

Press Release

EXCELLENCE IN PARTNERSHIP AWARD SELECTION

Washington, D. C.: February 3, 2015: The Roanoke River Basin Association's Upper Reach Program has been selected as the recipient of the 2014 U. S. Army Corps of Engineers national Excellence in Partnership Award.

According to Edward E. Belk, Jr., Acting Chief, Operations and Regulatory Division, Directorate of Civil Works, the Roanoke River Basin Association-Upper Reach Program was chosen "due their efforts to provide ecotourism, recreational therapy, and environmental education throughout the Roanoke River Basin." Belk further noted that the Roanoke River Basin Association through "innovative universally accessible canoe and kayak launch project has created recreational opportunities that empower communities to connect with the outdoors through waterways."

Scott Murray, Upper Reach Program Director, stated, "This is a project we have been working on for the last few years to specifically address the recreational needs of our community, especially the handicapped and the wounded warriors. So many organizations and individuals are to be congratulated on their efforts to make this project a reality."

Gene Adesso, Roanoke River Basin Association President added that the Upper Reach Program mission is an implementation of the Association's mission to protect the basin natural resources and support its wise uses.

The Association has long range, multi-million dollar plans for the furthering of this mission according to Andrew Lester, Association Executive Director, which includes the placement of 13 more access points in the basin in the next two years.

Contact: Ms. Sara Jones, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 559-787-2589

Contact: Scott Murray, RRBA-Upper Reach Director, 252-213-9501, smurray@upperreach.org

Contact: Gene Adesso, RRBA President, 919-870-0833, gene@rrba.org

Contact: Andrew Lester, RRBA Executive Director, 434-766-6727, exdir@rrba.org

About the Roanoke River Basin Association (RRBA)

The Roanoke River Basin Association is a 70 year old non-profit organization based in Danville, Virginia with offices on the Dan River portion of the Roanoke River Basin. The Association's mission is to establish and carry out a strategy for the development, use, preservation and enhancement of the resources of the Roanoke River system of lakes and streams in the best interest of present and future generations. RRBA consists of hundreds of members, primarily located within the 410 mile-long basin in Virginia and North Carolina, including local governments; non-profit, civic, and community organizations, regional government entities; businesses and individuals. www.rrba.org www.upperreach.org



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
441 G STREET NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20314-1000

FEB 03 2015

CECW-CO

MEMORANDUM FOR Commanders, Major Subordinate Commands and District Commands; Chiefs, Operations, Major Subordinate Commands and District Commands

SUBJECT: 2014 Excellence in Partnerships Award Selection

1. I am pleased to announce that the Roanoke River Basin Association – Upper Reach in the Wilmington District (SAD) has been selected as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recipient of the 2014 national Excellence in Partnerships Award.

2. Roanoke River Basin Association – Upper Reach was chosen due to their efforts to provide ecotourism, recreational therapy, and environmental education throughout the Roanoke River Basin. Their innovative universally accessible canoe and kayak launch project has created recreational opportunities that empower communities to connect with the outdoors through waterways.

The partnership has resulted in a greater appreciation and involvement by the community, and has acted as a springboard for larger partnerships and the addition of more than a dozen new partners that have invested \$60,000 to promote the region through the creation of the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway marketing and branding campaign. This has also prompted the completion of a second universally accessible launch downstream, creating one of the first fully accessible blueways on the east coast, which has strengthened an existing partnership with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion to help provide recreational therapy to wounded warriors.

3. The Excellence in Partnerships award is co-sponsored by the Corps Foundation in recognition of exceptional contributions to the recreation and environmental stewardship programs at Corps projects. The award will be presented to Roanoke River Basin Association – Upper Reach in the spring of 2015.

4. All of the nominees for this year's award made significant contributions to their partner projects and are deserving of special mention. They are: the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (NWD), Marklesburg Volunteer Fire Department (NAD), and First Midwest Bank (MVD). I sincerely appreciate your efforts to nominate top quality partners for this significant award.

