

Corps Park Ranger Erin Parnell and several young fishermen show off a catch. *Photo by Tracy Robillard.*



## Community partnerships bring hunting and fishing for all

For Corps of Engineers teammates like Glenn Kowalski and Erin Parnell, the outdoors were just as much a part of their childhood as ice cream cones and skinned knees.

"I stayed outdoors until the sun went down, sometimes even longer," Kowalski, now the natural resource program manager at the Richard B. Russell Dam and Lake Project, recalled. "I grew up on an old family farm in Anderson, S.C., and I was lucky enough that I had a father that took me fishing and hunting. That's one of the reasons I have the job I have today; because I love working outside and being involved with the outdoors."

Clemson graduate and Anderson townie Erin Parnell agrees. As a newly-hired Corps of Engineers park ranger at Russell Lake, she couldn't be happier with her first job out of college.

"As a little girl I always went hunting and fishing with my father," Parnell said. "It was always an adventure to me, especially trout fishing in the Chattooga River. Those memories created my passion for the outdoors, and that's what led me to study parks and protected areas management at Clemson University."

"My friends used to joke with me about wearing a big hat like Smokey the Bear," she said with a laugh, "but honestly, I think being a park ranger is the best job in the world."

Kowalski and Parnell's appreciation for the outdoors lies at the heart of an important Corps mission to provide and promote quality outdoor recreation for all ages. Russell Lake, along with the Savannah district's other dam and lake projects, provides recreation opportunities and events year round.

### Kid's Fishing Day reels in smiles and partnerships

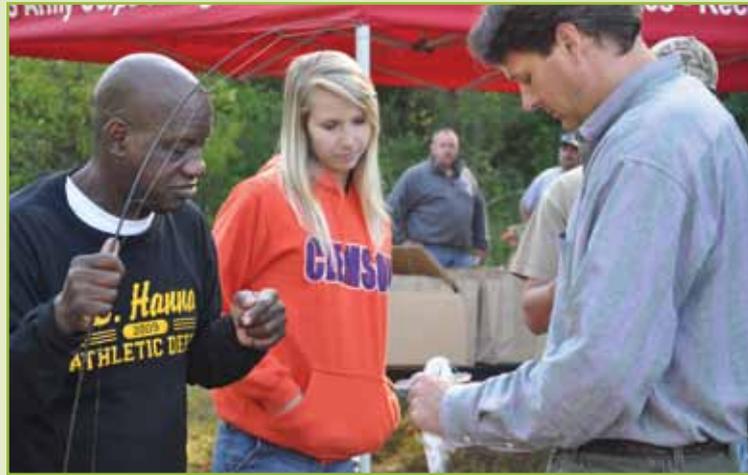
The Russell project hosted its 23rd annual Kid's Fishing Day on May 7, drawing 300 children and their parents from the Upper Savannah River region. The free event is hosted by the Corps but could not be a success without the help of several partnering organizations.

Along with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Corps partnered with the Southeastern Paralyzed Veterans of America, an organization dedicated to the health, education and well-being of disabled veterans and their families.

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"We look forward to these kinds of events where we can bring opportunities to able bodies and also to disabled veterans and disabled children," said Homer Cole, retired Marine Corps veteran and president of the Southeastern Paralyzed Veterans chapter headquartered in Augusta, Ga.

"When I was growing up, a lot of kids played in the woods, but nowadays with the fast pace of living, some people don't get out and experience nature and the outdoors as much," he added. "Our group encourages



James Kennedy, a local celebrity from the movie "Radio," (left) and volunteer Chelsea Erickson look on as Glenn Kowalski, Corps natural resource program manager, removes a hook from a catfish Radio caught.



(Above): The Corps stocked the fishing area with 900 pounds of catfish for the special event. (Right): A young boy smiles after baiting his hook at Kid's Fishing Day. *Photos by Tracy Robillard.*

kids to come out and get involved in these types of activities."

