Thank you, Patricia!

Patricia Graesser: This Flagship is for you

Patricia finished her career as the District’s Chief of Public Affairs. She has been with the District since 1988. Over her career, she supported, mentored and coached 11 commanders and two Department of the Army Public Affairs interns. She has created a PA team highly respectful and held in high regard by the Army Public Affairs interns.

She has established a legacy of unwavering professionalism and service.

Thank you, Patricia!

Individuals Matter
The Source of Our District’s Strength & Resiliency - Reprise

After my initial six months in the District, I wrote about my reaction when a few team members raised a concern to me that some of their peers don’t see how their individual job fits into achieving our overall District mission or vision.

I wrote, “In the daily grind, it can be easy to lose sight of how what we do matters. However, each and every job in our District is important even if it may not be easy to see it in the moment when you are filling out forms, sitting in a meeting, or repetitively executing a routine task.”

I shared a mountaineering analogy about climbing ropes and the important role that each of you plays in accomplishing our mission and achieving our vision.

Modern climbing ropes, known as kernmantle ropes, are constructed to optimize strength, durability, and flexibility. Kernmantle ropes are made up of a core (kern) of individual nylon filaments braided together into larger strands that are then encased in a smooth, woven sheath of nylon (mantle). Likewise, the core of Seattle District with each individual team member joined together with other team members into PDTOs and support groups, is what allows our District as a whole to deliver strong. Held together and protected by the sheath of shared District Values and our Strategic Vision, our District workforce is strong, flexible and durable, able to sustain the strain of heavy loads.

What if an administrative officer didn’t expedite a hiring action? Or contract specifications didn’t reference current building codes? Or a high hazard safety plan didn’t get reviewed with a critical eye? The strand would unravel and the rope would be weaker at its very core.

Ask any climber which strand in a rope that they could do without, and the answer is “none, I need all of them!”

What if our District had no foundational values or strategic vision? Old style ropes without sheaths were inflexible and susceptible to cuts and abrasions – without our values lived on a daily basis or lacking a strategic vision to focus our energies for the long haul, our District cannot pull its weight for long.

Thanks to the strength and resiliency provided by our kernmantle rope here in our District, we’ve been lifting heavy weights together that have enhanced our reputation at the national level. Mud Mountain Dam Fish Passage is on track for its completion deadline of this December, and it also relies on the protective mantle of our values sheaths were inflexible and susceptible to cuts and abrasions – without our values lived on a daily basis or lacking a strategic vision to focus our energies for the long haul, our District cannot pull its weight for long.

Our continued success as a District to excel in a dynamic environment and deliver strong for the Pacific Northwest, relies on EACH of you, who together comprise our kern/core as a team of teams, and it also relies on the protective mantle of our shared District Values and Strategic Vision that keeps us focused on our mission first and our people always.

You have set the conditions for an orderly and seamless transition from the 51st to the 52nd District Engineer and Commander, with no loss in momentum across our District. Thanks for all you do!

-Delivering Strong for the Pacific Northwest!
Mark Slominski likes the fact engineers and architects live in the world of natural laws. Gravity, statics, dynamics, electrical circuits, physics and chemistry all work the same no matter who uses them, including U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force or Marine engineers. The inter-service engineer organizations are symbiotically linked, according to Slominski. Whether it’s the Navy Civil Engineer Corps, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) or the Air Force Civil Engineers, he said none succeed without the other.

“But along the way we introduce ‘isms,” said Slominski. “Navy ‘isms, Army ‘isms and Air Force ‘isms. There’s definitely a need to customize commonly learned skills and definitely value in each service fielding organic engineering forces.”

From an external viewpoint, Slominski said it must be a head scratcher for the Defense Department and American public to see gaps emerge in mission effectiveness or quality of products.

“How can we find ways to close seams rather than expose gaps?” is a question he often asks himself.

Slominski is intimately familiar with the various ‘isms because of his career. He’s an accomplished engineer serving both the Army and Air Force. Over the past 26 years he has transitioned from an active duty Air Force engineering officer to Air Force civilian to Army civilian, with several years of private sector architect and engineer experience.

To top it all off he’s also had an prodigious Air Force Reserve engineering career along the way.

His Air Force career recently hit a milestone with promotion to brigadier general. His promotion ceremony was attended by senior Army and Air Force engineering officials; and during it Slominski offered perspectives on the value of viewing each other as more alike than different.

