralvillelake/recreation/devonian-fossil-gorge/>. 



Visitors explore the limestone bedrock of the Devonian Fossil Gorge below the Coralville Lake spillway near Iowa City, Iowa. The gorge was originally uncovered during the historic flood of 1993. *Photo by Sam Heilig*

Restoration to Revitalize: Pool 18 and the Mississippi

By Frances Candelaria, Public Affairs Specialist

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in partnership with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, has released a draft feasibility report for the Pool 18 Forestry Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project. This project represents a critical step forward for the federally authorized Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) Program. It is a major ecological restoration effort to revitalize over 900 acres of floodplain forests and wetlands along the Upper Mississippi River, near the towns of New Boston, Keithsburg and Oquawka, Illinois.



Project delivery team members Tate Sattler and Jillian Harms assess floodplain forest resources during a site visit for the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program's Pool 18 Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project.
Photo by Clayton Corken

"Historically, the Iowa River Delta and Blackhawk and Johnson islands supported robust and diverse forest communities. For instance, the Iowa River Delta once held the largest population of Kentucky coffee tree in the state of Iowa," said Steve Acuff, a natural resources specialist for the Regional Planning and Environmental Division at Rock Island. "However, human development, and extreme weather and flooding events have fundamentally altered how the river system operates and its ability to maintain and recruit healthy floodplain forests."

The project team has identified three critical environmental threats:

- **Prolonged Flooding:** Increased frequency and duration of high-water events are drowning out native trees.
 - **Invasive Species:** Aggressive, non-native vegetation is rapidly outcompeting native plants.
 - **Understory Degradation:** A lack of natural regeneration is threatening the long-term survival of the forest.
-

To combat these threats, the restoration team has established three core mission objectives: restoring forest diversity, increasing seasonal wetland areas, and revitalizing the forest understory. The proposed plan outlines a highly targeted, multi-tiered engineering and forestry strategy designed to bring lasting resilience to 909 acres of federally owned, state-managed land.

To accomplish these goals, the tentatively selected plan proposes four key restoration techniques.

The first technique, timber stand improvement, uses selective species thinning, prescribed fire and targeted tree planting to encourage natural regeneration. The next, ridge and swale creation, reshapes the topography to mimic the natural, wave-like patterns of an undisturbed floodplain.

To further manage water on the landscape, pothole scraping creates isolated depressions that trap water after seasonal floods, establishing permanent pools that serve as critical habitat for amphibians

and reptiles. Finally, non-forestry planting introduces diverse aquatic and emergent vegetation, providing immediate forage and nesting cover for pollinators and local wildlife.

“The project is designed to improve various floodplain habitat that support local wildlife. Floodplain forest improvements will benefit a wide array of species, including neotropical migratory birds, waterfowl, and fur bearing mammals, while more targeted measures like pothole wetland improvements and native vegetation plantings will provide refuge

for herptile species such as the state-endangered copperbelly and state-threatened diamondback water snakes with known populations in the area,” explained Acuff.

For the local community, restoring this dynamic ecosystem ensures that Pool 18 will remain a premier public destination for outdoor recreation, including camping, fishing, boating, and hunting for generations to come. 🏠



As part of the Pool 18 Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project, interior island wetland areas like this one will be enhanced through the introduction of native emergent wetland vegetation and shrubs to support local wildlife.

Photo by Clayton Corken

New Renovations Enhance Mission at Coralville Lake

By Jim Finn, Public Affairs Specialist

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, officially opened a renovated Administration Building and Visitor Center and newly built Storage Facility at Coralville Lake during a ribbon-cutting ceremony July 10. The event marked a major investment in the future of the project and the communities it serves.

Community leaders, elected officials and their representatives attended the ceremony, including Laurie Goodrich, mayor of the City of Coralville, and Rochelle Fuller, representing the office of Sen. Chuck Grassley.

The transformed project office complex combines modern workspaces with expanded educational

opportunities, reinforcing the USACE missions of flood risk management, recreation and environmental stewardship.

