



American Recreation Coalition

Dedicated to the protection and enhancement of everyone's right to health and happiness through recreation.

NEWS

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ARC Announces 2011 Beacon Award Winners

Washington, D.C. – The American Recreation Coalition (ARC) has selected six federal programs and efforts as recipients of the 2011 Beacon Awards, which recognize outstanding efforts by federal agencies and partners in harnessing the power of technology to improve public recreation experiences and federal recreation program management. Beacon Awards were first presented by the American Recreation Coalition in 2005. Nominations are made by federal agencies and are judged against the award criteria – which are:

- 1) Innovative use of technology for visitor services or recreation management;
- 2) Use of partnerships with for-profit and nonprofit organizations;
- 3) Efforts to share news of creative solutions within the agency; and
- 4) Community support for the work of this initiative.

The 2011 recipients of ARC's Beacon Award will be honored during Great Outdoors Week on Monday, June 13, at a ceremony on the Patio of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Whitten Building. Honorees are:

● **Lake Okeechobee Visitor Center Rehabilitation Project, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers nomination.**

This two-year project included redesign of three visitor facilities, replacing static exhibits with interactive displays that share the complexity of water management and consequences for recreation, navigation, water supply, flood reduction and environmental stewardship. And the new ADA-compliant exhibits – touch-screen monitors, each with multiple 2-5 minute, bilingual videos – are supplemented by a trailer available for visits to schools and events and a website. The technology leverages the human resources of a small park ranger staff and a smaller number of lock operators. The themes of the new interpretive program include "Trail of Discovery," the story of the 155-mile-long Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, and "Alien Invaders," about invasive species that threaten to eliminate native species. And visitors can even play a game – "Question of Balance" – which shows the consequences of various water-allocation decisions. Technology applications are being shared widely within the USACE professional community on the Corps' Natural Resources Management Gateway website and through social media, including Facebook and Twitter. And the success is best demonstrated by the dramatic growth in school visits to the sites.

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● Cleveland and Angeles National Forests Apply Robert Bateman's Get to Know Your Wild Neighbors Program, a U.S. Forest Service nomination

Senior Forest Service leaders at two southern California forests have used the expressive arts to connect children with nature, reaching children who would normally never be in contact with a national forest. Cutting-edge web resources encourage children to get out in nature and explore their backyards. Two successful pilot years have reached tens of thousands of children in the region and prompted the Chief of the Forest Service to expand efforts to a bilateral (U.S. and Canada) effort next year. The internet has been used to reach hundreds of thousands of youth for annual art, writing and photography contests as well as Natural Treasures and Virtual Hikes project websites. Partners in the effort range from renowned artist Robert Bateman to the National Wildlife Federation and the Children & Nature Network. Information about the effort has been shared widely within the agency and with existing and potential partners, and the leadership of Cleveland National Forest Supervisor Will Metz and Angeles National Forest Deputy Supervisor Martin Dumpis on this project earned the prestigious Regional Forester's 2010 Honor Award for Youth Engagement.

● Web Enhancements of Delivering USFS Recreation, a U.S. Forest Service nomination

A concerted effort by the Forest Service Offices of Communications and Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources over the past year has significantly improved web-furnished information to (1) agency recreation professionals and (2) the public seeking recreation opportunities. RecLink uses social-media techniques to create an internal community of practice, energizing the professional community and utilizing personal pages, blogs, links and a library to share ideas and information. Rapid and effective solution-finding is now available throughout the agency. Revised national forest public web pages incorporate Google maps with icons for recreation activities, improved search functions and an elevated treatment of recreation, since use of Google Analytics to track website visitors has shown clearly that most visitors to these sites arrive at forest-specific pages – not the national agency portal – and are seeking information about recreation opportunities – including activities previously not even reported on the sites.

● "Journals & JPGs: Seasons on the [National Elk] Refuge" and "Refuge Connections," a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service nomination

Staff at the National Elk Refuge has utilized technology to unleash student creativity and understanding of the Jackson, Wyoming, refuge. Art, science, writing and digital photography are used to stimulate the interests of Teton County School District second-grade students. The concept of an ecosystem comes alive through three seasonal visits and observations. The result is a lasting connection with local natural resources. A second program specifically targets first-generation Latinos, a rapidly growing segment of the community. Employing field guides, digital cameras, naturalists and computers, Teton County School District middle school students convert time in the field observing the National Elk Refuge into presentations utilizing photos and recorded sounds. Information on the programs has been featured in the USFWS's national Refuge Update publication and has now become an integral part of the school district's curriculum.

● Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Visitor Enjoyment Initiative, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service nomination

The Visitor Services Manager of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge recognized the value of delivering internet-based information to increase the value and

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enjoyment of visits to the refuge. When federal restrictions prevented public use of agency access to the internet, she worked with the refuge's local Friends organization to put in place a free public Wi-Fi system for the southern half of the refuge. In addition to providing access to refuge-provided information, the new Wi-Fi system has made possible special events including Curing Cabin Fever III and regular use of Earthcache sites on the refuge. One of the new available features now accessible within the refuge, or at home, is a network of Wildlife Viewing Cams, using donated cameras and assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the local Friends organization and several technology companies. Bald Eagles, American White Pelicans and various water birds can now be monitored remotely. And thanks to advanced technology, the three (and a planned fourth) cameras can be remotely controlled from the visitor center, providing the public with unprecedented access to the refuge!

● Youth Ambassador Program (YAP!) at New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, a National Park Service nomination

The Youth Ambassador Program (YAP!) helps teens communicate national park themes through hip-hop culture and social media. Music and videos are created and shared through YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Soundcloud and other channels. A special event – Third Eye Open – is held. It is a hip-hop festival with YAP! performances and a graffiti artist who creates a mural inspired by national park themes. Posters of the mural are printed and offered free to those who show a festival flyer. The performances include original songs and videos, and one of these, "Get Outside and Move," has been featured on the front page of the First Lady's Let's Move website. Now YAP! is moving to connect with youth regionally and nationally, collaborating with NPS sites throughout the northeast in efforts to increase park visitation by diverse and young Americans. YAP! performances included the National Park Youth Summit in 2010 and will include the 2011 Outdoor Nation event in New York City. YAP! will also coordinate a campout event in July to attract young and diverse Americans to camping and outdoor cooking – and yes, the event will be captured for viewing on the internet!

For more information on Great Outdoors Week, visit: www.funoutdoors.com.

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About the American Recreation Coalition

AMERICAN RECREATION COALITION — is a nonprofit, Washington-based federation founded in 1979. The association provides a unified voice for recreation interests to ensure their full and active participation in government policy-making on issues such as public land management. ARC membership consists of more than 100 organizations, including national and regional associations and corporations that represent a major share of the \$400 billion a year recreation/leisure industry and enthusiast groups representing millions of recreationists. Since its inception, ARC has sought to catalyze public-private partnerships to enhance and protect outdoor recreation opportunities and resources. ARC conducts research, organizes national conferences, and disseminates information through a variety of means, including its Web site www.funoutdoors.com. ARC plays a leading role in several key coalitions and organizations, including the Coalition for Recreational Trails, Scenic Byways Coalition and Coalition for Recreation in the National Forests. ARC also supports and promotes the WOW - Wonderful Outdoor World outreach to urban children and was instrumental in the re-launch of Take Pride in America. ARC was also instrumental in launching National Get Outdoors Day, a national effort dedicated to helping children enjoy healthy, active outdoor lives.