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5. Please pass along my congratulations to Roanoke River Basin Association – Upper Reach as the 2014 overall winner and to all of the nominees for their many achievements! My point of contact for this award is Ms. Sara Jones, who can be reached at (559) 787-2589.



EDWARD E. BELK, Jr., P.E.
Acting Chief, Operations and Regulatory Division
Directorate of Civil Works

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SUBJECT: 2014 Excellence in Partnerships Award Selection

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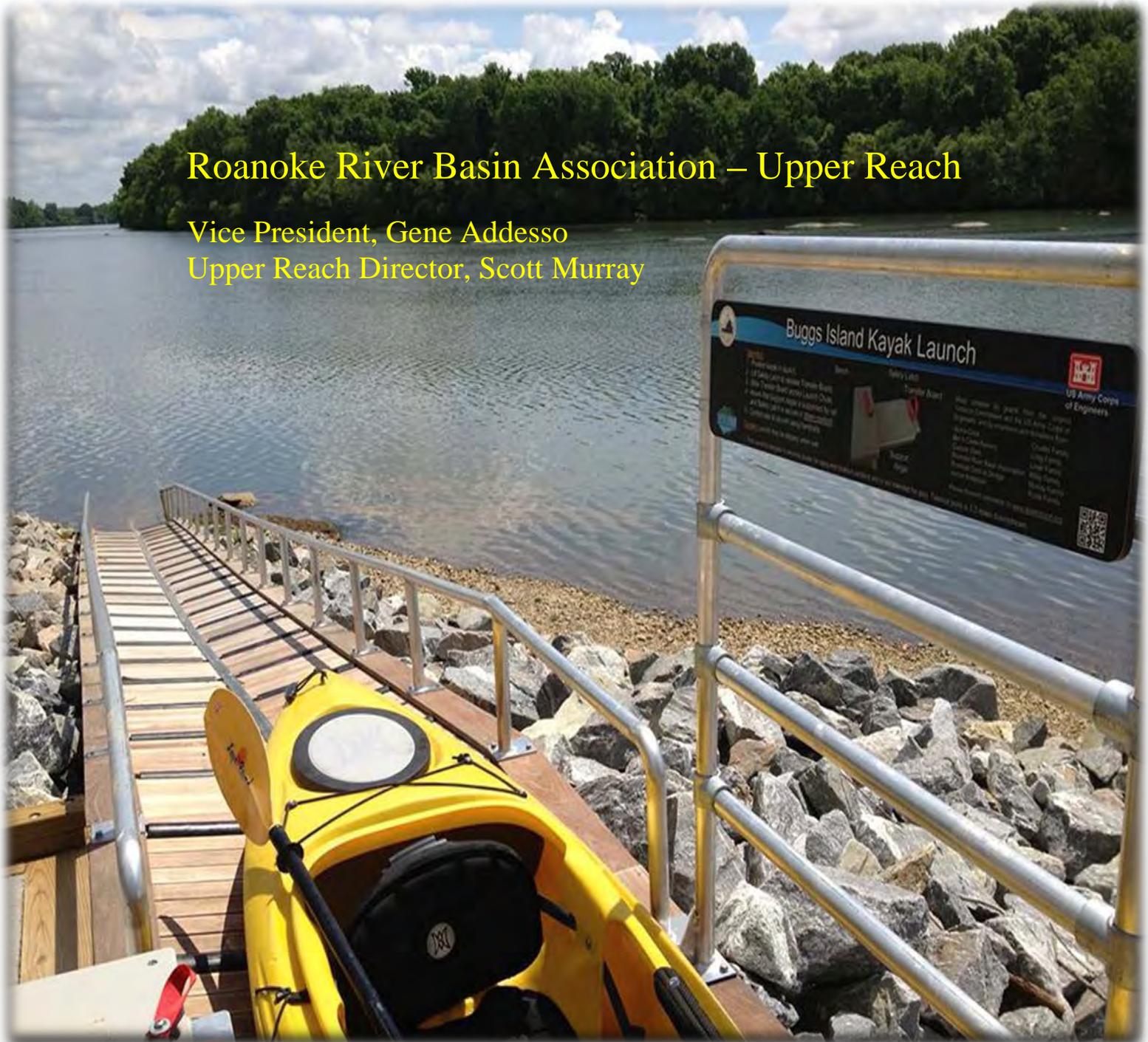
John H. Kerr Dam & Reservoir