“In my career, Slominski serves as the Corps’ Seattle District Construction Division chief. His staff administers $300 to $500 million in construction contracts annually across Seattle District boundaries. Construction contracts support Soldiers and Airmen at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, as well as Airmen at air force bases Fairchild in Washington, Mountain Home in Idaho, and Malmstrom in Montana. The division also supports six dams in Washington, Idaho and Montana, as well as the district’s civil works and interagency programs.

In the Air Force Reserve, Brig. Gen. Slominski serves as the Mobilization Assistant to the Air Force Director of Civil Engineers, Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Engineering and Force Protection.

“I’ve found through concurrent USACE and Air Force service the value of seeing where we are alike and engaging our strengths,” he said. “So far, it’s allowed me to walk the fence between the two and not get shot off of it.”

He points out how the services are alike in so many ways, rooted in common education, accreditation and standards. The federal government also has unifying frameworks. For Slominski it’s seizing opportunities.

“I’ve both on many days,” Slominski said. “I’ve learned to not be a split personality, but to embrace the opportunity to be the same person in different but compatible roles. I’ll admit the challenge serving in both USACE and the Air Force—some of my days turn into arguing with myself over performance.”

Mark Slominski at the Tactical Response Force military construction site, Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana. (Left) Mark’s sons, Joel, left, and Zack, pin stars on his epaulets during his promotion ceremony. (Below) Brig. Gen. Mark Slominski’s official photo.
Sturgeon recovery efforts begin to yield results

By Scott Lawrence
Public Affairs Office

After decades of collaborative effort to recover Kootenai River White Sturgeon, biologists are beginning to see tangible results.

For years, scientists have improved their understanding of the species and experimented with different approaches to encourage sturgeon migration and reproduction in suitable spawning areas.

Those efforts began paying off in spring 2018 when Idaho Fish and Game biologists discovered the first wild spawned fertilized sturgeon egg within restored critical habitat upstream of Bonners Ferry, Idaho.

The distinct population of Kootenai River White Sturgeon was listed as endangered in 1994 under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and later under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In subsequent years representatives from multiple agencies have been involved in the recovery effort, including: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Kootenai Tribe of Idaho; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; Idaho Department of Fish and Game; and British Columbia’s Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources Operations and Rural Development.

“We’ve been working collectively and adaptively to provide more suitable riverine conditions for successful sturgeon spawning and that’s what makes this discovery significant,” said Greg Hoffman, the Corps’ senior fishery biologist at Libby Dam, Montana.

“It’s the first fertilized egg collected over the rocky substrate upstream of Bonners Ferry, indicating that the population is responding to what we’ve been doing to encourage sturgeon to migrate upstream and spawn in that area.”

Prior to Libby Dam construction in the 1970s, Kootenai sturgeon spawned in the roughly one-mile stretch of the Kootenai River below Kootenai Falls. Since the dam’s construction, however, most spawning occurs downstream of Bonners Ferry over sandy substrates which are not conducive to egg and free-embryo survival.

“When sturgeon eggs are fertilized they become adhesive,” said Jason Flory, U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist. “And if they land on sand and silt, they become entombed and don’t survive. So it’s important that we induce them to spawn upstream over the rocky substrate.”

To encourage migration, biologists worked with Corps’ water managers to test whether additional flows from Libby Dam during spring spawning season would cause sturgeon to migrate upstream of Bonners Ferry. From 2010-2012, spring sturgeon operations included increased flows from Libby Dam and higher river stages, but telemetry data from tagged fish failed to show a significant change in sturgeon behavior.

Using an adaptive management process, the recovery team went back to the drawing board in 2013 and tried alternate approaches to managing outflows at Libby Dam. The team settled on experimenting with a double peak of increased flows during the spring freshet. The first peak was intended to provide cues for sturgeon to begin upstream migration and the second peak was meant to encourage further migration upstream from staging areas and spawning toward the end of the operation.

The team also made use of Libby Dam’s selective gate withdrawal system, which allows dam operators to control discharge water temperature and mimic the natural annual temperature cycle for the benefit of resident fish. Operators target discharge temperature at 50 degrees Fahrenheit as flows are receding to trigger spawning after Kootenai sturgeon have fully migrated upstream.

“All fish species are primarily triggered by temperature as a cue that it’s time to spawn,” Flory said. “So careful temperature management during spawning season is vital.”

The double peak approach was implemented in 2013-2017, but low water supply meant that there was only one peak instead of two in 2015 and 2016. Telemetry data showed a 20 percent increase in spawning sturgeon migrating upstream of Bonners Ferry in 2017. Additional analysis by IDFG indicated the number of days with river flows above 30,000 cubic feet per second best predicted the likelihood of spawning sturgeon migrating above Bonners Ferry.