Other partners included the Outdoor Dream Foundation and Faith Hunters for Youth, both Anderson-based organizations that provide outdoor recreation opportunities for children in need. Community businesses also lent a helping hand by donating prizes that were awarded to lucky young fishers by a random drawing.

"We're honored to partner with our friends at Georgia DNR and with our disabled veterans, who have sacrificed so much for our country, to promote outdoor recreation for our youth," Parnell said. "We also had the opportunity to work with local youth organizations to give disabled, terminally ill or other children the opportunity to experience the joys of fishing."

The Corps stocked the enclosed fishing area at Calhoun Falls with 900 pounds of catfish, giving each child a two-catch limit. Children participated in groups of 25 in half-hour shifts to allow every child a chance to reel a catch.

When the morning fishing hours were over, Parnell and her team led a water safety presentation for the children, followed by a free hotdog lunch.



“Recreation is an important part of the Corps of Engineers’ mission at our dam and lake projects like Lake Russell,” said Keith Crowe, project manager. “By partnering with state and local organizations to host free events like Kid’s Fishing Day, we’re not only building relationships, but we’re also encouraging the public to develop an appreciation for America’s great outdoors.”

Events like Kid’s Fishing Day go hand-in-hand with the President’s recent “America’s Great Outdoors” initiative, which encourages all Americans to appreciate and protect the nation’s lands, woodlands and waterways.

“One of the big White House initiatives right now is to get families outside,” Kowalski said. “Kids are spending more and more time in front of the TV but this program introduces them to something they may not be familiar with. If we can get them to enjoy playing or doing activities outside, they are likely to feel more appreciation for our natural resources and want to protect those resources.”

### **Hunting brings recreation, partnerships for children in need**

But Kid’s Fishing Day is just one fish in a large pond, so to speak, when it comes to the amount of public recreation opportunities offered at Russell Lake. Whether it’s camping, hiking, boating, swimming, or a slew of other outdoor activities, Russell’s 26,650 acres of water and 540 miles of undeveloped shoreline have it all.

Because Russell was completed in 1985 (after the Corps enacted a policy to prohibit private shoreline use on lakes built after Dec. 13, 1974) the lake maintains pure, aesthetic qualities, making it a unique place for recreation.

The Corps partners with the Outdoor Dream Foundation several times a year to give disabled or terminally-ill children the opportunity to go hunting on Russell’s extensive lands.

Typically, the children hunt for deer, but the Russell team hosted its first wild turkey hunt with the foundation on April 8. Three children attended the event, two with leukemia and one with a liver disorder in need of a transplant.

Even though this particular day ended with no harvested turkeys, the children had a fun and carefree experience, Parnell said.

The Outdoor Dream Foundation, based in Anderson, S.C., is a nonprofit foundation that takes children with terminal or life-threatening illnesses on outdoor trips, to include hunting and fishing.

Outdoor Dream’s founder, Harold Jones, is best known as Coach Jones from the 2003 motion picture *Radio*. The movie tells the true story of how Coach Jones befriends a mentally-challenged young man nicknamed “Radio” and helps him become an integral part of the Anderson community. *Radio* is still a community icon today and was a special guest at Kid’s Fishing Day.



A child with the Outdoor Dream Foundation hunts for wild turkeys at Russell Lake. *Photo provided by the Anderson Independent Mail.*



The Corps Russell Lake office hosted its first wild turkey hunt with the Outdoor Dream Foundation on April 8. *Photo provided by the Anderson Independent Mail.*

“It’s been great working with the Corps of Engineers,” said Donald Hudson, a volunteer with the Outdoor Dream Foundation. “We’ve done deer and turkey hunts, we took a tour of the dam, and most importantly, we met different people who are going to be friends throughout our lifetime.”

“Some of these kids have never been out of their own counties, some of them don’t get to go on hunting or fishing trips due to their conditions, but we try to make accommodations for them,” Hudson said, noting that his own son was born with a terminal illness. “It thrills my heart to see these kids go out and be able to do something they’ve never done before, and to see the smiles on their faces is a tear jerker, it really is.” 

*By Tracy Robillard, Corporate Communications Office*