Operations Project Manager, Michael T. Womack

John H. Kerr Dam & Reservoir
1930 Mays Chapel Road
Boydton, VA 23917
434-738-6143

Roanoke River Basin Association – Upper Reach

Vice President, Gene Adesso
Upper Reach Director, Scott Murray



The waters of the John H. Kerr tailrace and the Roanoke River are much more accessible to handicapped and able-bodied paddlers alike thanks to a partnership with the Roanoke River Basin Association-Upper Reach, which established a universally accessible canoe and kayak launch in 2013. The mission of “Upper Reach” is to provide eco-tourism, recreational therapy, and environmental education throughout the Roanoke River basin. These goals mesh well with the Corps mission to manage and conserve natural resources consistent with ecosystem management principles, while at the same time providing quality public outdoor recreation experiences to serve the needs of present and future generations. These common goals allowed for a seamless transition into a Handshake Partnership that resulted in the construction of this innovative canoe/kayak launch and its associated support facilities. This project has jump-started the Corps’ efforts to enhance access through the “Blueways Initiative” and has created recreational opportunities that empower communities to connect with the outdoors through waterways.

Creativity and Originality - The launch is a unique, original design adapted from similar facilities used on slack water systems. The frequent high water hydropower releases at Kerr Dam made these adaptations necessary to provide a safe and reliable launching platform for paddlers. The launch is composed of rugged, high quality materials which add to its sustainability and will keep maintenance to a minimum. The Upper Reach Director, Scott Murray, who also happens to be a certified landscape architect, designed this one-of-a-kind facility. The response to his unique and functional design has generated significant interest from around the country and the plans are featured on the NRM Gateway. The design was also featured as one of the case studies in the National Park Service - Logical and Lasting Launches Guidelines Manual. The plans have been provided by the RRBA to numerous organizations across the country, at no cost, in hopes that they can further their mission beyond the Roanoke River Basin.

Improvement in Public Awareness – The first launch was constructed at Tailrace Park, just below Kerr Dam, an annual hydropower producer of 267 megawatts. Management of the lower river’s water flow is an up-and-downstream balancing act which occurs monthly through open discussions with multiple public and private groups. Issues such as dissolved oxygen, salt-water influx, riparian forests and wildlife, tourism, water supply, power production, adjoining property owners, recreation and flood risk management are considered. The construction of the canoe/kayak launch at the very heart of this high profile project has increased the opportunity to engage the public in understanding these decision points and to take part in the process. The facility has resulted in a greater appreciation of the lake and lower Roanoke River through first-hand experience. The reach of this initial partnership has been amazing and resulted in two opportunities this summer and fall where USACE was asked to participate in a River Recreation Workshop and the Virginia Tourism Conference. These events were specifically held at John H. Kerr because of the partnership that we have been able to cultivate in support of eco-tourism, environmental education, and recreation. These are both statewide events that had

representatives from multiple agencies as well as non-profits looking for direction and guidance concerning the establishment of an effective partnership.