"We are excited to have these new facilities, and even more excited to use these spaces to better serve our community and visitors," said Ben DeRoo, Tri-Lakes Operations Project Manager. "Coralville Lake has long been a community treasure, connecting people to the outdoors through camping, hiking, boating and the Devonian Fossil Gorge."

The renovated main building includes a 4,200-square-foot administrative office supporting 13 Natural Resources Specialists and modernized communication, security and safety systems. Adjacent



Rochelle Fuller, representative from Sen. Chuck Grassley's office (left), and Coralville Mayor Laurie Goodrich (right) hold the ceremonial ribbon for USACE Rock Island District Commander Col. Aaron Williams (center left) and Tri-Lakes Operations Project Manager Ben DeRoo (center right), alongside Coralville Lake staff, park rangers, and volunteers as they celebrate the opening of the newly renovated Administration Building and Visitor Center. *Photo by Jim Finn*



A replica Dunkleosteus skull display at the new Coralville Lake Visitor Center, designed to educate guests about the Devonian Fossil Gorge located downstream of the lake's spillway. Photo by Jim Finn

to the office is a 3,000-square-foot visitor center featuring interpretive exhibits on the lake's history and environmental significance, Devonian Period fossil displays, recreation information and a flexible classroom for educational programs and community outreach.

"Our upgrades aren't just about new walls," said Coralville Lake Manager Doug Vogel. "They're about supporting our mission-critical operations and expanding how we connect with the public."

The newly constructed 8,340-square-foot storage facility, designed to strengthen operational readiness, includes a 10-bay garage, wash bay, office space and expanded storage. The renovation project also included upgrading utility infrastructure and installation of a backup generator system to help ensure uninterrupted operations.

Col. Aaron Williams, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District, said the new facilities reflect the District's commitment to both operational excellence and public service.

"While flood risk management remains our primary mission, our efforts have always reached far beyond the dam," Williams said. "These upgraded facilities ensure our staff have the resources they need while providing a welcoming place for families and students to learn about this remarkable resource."

Mayor Goodrich highlighted Coralville Lake's lasting impact on the community, calling it a critical

tool for flood risk management, a premier destination for outdoor recreation and a place that helps build a healthy, active community. She said the lake contributes to residents' mental and emotional well-being while strengthening the city's overall quality of life.

Located between Iowa City and Cedar Rapids, Coralville Lake encompasses 24,597 acres of land and water and welcomes more than one million visitors annually. The project offers boating, camping, hiking, mountain biking, bird watching and access to the Devonian Fossil Gorge, one of Iowa's most unique natural attractions. 



Visitors admire a bald eagle exhibit at the newly renovated Coralville Lake Visitor Center.

Photo by Jim Finn

Antiterrorism Awareness Month: Our Shared Responsibility

By Frank Jacobs, Security Specialist

It has been 25 years since our nation felt the pain and fear of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. I can remember everything about those moments. I had the TV on as I was getting ready to leave. I watched as reporters filmed the fire on the first tower.

I watched as the second plane struck the tower. It felt like the world had stopped. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, and I felt like I had to make myself breathe.

Since that day, our nation has continued to adapt to an ever-changing world of threats. In advance of this anniversary, we observe Antiterrorism Awareness Month (ATAM) throughout August. Daily Tasking Order (DTO) 26-07-09 directs us as follows:

"USACE will execute the Army's Annual Antiterrorism Awareness Month (ATAM) throughout August 2026, delegating execution authority to commanders and directors at all echelons. The strategic objective is to institutionalize heightened antiterrorism awareness and vigilance enterprise-

wide, thereby mitigating the risk of terrorist attacks and safeguarding USACE personnel, critical infrastructure, and resources from violent extremist threats. During the month of August USACE conducts comprehensive Antiterrorism (AT) education and

awareness operations targeting Soldiers, Department of the Army (DA) Civilians, contractors, and family members in order to instill heightened organizational vigilance, deter terrorist activities, and protect critical personnel and resources."

