

J. Strom Thurmond Lake Volunteer Village

Volunteers have long been a part of Thurmond Lake programs, from volunteer winter hosting in closed campgrounds to volunteering in the Natural Resources Management programs. In 2010, we began to realize the severity of the budget constraints we were facing and decided to meet the challenge head-on. After visiting Lake Lanier's Volunteer Village and then Lake Hartwell's Volunteer Village and learning more about how the program operates, we felt more comfortable with the idea of adding a Volunteer Village at Thurmond. These site visits were an integral part of getting our own Village up-and-running.

We started out with an on-the-ground meeting with our contractor. We had two closed former lease areas near the office that were potential sites for the Volunteer Village. After assessing both sites, we chose the area that had an existing boat ramp and meeting hall/community building. We walked the area and developed a conceptual plan of where the sites would be constructed.

Late in 2010, after agreeing on the layout of sites (twelve waterfront sites near the community meeting hall building) we initiated a logging contract with a biomass product contractor to have timber removed from the area. After thinning was completed, our contractor went to work building the sites and installing utility lines for full hookups in 2011. The layout was also designed to minimize water/electric/septic infrastructure costs. Additionally, the development plan for this area took into consideration input from Volunteer Village 'veterans' that had worked at the Lanier and Hartwell Villages. Key amenities at the Village include full hookups (water, electric and septic) at each site, concrete RV pads at each site, a boat ramp inside the Village, WI-FI, and a community building/meeting hall that was left on the former lease site. New fiber-optic lines were also run into the Village at no cost through in-kind services on a 50-year lease. In October 2011, Thurmond's Volunteer Village officially opened. We had an extremely successful first year, with the Village averaging a 90% occupancy rate through the peak recreation season. After opening the Village, we developed a plan for renovating the dilapidated meeting hall which included both volunteer and contractor work. The itemized work list helped us tackle one job at a time as funding became available.

We also drafted a Volunteer Village Program Plan with input from the Lanier and Hartwell Volunteer Villages. The plan is shared with every volunteer prior to signing a Volunteer Agreement. Volunteers are also required to submit information for a background security check, and we bond those volunteers that are working with user fees. We purchase volunteer vests from the same contractor that supplies Corps Ranger uniforms, and we purchase nametags locally. Volunteer work coordination is accomplished through a Park Ranger who serves as our Volunteer Program Coordinator.

The total cost of construction was \$250,000 and the value of volunteer services we received from volunteers residing in the Volunteer Village was over \$166,000 in the first year of operation.

POC: David Hatfield, 864-333-1129