

Stakeholder Meeting Participant Comments (June 2015)

What is the role of the Corps in recreation management? Is it taking on the role of park management similar to the Park Service?

USACE response: The Corps is not a mission agency like the NPS or Forest Service. It has several different business lines, of which navigation and flood risk management are primary. Recreation and water supply are secondary missions. The Corps manages recreation at 500 lakes nationally. It creates a lot of challenges due to limited funding, budgets are built in three-year cycles. Funding for recreation has declined from \$5.5 million in 2004-05 to \$3.7 million this cycle. Loyalhanna funding decreased from \$180K to \$130K. Conemaugh went down from \$120K to \$7K. On the visitation side, Loyalhanna gets \$190K on average per year and Conemaugh 83K. Budgets are driven by visitation. That's why we want to reach out to the out grants.

Is the master plan specific to the recreational areas?

USACE response: It's project wide, to include the dams.

These two projects (Conemaugh and Loyalhanna) handle flood management and recreation?

USACE response: That's correct. Their primary mission is FRM, manage high water. Secondary to that is recreation and water quality. We manage by watershed. The Pittsburgh District monitors the entire Allegheny Watershed and the Upper Ohio, along with the Beaver. And we do have dams – Tygart, WV – that have both a FRM and a navigation mission to provide augmentation flows into the Mon to ensure a navigable channel.

How visitors to the projects are accounted must be modernized.

USACE response: In prior years we would use a combination of car counts as well as hard counts in order to derive some level of confidence what our visitation numbers are for the summer season. Where we're located geographically, the bulk of our visitation is from late spring to early fall as opposed to other Corps projects to the south and west that generally have recreation all year round. One of the things I'd like to see us do collectively is to try to do something in that offseason, some kind of winter recreation if we can but it's very difficult where we're at, an area that sometimes gets snow and sometimes doesn't. That's a challenge in itself. Now, in the visitation modernization effort, the reason we're doing this is to be able to report more robust numbers for the project. We're looking to get better technology – counters, infrared scopes – things that measure people as they pass by in vehicle, bike, ATV, or on foot. It would accurately capture what level we are. Now, we still will continue to do statistical sampling and slope factors, meaning, if a car passes, on average there are, maybe, 1.2 or 2.3 visitors per car load. That's going to be a multi-year effort because of the sheer size of our project and some of the intricacies of different rec areas.

There is a need to distinguish recreation types at the two projects boating (motor/non-motor boats), camping, and fishing and who gets what. At what level of the hierarchy are policy decisions made?

USACE response: For the motor boats, that's decided by the PA Fish & Boat Commission. The recreation area and camping area are based on future conveyance.

Is there a Pittsburgh District meeting to assess the recreation portion of the project and to create a list of objectives?

USACE response: That's determined in large part by Congress, such as at the dams. How much recreation there is, is based on budget. Now, for recent budgets, we haven't had room to expand recreation. What we're doing right now is to see what other funding are available and go in a different direction.

There are different recreational at both sites even through both are close. There could be some commonalities.

USACE response: There very well could be. We are working to have one set of recreational activities at Conemaugh and another at Loyalhanna. It's going slowly, but we are trying to do better marketing and outreach.

How are water levels for dams determined? There are impacts to kayaking below Route 903 when the water levels drop off after June 1.

USACE response: Water levels are determined by water control manuals that cover operations and water quality issues. We are not authorized to the project for recreation at the expense of primary purposes, such as hydropower.

Rivers need to be marked with bigger signs, especially at access points.

Cultural resources need greater protection.

USACE response: The entire property hasn't been surveyed but we have many recorded sites that are protected. We take this into account when planning recreational areas.

Barb Frederick (PHMC): The Corps also needs to consider the landscape, dam, and other structures for Section 110 eligibility.

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Chris Baker (Park Manager, Keystone State Park):

- * There is a possibility that the Corps bottom four goals will be hit in two years.
- * Keystone tied into municipal sewer and a rails-to-trails project was recently revived – visitors will cross Corps property to use it, increasing the Corps' visitation numbers.
- * Keystone property attendance is at 600,000 and will increase in coming years, with overflow using Corps property.
- * Just recently installed four new kayak launches.
- * Water quality improvement opportunities exist at Crabtree Run.
- * The Corps needs to open up facilities for greater accessibility.
- * The Corps has unique fishing opportunities, but doesn't publicize them.

USACE response: We have identified areas for kayaking and certain water sports, but we're not Raystown Lake, which is entirely recreational and their pool doesn't fluctuate. We have some challenges they don't have. We're somewhat limited with the water levels. We agree, though, that there are opportunities for partnerships. Where the Corps is now, financially, a lot of the proposed recreation activities will have to be done through partnerships. We are striving to

make partnerships lake, by lake, by lake. Raystown Lake had \$1 million earmarked from Congress to get established, but our budgets have been declining.

How much recreational growth should be permitted? Consider crowded facilities and traffic.

USACE response: We're identifying areas where there could be growth. What we want to get out of this not just a sense of what we want to do down the road, but to maintain flexibility for what to do if funding does become available or if there is other (outside) development in the area.

Another participant's concerns:

- * Sedimentation is a huge issue on the Conemaugh River.
- * Bigger boats are starting to come on. Consider raising the pool.
- * More, bigger signage is needed. Open up all launches. Indicate parking areas.
- * There is a public perception that Conemaugh is unboatable.
- * Loyalhanna signage is unreadable.
- * Elderly and handicapped access is limited due to sediment and a lack of a ramp.

The Corps needs to harness public/private/business resources to build launches. A ramp at Keystone had partnerships with 12 different organizations and businesses.

Conemaugh needs cleanup of garbage coming from Johnstown.

IUP: The Corps needs to notify potential partner groups when opportunities exist. It needs to identify wants and needs before establishing networks. The Corps needs to improve marketing and outreach.

USACE response: Agreed. We're trying to strengthen our public engagement. We need to identify what resources are out there who can assist. We hope we can improve our partnerships. Part of it has also been a lack of communication on our part. The Corps needs to show its existing master plans to highlight to the public what we have in mind.