



SPN SURVEYOR

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Agreement signed in Pajaro

A look back at Pajaro River emergency response & other top stories in 2023



Also inside this issue . . .

District, VA commemorate seismic retrofit project, page 3

Year in Photos: A look back at 2023 events, pages 4-5

Shebesta assumes command of district by the Bay, page 6

District launches Engineering With Nature training, page 7

Shallow water placement project kicks off in SF Bay, page 8

COMMANDER'S CORNER

Western extremes dominate the headlines in 2023

By Lt. Col. Timothy W. Shebesta
San Francisco District Commander

2023 gave us the stark reminder of the very real threat Western extremes have had and will continue to have on our operating environment.

From prolonged drought to sudden wildfires to winter storms, these events dominated the headlines in 2023 and kept our water managers, project engineers and emergency management staff on high alert.

In a few short weeks in January, we witnessed a cluster of atmospheric rivers move across our Northern California landscape and quickly fill our two reservoirs — Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma — to the brink seemingly overnight. Unlike past operating years, our Ops staff was able to use advanced forecasting tools to determine the right timing and amount of water to release to stay one step ahead of changing conditions. And these Western extremes will only be exacerbated by climate change. I'm proud to say the San Francisco District is well poised to meet



this increasingly complex risk landscape with innovative tools like Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations, or FIRO, to improve water supply and flood risk management with data-informed decision making.

It was also in 2023 on the night of March 10 that a section of the Pajaro

River Levee Left Bank breached causing devastating flooding to the town of Pajaro. Two additional levee sections at a Highway 1 crossing and further downstream would also sustain crippling damage. It was a few days after these events that I would join my predecessor, Lt. Col. Kevin Arnett, on the ground to witness first-hand the damage, assess the community impacts and determine how we, at all levels of government, could provide short-term and long-term assistance.

These winter storms and their aftermath have galvanized our district's resolve to quickly get the \$400 million federal Pajaro River flood risk management project into construction expediting the entire project wherever possible. Our entire staff is working as hard as they can to move the needle and finally provide the relief this community and others like it deserve. We are not fully out of the woods yet as another winter season is upon us, but I'm confident we are in a better position than we were last year at this time.

With such a dedicated workforce, I believe we are well positioned for continued project delivery with our partners in 2024.

SPN SURVEYOR

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District Commander

Lt. Col. Timothy W. Shebesta

Deputy Commander

Maj. Shantel K. Glass

Editor

Brandon Beach

brandon.a.beach@usace.army.mil

Staff Writers

Tammy Reed

tammy.l.reed@usace.army.mil

Alev Bilginsoy

alev.bilginsoy@usace.army.mil

SPN's deputy district engineer departs

By Tammy Reed
District Public Affairs

Colleagues, friends and family gathered Dec. 13 in San Francisco to wish Stu Townsley all the best as he retires from the San Francisco District following a 22-year career with USACE.

SPN hosted a (albeit reluctant) retirement luncheon for Townsley, SPN's long-serving deputy district engineer for project management. During the event, Townsley and his family listened to friends speak of his illustrious career. The running theme, they all seemed to agree, was that he was a people person, who was always there to help you do your job the best way possible. During his tenure, Townsley was responsible for delivering the district's planning, construction and



SPN Deputy Commander Maj. Shantel Glass presents Stu Townsley with his official retirement certificate Dec. 13.

operation & maintenance civil works, military and Interagency and International Services projects, in addition to oversight of the Clean Water Act regulatory program.

Congratulations on a job well done!

Winter 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Photo Timeline: A look back at San Francisco District events and milestones in 2023

4

Feature Story: San Francisco District launches new Engineering with Nature training

7

Closer Look: Shallow water strategic placement project

8



SPN, VA kick off seismic retrofit project

By Brandon Beach
District Public Affairs

The San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers San Francisco District commemorated the start of construction of a \$49.9 million seismic retrofit project for Building 8, a mental health facility on campus that has served Bay Area veterans since 1932. Now the four-story building is receiving a much-needed up-

grade to meet the seismic safety standards of today, while preserving its historic architecture. Leaders from SFVAMC, VA Office of Construction & Facilities Management, SPN, and Brice Builders LLC, the construction firm awarded the contract, gathered May 12 to officially break ground on the two-year project.