Public Education - The partnering and development of the Blueway has fostered environmental stewardship through enhanced recreational opportunity and interpretation. Improved access has enabled volunteer groups to get out on the water to conduct evaluation of the conditions of the river and its banks, for clean-up and habitat restoration, to conduct clean-up (litter/debris), and to provide enhanced fishing and paddling access for hand-launched craft. Prior to the partnership's efforts, access had been insufficient in many locations for volunteer and community-led activities. Appreciation and understanding of the historic resources including river navigation, adjoining historic transportation and commercial uses along the river to include Native American history has been improved with better access and signage. The partners have installed four interpretive signs across Kerr Lake that share points of interest and provide mapping of the Blueway trail that the user can experience from that launch point. Public awareness of the partnership and river-based projects in the local communities has refocused the public's attention on river resources, habitat, history of the River Basin/and its tributaries and the important role it plays in all our lives.

Accomplishment of Management Objectives - This project has contributed to Corps efforts to enhance access and recreation opportunities, empower communities to connect with the outdoors through waterways and has met the recommendations of the "America's Great Outdoors" and the "National Blueways Initiative." In addition, the project's joint partnership efforts contribute to the Corps National Recreation Strategic Plan (goal 1) to "implement...adaptive operation and maintenance of resources that provide safe and healthy recreation experiences...of current and future generations." Creation of these blueways across project waters has improved recreation and environmental awareness while linking communities and land based attractions such as recreational trails, historic sites, and parks. The partnerships that have been realized and the funds invested at Kerr Lake to achieve common management objectives would not have come to fruition without the Handshake Partnership with RRBA.

Involving Other Partners – This partnership not only created a wonderful opportunity to partner with multiple groups at this location but has acted as a springboard for larger partnerships throughout the Kerr Lake region. The Handshake Partnership that started with RRBA, USACE, and the Virginia Tourism Corporation, now includes nearly a dozen new partners (listed below). This larger partnership, led by RRBA, has resulted in two additional launch facilities being constructed within the basin. In addition, these partners have also invested \$60K to promote the region through creation of the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway (SVWB). This marketing and branding campaign has led to the creation of a website, extensive mapping of the blueways, and printed material that all promote the wonderful natural resources of the project and the surrounding region. The SVWB was officially recognized during a Grand Launch Celebration in June 2014 at Staunton River State Park located at the head waters of Kerr Lake. This partnership

continues to grow and branch out into various aspects. The creation of these access points has created opportunity for outreach, education, and volunteer groups to take their programs to a higher level. More information about these unique efforts can be found at:

<http://www.sovawildblueway.com/about-the-blueway/>

Partial List of Stakeholders and Partners:

US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Roanoke River Basin Association (RRBA)
Dan River Basin Association (DRBA)
Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)
VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF)
Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission (TICR)
Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC)
Dominion Power
Halifax County, VA
Mecklenburg County, VA
Town of Halifax, VA
Town of South Boston, VA

Serving Diverse Audiences - Our partnership with the Roanoke River Basin Association- Upper Reach, coupled with their hard work, has resulted in this universally accessible canoe and kayak launch that will serve our wounded warriors returning home, and anyone who lives with a physical limitation. Our partnership with the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars has been strengthened by the completion of this project and the facilities are being used by these groups to get wounded warriors back outside and active. This recreational therapy is critical to the healing process, both mentally and physically, for those returning from war. The completion of the second universally accessible launch five miles below the tailrace has created one of the first fully accessible blueways on the east coast. This launch has created a gateway for the enjoyment of the beautiful natural resources that surround us and provides the opportunity to get outdoors and be active. Tailrace Park on the downstream side of the John H. Kerr Dam has always been a popular fishing and wildlife viewing area and the access has both enhanced and allowed for a greater number of people to enjoy the outdoors. These facilities provide easy access for the amateur paddler and serve a larger demographic because of its functional design. Recent studies conducted by Virginia Tech show that the economic impact for paddling activities within the Roanoke River Basin for Virginia alone totals:

\$47,071,318 of Income (\$20,828,017 direct paddling +\$26,243,301 indirect) and 1,180 Jobs (694 direct paddling + 486 indirect) in the Roanoke River Basin.*

*Assessing Economic Impacts of Ecotourism in the Roanoke River Basin: Metrics Program Development Services – Ellerbock 2014

Pictures below provide a snapshot of the Handshake Partnership before, during and after construction of the universally accessible canoe/kayak launch.