How USACE Headquarters guidance is being implemented at the Rock Island District:

- **Go Beyond the Checkbox:** We all must complete our mandatory Level I AT Awareness Training, but true security requires more than basic compliance. We need to apply these concepts every day. Be situationally aware, don't allow tailgating through secure doors, remove your CAC when leaving your desk, and practice good operational security (OPSEC) in public spaces.
- **See Something, Say Something:** Threat recognition is our collective defense against violent extremism and insider threats. Familiarize yourself with reporting systems such as iWATCH Army and iSalute. If you observe suspicious activity — such as unauthorized photography of our facilities, unusual questions about our operations or concerning behavioral changes in a colleague — report it immediately.
- **Enhance Our Survivability:** Take time this month to review your office's emergency action plans. Familiarize yourself with primary and secondary evacuation routes, and mentally rehearse your active shooter response procedures. Preparedness saves lives.
- **Trust the Process:** While you remain vigilant, know that District leadership and our ATOs are working hard behind the scenes. They are actively reviewing facility-level plans, conducting Random Antiterrorism Measures (RAMs) and tailoring Force Protection Condition (FPCON) measures to ensure our environment remains secure.

As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, this year's campaign reinforces our resolve. By promoting focused ATAM themes, we will sustain a proactive defensive posture designed to enhance situational awareness and organizational vigilance across the District.

What does this mean for our district?

Headquarters sets the strategy, but the actual work of protecting our people happens right here, every day. A strong security culture means safety is not just the responsibility of the Antiterrorism Officer (ATO) or the guards at the door — it is a shared responsibility.

The events of 25 years ago showed us the worst of what can happen when our adversaries succeed. This August, let's

honor that memory by looking out for one another, remaining vigilant and ensuring our District remains a hard target.

Stay safe, and thank you for doing your part. 

DEPLOYMENT SPOTLIGHT:

Maj. Matthew Kindig

By Jordan Raiff, Editor

Given the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works mission, military personnel across USACE can still find opportunities to support emergency response and recovery efforts. For Maj. Matthew Kindig, one such opportunity came when he was offered a deployment to the Mariana Islands in the Pacific Ocean, southeast of Japan.

"Col. Pfeiffer, deputy director of contracting for USACE, the highest military contracting [official] in USACE, reached out to all 51Cs (Army contracting officers), asking us about deploying to Saipan to support disaster relief efforts from Typhoon Sinlaku," Kindig said. "I volunteered but couldn't go for the first iteration due to family commitments, but I offered to go over the summer. I always wanted to deploy and support natural disaster recovery, so I jumped at the opportunity."

Upon his arrival, Kindig found himself jumping feet-first into the action.

"I worked within the Recovery Field Office while there," he said. "I wasn't a part of any of the Planning and Response Teams. Contracts themselves were handled by the home districts. Instead, I was giving business advice to the commander, tracking contracts and advising on pieces I identified that either already needed contract support or were likely to in the future. I would also relay my findings to the home district based in Hawaii."

Kindig said he quickly found that his role would evolve and become more complex.

"Roughly a week after I arrived to the Recovery Field Office, the commander pulled me aside and, since I was the senior major, he made me the Executive Officer of the RFO," Kindig said. "I helped coordinate the staffing, logistics, administrative, and operational side of things because it was a rapidly evolving mission, especially when Typhoon Bavi came through while we were there."

While forecasted in advance, Typhoon Bavi was a system with a difficult-to-pinpoint landfall location. Thankfully, Kindig and others were prepared.

"We all had to shelter in place as that happened," he said. "Since the Northern Mariana Islands consist of three main islands — from north to south, Saipan, the biggest island, Tinian and Rota — the destruction was spread out. Saipan took most of the damage from Sinlaku, and Tinian took a glancing hit," said Kindig.

"Meanwhile, with Bavi, it was a direct hit on Rota. This second typhoon didn't delay any progress we had made on the first two islands, but it created a recovery need where we previously didn't have much work. We had to do power generation first," he added.

It also meant a change in mission for Kindig and others.