In their own words

"I'm really proud to mark the beginning

Continued page 8

District News

SPN rangers conduct mid-winter bald eagle counts at two lakes



An adult bald eagle is spotted in a pine tree along the Lake Sonoma shoreline. (Photo courtesy of Wade Eakle).

By Joe Lishka
District Park Ranger

In January, both USACE San Francisco District lake projects—Lake Sonoma and Lake Mendocino—participated in the 2024 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey. The purpose of the survey is to monitor the status of bald eagle wintering populations in the United States by estimating national and regional count trends, overall and by age class.

Each January, several hundred individuals count eagles along standard, non-overlapping survey routes. This year, Lake Sonoma recorded six adult bald eagles, one immature bald eagle, one adult golden eagle and one immature golden eagle. Lake Mendocino recorded four adult bald eagles.

Lake Sonoma's survey team was comprised of Park Rangers Joe Lishka and Daniel Pettys, with retired SPD Ecologist Wade Eakle. Lake Mendocino's team was comprised of Park Rangers Sadie Parker and Kevin Haney, with Maintenance Worker John Dane.

On the cover

[Top] In 2023, leaders from the San Francisco District and Pajaro Regional Flood Risk Management Agency signed a milestone project partnership agreement for construction of the long-awaited Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project to begin this summer. [Bottom left] Lt. Col. Timothy Shebesta assumed command of the San Francisco District during a ceremony June 23 in Sausalito. [Bottom right] Also in 2023, a barrage of winter storms across Northern California significantly increased reservoir levels at Lakes Mendocino and Sonoma. (Photos by Beach)

YEAR IN

A brief look back at San Francisco

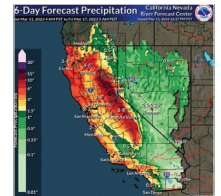
JANUARY 16

A barrage of winter storm events across Northern California significantly increase reservoir levels well into the flood control pool at Lake Mendocino for the first time since 2020. In response, San Francisco District water managers initiate a series of high-flow releases from Coyote Valley Dam starting Jan. 16. In an effort to build community awareness around these actions, SPN organizes a press conference timed at the start of the first flood control release.



MARCH 10

Major storm events continue to roll into Northern California filling reservoirs to near capacity and impacting levee systems. On the night of March 10, the Pajaro River Levee Left Bank breaches causing devastating floods to the Pajaro community. The overflow from the breach results in partial damage at a crossing under Highway 1 and a third breach downstream. California Department of Water Resources and local agencies quickly respond to shore up the breaches with temporary levee repairs.



MARCH 17

San Francisco District Commander Lt. Col. Kevin Arnett travels to the Pajaro-Watsonville area March 17 with several Corps' engineers and emergency management team members to view the levee breaches and devastating aftermath. "What happened here at Pajaro is truly a tragedy. We came here to make sure we understand the work that needs to be done and what our partners and community needs, so if the State of California requests assistance we can step in and help as quickly as possible," said Arnett.



APRIL 25

Crewmembers of the USACE Drift Collector John A.B. Dillard, Jr., get an early start as they join multiple Bay Area agencies for a mass rescue exercise off Bodega Bay. Approximately 200 personnel participate in the all-day event. The exercise scenario calls on the Dillard to play the role of cruise ship that experiences an explosion and fire requiring airborne evacuation of injured passengers. A simulated triage area is set up onshore providing medical care in real time. Three separate search and rescue aircraft from the Coast Guard, California National Guard and Navy conduct hoisting evolutions using the Dillard's platform.