Universal kayak launch opened below Kerr Dam

Canoe and kayak paddlers of all ages, abilities, and experience now have an easier way to launch on the Roanoke River above Buggs Island Lake thanks to the Roanoke River Basin Association and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

On May 23, a new handicapped-accessible launch was dedicated and opened for public use. The launch is located at Tailrace Park, just below the

John H. Kerr Dam.

Paddlers can place their canoe or kayak on a series of rollers in the center of a ramp where it remains stable until they are ready to push the canoe or kayak down the ramp. The launch has a wheelchair transfer station that assists paddlers in positioning themselves in their kayak.

Paddlers push off from the launch with the aid of two parallel handrails. When returning, paddlers reverse the process and



Dignitaries at the dedication of the Tailrace Park handicapped accessible kayak launch are (from left to right) Paul Hoffman (representing Congressman Robert Hurt), Justin Kerns, Mecklenburg County Tourism Director, Scott Murray and Gene Adesso with the Roanoke River Basin Association, Michael Womack with USACE and Commander Steve Baker of the Wilmington District USACE.



Launching the kayak

pull themselves up to the dock's level center.

Michael Womack, Operations Project Manager for the Wilmington District, said the project could not have happened without the efforts of the Roanoke River Basin Association and Scott Murray's Upper Reach ecotourism program.

Also on hand at the dedication

was Tom Loftus, who with his Vets On A Roll organization is leading the effort to turn Island Creek Park into a 100% handicapped accessible fishing and boating facility. Loftus told the crowd that this ramp was just one more opportunity for veterans and others enjoy outdoor experiences despite the limitations of their handicaps.

A similar ramp is already in the planning stages, according to Gene Adesso of the Roanoke River Basin Association. This one will be located near Steel Bridge on Lake Gaston. His organization is working with Dominion Power to obtain the necessary permits before beginning fundraising.

South Hill Enterprise
Wednesday, June 18, 2014



Pictured at the grand launch for the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway are, from left to right, Michael Womack, Mecklenburg County Supervisor Dan Tanner, Col. Steven Baker, Clyde Cristman, Maurice Jones, Justin Kerns, Sandra Tanner, South Boston Mayor Edward Owens, Del. James Edmonds, Carl Epp, Tiffany Hayworth and another representative of the Dan River Basin Association and Linda Shepperd. (Olivia Allison/South Hill Enterprise)

'Grand Launch' held for blueway

By
Olivia Allison

SCOTTSBURG — A "Grand Launch" opening ceremony for the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway, a regional water trail that boasts more than 30 access points to more than 100 miles of paddling along three rivers as well as hundreds of miles of shoreline in two lakes, was held at Staunton River State Park in Scottsburg on Monday morning.

The ceremony marked the finalization of a journey that began nearly a year ago when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Virginia State Parks, the Dan River Basin Association and the Roanoke River Basin Association's Upper Reach Project teamed up with Mecklenburg and Halifax counties to envision a marketing strategy to better utilize the beautiful waterways in the area for recreational and tourism benefits.



A man and boy prepare to get out on the water following Monday's ceremony. (Olivia Allison/South Hill Enterprise)

The completion of the Tailrace Canoe/Kayak Launch has resulted in numerous partnerships and the continued construction of access points throughout the basin as demonstrated in these pictures.

Right: Parking and access path to the floating launch shown below. Interpretive signage and mapping are located at each access point.



Left: Floating launch that is located five miles below the Tailrace Launch. This blueway now allows for the launch and retrieval by those with disabilities.

Right: Tributary to Kerr Lake - Banister River Launch. This stair step launch eliminated the need for skids that often create a tripping hazard. Canoe/kayaks can slide down the steps without damage since the leading edge of the concrete steps are designed using wood.