"After Bavi, the biggest portion of my role was organizing the logistics to get people onto Rota, because with the airport being down, you could only do charter flights," Kindig said. "It's such a small island, with approximately 2,000 people living there, and they only have two hotels and an incredibly limited number of rental vehicles. Now trying to bring in so many members of FEMA, USACE and other personnel, they just lacked the capacity for them to be there. This meant staggering our support, so power generation was the top priority, then roofing, then debris."

"You're there for the people"

"Deployments with USACE are well worth it. While there, numerous people told me this would be one of the most gratifying times I would spend with USACE, and I would agree with that. You're there for the people, and to help them, and not for yourself. The people who were there are so appreciative of us being there to help them." 



Maj. Matthew Kindig performs spot checks on recovery efforts while deployed in response to Typhoon Sinlaku in the North Mariana Islands.
Courtesy Image

USACE Rock Island District Turns 160

Historical compilation by Jordan Raiff



The Clock Tower Building at the Rock Island Arsenal in 1938, four years after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District officially established its headquarters at the site. In the foreground, horseshoe pits are visible on the lawn, installed for employee recreation. *District Library Photo*

August 3, 1866, marked the arrival of Lt. Col. James H. Wilson in Keokuk, Iowa, an event recognized as the beginning of the Rock Island District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. While the term “District” did not

become part of the USACE vocabulary for another 42 years, his arrival is widely recognized as the starting point for the organization.

Originating as part of a congressional act of 1866, appropriated funds were earmarked to provide the first official attempt at addressing the navigational challenges of the upper Mississippi River. Just three years after his arrival, a field office was established in Rock

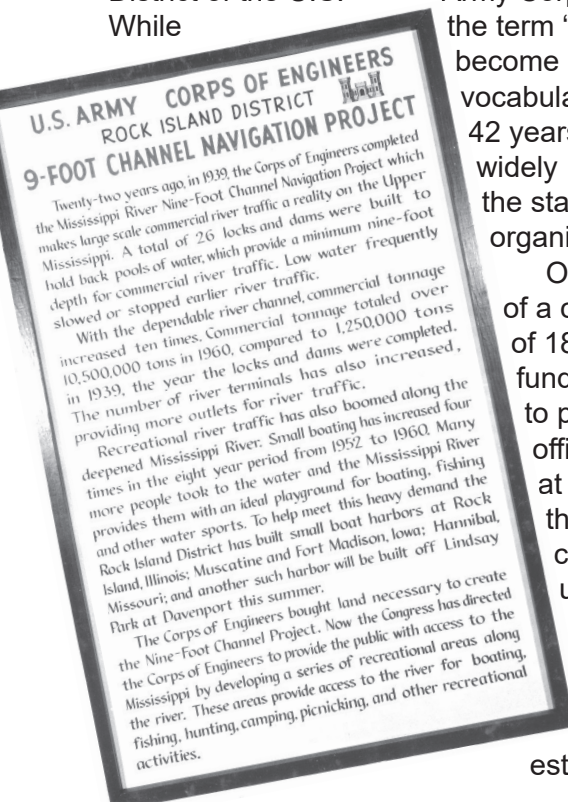
Island, Illinois, while remaining under the established command in Keokuk, Iowa. This decision proved fruitful in the years to come.

In the late 1880s, construction of a 4½-foot navigation channel on the Mississippi River spurred the idea of separating the area between St. Paul, Minnesota, and St. Louis, Missouri, into its own “District,” ultimately known as the Rock Island District.

By 1907, the project expanded to a 6-foot channel, with an ultimate depth of 9 feet reached in 1930 — a depth still maintained today.

As the 9-foot channel project and construction efforts grew, so did the need for a more prominent and centrally located headquarters. In 1934, the Clock Tower Building at the Rock Island Arsenal was acquired by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and later became the headquarters for the District. In 1936, the mission expanded to include flood control. Ultimately, this addition resulted in the construction of five reservoirs throughout the Rock Island District.

Like many other organizations, the District adjusted its mission in 1942 to support the war effort by shifting from civil works to military construction. This change resulted in the completion of \$80 million in projects before returning to its original civil works focus in 1945.