JUNE 23

Leadership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers San Francisco District changes hands June 23 when Lt. Col. Timothy W. Shebesta is sworn in as the district's 58th commander. At a military ceremony at the Bay Model Visitor Center, Lt. Col. Kevin P. Arnett relinquished command of the district he has led since 2021. Shebesta assumed command after having most recently served as professor of military science at his alma mater, Marquette University Army ROTC.

PHOTOS

District events, milestones in 2023



JULY 7-9

Crewmembers from the USACE Drift Collectors Raccoon and Dillard join forces to remove a multitude of navigational hazards adrift in the Stockton Deep Water Ship Channel. The work is part of the "Difference in the Delta" volunteer cleanup program, spearheaded by the San Joaquin Delta Neighborhood Watch. Over the course of three days, USACE crews transit hundreds of nautical miles, snag an assortment of floating debris, and return to the Sausalito Base Yard to offload.

AUGUST 25



The San Francisco District and Monterey County Water Resources Agency hold a construction site visit along the Pajaro River Levee System to share information to local media outlets about the ongoing PL 84-99 emergency repairs there. The repairs come five months after severe winter storms caused a breach in the levee that flooded the town of Pajaro and acres of farmland. Funding for the repairs comes from the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2022, with \$20 million of this appropriation going to repair the levee breaches and erosion under Highway 1 on the left bank of the Pajaro River. "There will be a series of construction projects to provide a stronger, more resilient system for this community," said Lt. Col. Timothy Shebesta, the district's new SPN commander, during his remarks. "Work along the Pajaro River System would not succeed without the strong and unyielding support from the collective energy everyone out here provides to these projects."

SEPTEMBER 25

Volunteers from the San Francisco District haul out a truckload of trash and recyclables from Angel Island during the 39th annual California Coastal Cleanup Day. For over a decade now, the district has organized cleanup efforts at Point Blunt Beach, an area described by John Clagget, a California State Park interpreter, as a "trash magnet."

NOVEMBER 22

Leaders from the San Francisco District and Pajaro Regional Flood Risk Management Agency sign a milestone project partnership agreement setting a course for construction of the long-awaited Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project to begin next summer. The construction comes on the heels of \$149 million in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, as well as support from another crucial partner – the state of California. The agreement lays out responsibilities of the government and the non-federal sponsor in the cost sharing and execution of work.

DECEMBER 14

SPN employees enjoy the festivities at the Bay Model Visitor Center during the district's annual Holiday Luncheon.



EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Shebesta assumes command of district by the Bay

Story & photos by Brandon Beach
District Public Affairs Office

Leadership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers San Francisco District changed hands June 23 when Lt. Col. Timothy W. Shebesta was sworn in as the district's 58th commander.

At a military ceremony at the Bay Model Visitor Center, Lt. Col. Kevin P. Arnett relinquished command of the district he has led since 2021. Shebesta assumed command after having most recently served as professor of military science at his alma mater, Marquette University Army ROTC.

"When I commissioned in the Army 16 years ago, I knew USACE was where I wanted to command."

Lt. Col. Timothy Shebesta
SPN's 58th Commander

"Many of you have heard me say this before, but I will say it again, how happy I am to be part of this district. When I commissioned in the Army 16 years ago, I knew USACE was where I wanted to command," said Shebesta. "To the district [employees], thank you for the warm welcome you have given me. I've been very impressed by what I see, and it makes me even more excited to be part of a group of experts like you." He later added, "I'm very excited to continue the hard work this District has been doing for decades."

Lt. Col. Shebesta was born in Antioch, Ill., and holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. He has also earned a master's degree in civil engineering from the Missouri University of Science and Technology, and a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Minnesota. He holds a current license as a professional engineer and a project management professional certification.

Some of his previous assignments include commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the Special Troops Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division during a third deployment to Taji, Iraq. Next, he served as an Area Engineer in the U.S. Army



Lt. Col. Timothy Shebesta takes command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers San Francisco District guidon during a ceremony June 23 at the Bay Model Visitor Center in Sausalito, Calif. [Inset] Shebesta, newly sworn in as commander, delivers his first remarks to the district.