“While 2019 wasn’t a good water year in terms of volume and we didn’t see the results we hoped for, we definitely believe we’re on the right track with sturgeon recovery,” Hoffman said. “We’ve adopted the Tribe’s holistic ecosystem recovery approach -- providing normative flows, temperature management and improving spawning conditions and critical habitat for sturgeon. There’s still much work to do, but we’re in a better place today and looking confidently to the future.”

The projects include restoration of side channels and tributary habitat, installation of large woody debris, bank restoration and re-vegetation to increase and improve sturgeon and other native fish habitat.

The Tribe also incorporated a network of excavated and naturally-enhanced pools where fish can rest and feed as they move up and down the river, as well as a staging area where they are getting ready to spawn.

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Left: British Columbia fishery biologist Sarah Stephenson releases a large wild female Kootenai sturgeon at the mouth of Kootenay River near Creston, BC. Right: A wild Kootenai River white sturgeon is released back into Kootenay Lake after capture and data collection. (USACE Photos.)
SEATTLE DISTRICT RESPONDS

Assessment teams scour Washington

photos by Bill Dowell

At the request of FEMA and Washington state, Corps teams and other federal and state officials evaluated 20 state-identified facilities throughout Washington state. (Clockwise from top left)

(Left to Right) Bridget Bentley, Joe Marsh and Jon Springer examine an operating room at a former hospital in Yakima, Washington.

Team lead Sid Jones (left) and Scott Long look over University of Washington’s Dempsey Indoor Practice Facility.

Nowell Grothe photographs and inspects an electrical connector at a possible location for an alternate-care-site.

Team members (left to right) Joe Marsh, Keith Rudie, Rob Didenhover, Capt. Gregory Hutchinson, Bridget Bentley, Jon Springer and Joshua May on brief following an assessment of a former Yakima, Washington, hospital.

Jon Springer photographs an electrical panel during an inspection.

Joe Marsh inspects mechanical equipment.
2020 CORPS DAY AWARDS

Commander’s Leadership Award (supervisory)  
Commander’s Leadership Award (non-supervisory)  
Engineer or Architect of the Year  
Project Engineer of the Year  
Scientist(s) of the Year  
Employee of the Year (up to GS-9)  
Employee of the Year (GS-10 and above)  
New Employee of the Year (up to GS-9)  
New Employee of the Year (GS-10 and above)  
Support Employee of the Year (up to GS-09)  
Support Employee of the Year (GS-10 and above)  
Project Manager of the Year  
Program Manager of the Year  
Innovator of the Year  
Outstanding Accomplishment at a Project or Field Office  
Individual Safety Award  
Team Safety Award  
Team of Teams Award  
Support Team of Teams Award  

In order to recognize Seattle District’s top performers during the public health pandemic, the 2020 Corps Day awards ceremony was held virtually. Leaders were able to stream the ceremony live so employees could view the ceremony from their computers at home. In addition to the awards ceremony, there were other events that took place including a baby photo guessing game and a live streamed origami class for kids.
Col. Gerald’s farewell to the District

By Col. Mark Geraldi
(Outgoing) Seattle District Commander

Note: The following is the transcript of Col. Gerald’s remarks during the June 30 Change of Command Ceremony.

General Helmlinger, Friends, Families, Tribal and elected officials, and most importantly, our dedicated Seattle District workforce, thank you all for being here, either physically here at our beautiful Oxbow Building overlooking the Duwamish River, or virtually.

The I Corps Band – you sound great and you being here is a testament to the special relationship we share with Joint Base Lewis McChord – please join me in a round of applause for these Army professionals.

General Helmlinger talks about the three P’s: Program, Partners, and People, which he describes as our “arranged marriage” with the community and industry partners.

Col. Geraldi presents Lt. Col. Andrew Olson his deployment flag at Seattle District headquarters. (USACE photo)

Col. Geraldi’s farewell to the District

General Helmlinger describes how the Seattle District is a full-service district, having both civil and military missions, and highlights three important features of the program:

• The carpet where we just raised the Guideon at the Change of Command ceremony, which states: “Serving the World since 1917” – our 100-plus year old locks are the busiest in the Nation and they, along with the only botanical garden in the Corps, are either the top one or two most-visited destination in Seattle.

• The carpet on the upper Columbia River is the highest generating capacity hydro-electric dam in the entire Corps of Engineers.

• Libby Dam in the beautiful Kootenay River Valley, Montana, another top hydro-electric powerhouse is also considered one of the most architecturally aesthetic dams in the Nation.

Albeni Falls Dam is home to some of the most visited recreation sites in the Corps and with its unique ability to store extra water capacity, is what I like to call the “turbo-charger” for the many hydroelectric dams below it along the Columbia River.