In 1980, a Corps-wide realignment changed the mission of the District drastically. The responsibilities for the Illinois, Chicago, Fox, Des Plaines, Kankakee and Sangamon rivers became significant parts of the Rock Island District mission.

Accordingly, in 1986, the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program began. Formed to address the health and sustainability of the Mississippi River and its waterways, UMRR has been instrumental in the significant changes seen along the Mississippi River over the last 40 years. In 2004, this effort led to the Upper Mississippi River — Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study. The results of this study have greatly impacted how ecological conflicts and

waterway planning are conducted, not only in the Rock Island District, but globally.

With near-consistent months of rain in 1993, floodwaters shattered records and cost thousands of families their livelihoods during one of the most devastating floods in U.S. history. As a result of the Rock Island District's incredible response, the District was recognized as the center of expertise for flood fight material distribution in 2006. This mission has sent representatives from the Flood Fight Materiel Center across the U.S. to serve not only as technical advisers, but also as on-the-ground trainers during catastrophic flood events.

(Continued on page 16)



Looking down from Lockport Lock's lift tower in 1942, the submarine USS *Peto* traverses the Illinois Waterway in a floating drydock. Whether moving emergency wartime vessels or millions of tons of agricultural and industrial goods each year, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers navigation infrastructure has been vital to the process. *District Library Photo*

(Continued from page 15)

In the year 2013, Rock Island District saw further innovation as the Inland Navigation Design Center — Mandatory Center of Expertise was created. Widely regarded as a premier organization for maritime engineering, its expertise supports waterway projects not only across the Mississippi River system, but around the globe. With innovation at the core of its mission, the center continues finding new and better ways to accomplish the mission.

In 2016, the Lockport Lock and Dam Upper Pool Project was completed, becoming one of the largest civil works projects completed by the District. Featuring a canal pool nearly 40 feet above neighboring communities, the structure had been in existence for more than 100 years but was showing signs of weakening. With reliability concerns raised in the 1990s, the Rock Island District took on the challenge and developed a solution to ensure continued operation.

More recently, in 2024, the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program, also known as NESP, initiated construction of the Lock and Dam 22 Fish Passage Project near Saverton, Missouri. As the first structure of its kind on the Upper Mississippi River, the ladder design features multiple pools

allowing fish to move up and down river over the spillway, to continue their natural migration pathway for spawning. NESP also has led the way for lock expansion on the Upper Mississippi River system as construction is ongoing for a 1,200-foot lock at Lock and Dam 25.

After 160 years, the Rock Island District has experienced significant changes. The District has faced challenges, met adversity head-on and continued advancing solutions for the safety of our waterways and communities. Together, the District and USACE stand ready to design solutions to the toughest challenges while providing value, safety and security to the region and the nation.

After 160 years, the Rock Island District remains at the leading edge of civil works and water resource management. Today, the District pairs historic engineering experience with emerging capabilities to overcome complex challenges of today's world. As it has since 1866, the Rock Island District stands ready 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. 



Looking north at construction of the outlet works and control tower for the Coralville Reservoir on the Iowa River in 1952. *District Library Photo*

Locks and Dam 15 Webcam Returns

By Sam Heilig, Public Affairs Specialist

A live webcam overlooking Locks and Dam 15 on the Mississippi River has returned to serve as a practical resource for maritime watchers and local motorists across the Quad Cities.

Operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, the camera provides a real-time view of lock operations and the adjacent Government Bridge, which connects Davenport, Iowa, and Rock Island, Illinois.

For years, a webcam had operated at the site before being taken offline a few years back due to the scheduled demolition of the tower it was mounted to, and outdated technology. A new camera was recently installed by the Mississippi River Project in response to strong community interest and ongoing public requests for the feed.

Today, the stream remains popular with river enthusiasts and industry watchers monitoring commercial towboats and barges transiting the 600-foot lock chamber.