Corps of Engineers New York District, followed by an OC/T Team Chief and Operations Officer in 181st Multi-Functional Training Brigade of First Army in Fort McCoy, Wis. As a major, he served as the Current Operations Integration Cell Operations Officer, Battalion Operations Officer, and Battalion Executive Officer of Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, U.S. Army South in Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Past SPN commanders since 2008

Lt. Col. Kevin P. Arnett, 2021-23

Lt. Col. John D. Cunningham, 2019-21

Lt. Col. Travis J. Rayfield, 2017-19

Lt. Col. John C. Morrow, 2014-17

Lt. Col. John K. Baker, 2012-14

Lt. Col. Torrey A. DiCiro, 2010-12

Lt. Col. Laurence M. Farrell, 2008-10

SPN launches new Engineering With Nature training

Story & photo by Tammy Reed
District Public Affairs Office

Learning to get to “Yes,” was one of the goals of San Francisco District’s new Engineering With Nature Interactive Training that 20 personnel from a wide range of interdisciplinary fields participated in Oct. 18 at the district’s headquarters. The participants invested three hours of their day in a conference room divided into project development teams working through a scenario provided by the EWN Planning Team, led by Coastal Engineer Tiffany Cheng.

“Our PDTs are increasingly being asked to consider nature-based solutions as part of our civil works projects and to lead the way in delivering climate resiliency in our communities, project by project,” Cheng said. “The purpose of this training was to give staff a sandbox where they could take on a role in a PDT in a training scenario focused on evaluating the tradeoffs of various green-to-gray solutions and selecting or developing an alternative that meets their needs, outside of the real constraints of budget and schedule.”

There were three teams in the class, each taking on the role of coastal engineer, harbormaster, transportation agency representative, environmental resource agency rep, and community leader. Each team had to come to consensus (i.e., get to yes) and select or develop an alternative that would best support their overall goals for adaptation, coastal defense, navigation and recreation in the project scenario. There were six alternatives that were pre-developed and presented in the class material, but teams were also encouraged to combine and create their own alternative.



Cheng

SPN Project Manager Allison Conn thought the training was a great opportunity to prepare for a project she is working on that will use nature-based solutions.

“I learned how to work with a PDT and stakeholders to explore alternatives for a coastal flood risk management project,” she said. “The alternatives ranged from gray infrastructure to green EWN solutions. We were coached on negotiating and modifying alternatives to suit everyone’s needs and eventually agree on a solution. The experience I gained from the scoping exercise was helpful and is something I



Participants in the San Francisco District Engineering With Nature interactive training work as a project development team on a scenario where they try to reach consensus on nature-based or gray alternatives for their project, as Julie Beagle, EWN planning team lead, watches on Oct. 18.

“Our teams are increasingly being asked to consider nature-based solutions as part of our civil works projects and to lead the way in delivering climate resiliency in our communities.”

Tiffany Cheng
SPN Coastal Engineer

will apply to my USACE project.”

Applying EWN to Corps’ projects was another goal of the training, and it was something that Julie Beagle, SPN Environmental Planning Section chief, is working to instill throughout the district and the Corps itself. She believes the idea of integrating nature-based solutions into projects in new ways to address coastal storm risks and flood-risk management problems, as well as yielding ecosystem benefits, is something that is ingrained into the way people working in the Bay Area think.

“What I hope people get from this train-

ing is it was helpful to think about different types of nature-based solutions that people hadn’t really thought of before and ways that they can be used together with gray infrastructure to achieve more benefits. So, it’s like thinking outside the box, thinking outside of your traditional role and also learning new tools,” said Beagle, one of the training instructors. She and the district’s EWN Planning Team want Corps’ PDT members to sit in another person’s shoes and think about how another agency or another type of professional might look at a problem and think about better ways to come to a more holistic solution.