• Last but not least is Mud Mountain Dam, which is in the final stages of constructing the Nation’s largest trap and haul fish passage, capable of passing 1.2 million fish per year and will be a tremendous step towards restoring the Chinook and other endangered species to the Salish Sea. Oh by the way, it was designed right here by our in-house design capability, working in concert with other USACE teammates across Northwestern Division and the Enterprise.

The first “P”, Program. You just heard General Helmlinger describe many features of our diverse program with responsibilities across four states, so I’ll just briefly highlight a few more. As a full-service district, Seattle has both civil works and military construction missions. I want to start with recognizing the civil works side, specifically our six operating projects, which are the heart of our district and are physical manifestations of the many superlatives that define Seattle District’s uniqueness.

• The carpet we just conducted the transfer of our District colors is actually from the Lake Washing Ship Canal, the site where we (under non-COV-19 circumstances) traditionally hold our change of command ceremony. On the carpet it states: “Serving the World since 1917” – our 100-plus years old locks are the busiest in the Nation and they, along with the only botanical garden in the Corps, are either the top one or two most-visited destination in Seattle.

• Our Chief Joseph Dam on the upper Columbia River is the highest generating capacity hydro-electric dam in the entire Corps of Engineers.

• Libby Dam in the beautiful Kootenay River Valley, Montana, another top hydro-electric powerhouse is also considered one of the most architecturally aesthetic dams in the Nation.

• Albeni Falls Dam is home to some of the most visited recreation sites in the Corps and with its unique ability to store extra water capacity, is what I like to call the “turbo-charger” for the many hydroelectric dams below it along the Columbia River.

• Just up-river from where we stand is the Howard A. Hanlon

Col. Gerald presents the guideon during his change of command ceremony. (Bottom left) Col. Gerald is photographed with a work crew in the large lock chamber at the Chittenden Locks. (Bottom right) Col. Gerald is photographed with is name displayed on the sign at Malmstrom AFB, Montana. (Courtesy photos)

Col. Geraldi presents Lt. Col. Andrew Olson his deployment flag at Seattle District headquarters. (USACE photo)

Col. Geraldi’s farewell to the District

Under our civil works umbrella, our team also executes maintenance of deep-draft navigation channels for the Ports of Seattle, Tacoma, and Grays Harbor to name a few, and our nationally-renowned Emergency Management Team, manage two distinct flood seasons every year, one on either side of the Cascade Mountain Range.

In the interest of time (trust me I could gush on for hours about our team), I’ll only mention one project to represent our entire military portfolio, the Selah Air Field at Yakima Training Center. Despite a 5-week delay due to an engineer equipment operator union strike, our team delivered this C-17 capable airfield two days ahead of schedule, adding a strategic force projection platform to the joint base. At the programmatic-level, even though we’re still only in 3rd Quarter of the FY, this is the second fiscal year in a row our team has achieved 100% of military construction project awards.

That means that our programs are being completed on time, that is why we can confidently make reference to this partnership with our sister Divisions and contractors who have done just that: General Spellmon and our host today, General Helmlinger – sir, thank you for enabling us to deliver at the speed of trust.

External partners include our Congressional delegations, sister federal agencies, state and local governments, and private industry. In our Area of Responsibility across a large swath of the greater Pacific NW, we are also fortunate to work with 50 federally-recognized Tribes, including the Salish Sea Area Treaty Tribes. They are tremendous partners in what one of the chairman described as our “arranged marriage” between the Tribes and me as a treaty right trustee. They offer rich perspectives on the environment and creative solutions, and many of our projects simply would not be possible without their support. I want to thank them all for sharing their knowledge, wisdom, support, and their friendship.

Finally, People. Our dedicated workforce is our center of gravity and the bedrock of our Team of Teams, without whom nothing happens. The care and precautions our supervisors and employees continue to take for our workforce throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, all while delivering our program, is emblematic of their commitment to each other and our district.

I want to highlight our senior civilian leadership who make up the commander’s advisory group, as representatives of our entire civilian workforce. I affectionately refer to them as “The Titans”:

• Operations Division Chief Amy Reese, who heads the largest and most geographically dispersed division in our district.

• Engineering Division Chief JoAnn Walls, whose purview includes a full-service design branch and an internationally renowned hydraulics and hydrology branch.

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Finished.Finished.Finished.
CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019
(COVID-19)

You can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses with these actions:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose & mouth.
- Practice social distancing by putting space between yourself & others.
- Wash hands often with soap & water for at least 20 seconds.

cdc.gov/coronavirus