Area commuters also rely on the feed to check traffic conditions before crossing the river. The Government Bridge features a swing span that rotates open to allow tows to pass, temporarily halting roadway and rail traffic. By checking the stream, drivers can see whether the bridge is turned for river traffic or open to vehicles, helping them plan their routes and avoid delays.

The live feed is available to the public on the Rock Island District website: <https://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/media/webcam/>. 



A view of the new live webcam overlooking Locks and Dam 15 and the Government Bridge.



USACE Headquarters Leadership Visits Nahant Marsh Mitigation Banks

By Abigail Steele, Chief Regulatory Div. Western Branch

The Rock Island District welcomed Mr. Stephen Hill, director of Operations and Regulatory Program, Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for a visit to the Nahant Marsh Mitigation Banks in Davenport, Iowa.

As one of the largest urban wetlands on the Upper Mississippi River, Nahant Marsh provided an ideal setting to highlight the Regulatory Program and demonstrate how mitigation banking can support the Corps' Section 404 mission while building on and expanding decades of successful restoration.

At Nahant, Mr. Hill was able to see that approach across three different stages of mitigation. Phase I demonstrated what successful wetland mitigation looks like after years of restoration, monitoring and active management. Phase II showcased stream restoration focused on restoring natural stream processes and functions, including remeandering a straightened stream, reconnecting the floodplain, creating channel diversity and establishing native riparian habitat.

Phase III, currently in development, builds on lessons learned from the first two projects and proposes to restore and enhance nearly 58 additional acres of former agricultural land adjacent to the existing Nahant Marsh complex.

Together, the projects demonstrate the broader value of mitigation banking: meeting compensatory mitigation needs for unavoidable impacts authorized through the Section 404 program while directing restoration toward larger, permanently protected and connected aquatic resource systems. At Nahant, mitigation is not occurring in isolation; it is helping expand an established wetland complex and improve habitat connectivity, water quality, floodplain function and long-term ecological resilience within the Mississippi River landscape.

The visit provided an opportunity to demonstrate how the Rock Island District, mitigation providers and conservation partners can use the Section 404 program not only to offset unavoidable aquatic resource impacts, but also to support meaningful, landscape-scale restoration with lasting benefits. 



Abigail Steele (center left), Chief Regulatory Division, Rock Island District-Western Branch discusses the Nahant Marsh mitigation banks with Mr. Stephen Hill, director of Operations and Regulatory Program, Headquarters USACE (center right). Matt Zehr, Chief, Regulatory Division, Rock Island District, (far right) and Andrew Smothers, Deputy Operations Chief of the Mississippi Valley Division, look on. Photo by Jordan Raiff

• AROUND THE DISTRICT •

USACE Family News

Obituaries



Michael "Frank" Robbins passed away July 1, 2026. Serving as an infantry RTO with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade, 2/3 Delta, Robbins was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart after being wounded in action. Following his discharge in 1971, he began his career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Lock and Dam 18, ultimately retiring in 2004 as a Lockmaster.



Richard Charles "Dick" Atkinson passed away July 18, 2026, in Davenport, Iowa. A native of Chicago, Illinois, he graduated from the University of Iowa with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1964. In July 1964, he began his career with the Rock Island District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ultimately retiring as Chief, Structural Section, Engineering Division.

Births



Miles Lucas Kraft was born to Shelly and Mason Kraft. She weighed 6 pounds, 8 ounces.



Carson Edward Molenburg was born to Lizzy and Griffen Molenburg. He entered the world weighing 7 pounds, 14 ounces.



Cecelia Brooke Scalora was born to Lindsay and Nick Scalora. She entered the world weighing 8 pounds, 7 ounces.

Please send family news to cemvr-cc@usace.army.mil to be included in the next issue of the Tower Times.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY ENGINEER DISTRICT, ROCK ISLAND
CLOCK TOWER BLDG. – P.O. BOX 2004
ROCK ISLAND, IL 61204-2004

Can you name where this photo was taken?



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

Last Issue's Winner



Answer: Northeast corner
of the Clock Tower at the
Rock Island Arsenal
Winner: Robert McAfee