The team, which also includes Environmental Planners Tami Church and Jeneya Fertel, is looking to incorporate feedback about the activity to improve the training, as they hope to have the EWN training materials available to share with other Districts.

“I think our main message is meeting the challenges of the future is going to require us to do things differently, to work across sectors and disciplines and to be creative because these are really hard problems that we are trying to solve,” Beagle said. “An interactive training like this is one of many ways that we can coalesce as a district and really learn from each other and try to embrace this challenge of engineering with nature.”

CLOSER LOOK

Shallow water placement pilot project kicks off in SF Bay

By Brandon Beach
District Public Affairs Office

A steady stream of scows began arriving the morning of Dec. 6 just off the coast of Eden Landing, a 6,400-acre ecological reserve located along the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay, depositing nutrient-rich dredge material in the shallow Bay waters about one mile from its tidal marshes. The daily operation, which wrapped up Dec. 31, is part of a \$3.6 million shallow water strategic placement pilot project spearheaded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers San Francisco District and California State Coastal Conservancy (non-federal project proponent), and monitored by the U.S. Geological Survey.

This past month, dredgers have been scooping this beneficial-use material from the federal channel at Port of Redwood City in South San Francisco and loading these scows for the short voyage across the bay. Once deposited, the material is slowly moved toward the shore by natural tidal and wind wave action replenishing the mudflats and marshes with much needed sediment. This California Department of Fish and Wildlife-managed reserve is a popular stop for wintering and migrating waterfowl, as well as shorebirds, mammals and fish such as salmon and steelhead.



A scow heads toward Eden Landing near Hayward, Calif., to deposit nutrient-rich dredge material there Dec. 15. The 6,400-acre ecological reserve located along the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay is one of 12 sites part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Section 1122 Shallow Water Strategic Placement Pilot Project.

The three federal and state agencies have partnered on the project to determine if this Engineering With Nature approach can be a successful new method to achieve beneficial use for existing mudflats and marshes as they increasingly need low-impact elevation boosts to keep pace with sea level rise.

"EWN allows us to work with the power of water and sediment to efficiently, and ideally, cost-effectively protect our communities, restore natural systems, and prepare us for

the challenges of the future," said Julie Beagle, USACE San Francisco District EWN Practice Lead and Environmental Planning Section chief.

Earlier this fall, a team of environmental scientists and coastal engineers from USGS completed pre-project monitoring to understand baseline conditions of the local sediment supply, benthic communities and eelgrass habitats. Following this month's placement operation, the project will move into a robust post-project monitoring phase. They

will use various methods and techniques to determine sediment deposition and impacts from this strategic placement, including a magnetic particle tracking study.

"The San Francisco District is well-positioned to work with partners to develop and implement EWN solutions to manage the risk of flooding in the built environment, restore aquatic ecosystems and continue to meet navigation missions while adapting to new conditions in the face of climate change," said Beagle.

VA continued

of this project because it is for the safety of our veterans," said Jia Li, San Francisco VA Health Care System medical director. "We are [also] very pleased we are preserving the tradition and history of our campus. Some of these buildings are before World War II era, and we really respect the preservation of the façade of the building."

"I am honored to be here and salute

the spirit of partnership and collaboration that has made this all possible," said Maj. David Miller, USACE San Francisco District acting deputy commander. "Today, we embark on an ambitious project to modernize Building 8 and deliver a world-class project for our veterans."

More about the project

The renovation and construction of Building 8 includes remediation of asbestos-containing materials and lead-based paint as well as fully demolishing all existing inte-

rior finishes, partitions and mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. The facility will be retrofitted with new shear walls systems and assemblies and a new foundation comprised of continuous perimeter footings, micro piles and new interconnecting slab-on-grade.

Once complete, the building will have all new partitions, hardware and finishes with the visual presence of the exterior matching the rest of the campus adhering to the State Historic Preservation Office.