

CHAPTER 5 - VISITOR CENTER PROGRAM

5-1. Purpose. This chapter establishes the policy governing planning, development, management, and operation of USACE Visitor Center facilities at civil works water resource projects.

5-2. Policy. It is the policy of the Corps of Engineers to plan, develop, manage and operate Visitor Centers at water resource development projects in accordance with the following criteria:

a. The Corps of Engineers is responsible for providing information to the visiting public at every project it operates through a Type A Regional Visitor Center, a Type B Project Visitor Center, or a Type C Visitor Information Facility.

b. The interpretive objectives of Visitor Centers are to:

(1) Enhance the public's understanding of the multidimensional role of the Army and the Corps and their contributions to the Nation.

(2) Enhance the public's understanding of the purpose and operation of the project, its archeological, historic, man-made, natural, and cultural features.

(3) Develop public appreciation for the proper and safe use of project resources.

(4) Foster the spirit of personal stewardship of public lands.

(5) Orient the visitor to the project and its recreational opportunities.

(6) Aid project personnel in accomplishing management objectives.

(7) Reduce overall project operation and maintenance costs.

c. Visitor facilities must fall into one of the following categories:

(1) Type A Visitor Center. Construction of Type A Regional Visitor Centers is no longer authorized. Specific legislation is the only way a new Type A Visitor Center can be built. However, a Type B Visitor Center can be redesignated as a Type A Visitor Center with authorization by HQUSACE (CECW-ON) provided it meets the existing criteria. A Type A Visitor Center is intended to serve as a regional facility. It provides information encompassing a large geographic area such as a river basin, state, or other designated area of concern. It tells the story of the Corps from the national to the local level and the mission of the local project. It provides information on the socioeconomic development of the area, events of archeological, historical, cultural, and natural importance in the area, and other items of interest. Information shall be made available to visitors concerning rules and regulations, safety, facilities, and other recreation projects in the area. This type of facility is called a "Regional Visitor Center."

(2) Type B Visitor Center. Construction of Type B Project Visitor Centers are limited to those projects where the Corps is committed to construction through legislation, memorandum of understanding or cost sharing agreements. This type of Visitor Center, established by the MSC Commander, presents information on the project area. This can include specifics on Corps

history, the project, natural and cultural resources, and local history. In addition, information on rules and regulations, safety, facilities and project recreation opportunities should be available to visitors. This type of center is similar to the Type A Visitor Center except that its scope is local in nature. This type of facility is called a "Project Visitor Center."

(3) Type C Visitor Center. Construction of Type C Visitor Information Centers is limited to the placement of exhibits in existing buildings, or in new or rehabilitated administration buildings for which construction has been budgeted. Justification for these buildings shall be based on administrative need. Information facilities of this type are usually incorporated into existing buildings. Type C Visitor Centers shall be staffed during regular office hours, as needed, incidental to other work. They dispense information, publications and maps which assist visitors in understanding, locating, and safely using and enjoying project facilities. Displays and presentations, as space permits, cover such topics as project purpose, visitor safety, history, and natural resources. This type of facility is called a "Visitor Information Center."

(4) Projects Without Visitor Centers. If a project does not have any of these facilities available, an area shall be designated to make Corps project, regulatory, safety, and other informative materials available to the public.

d. Visitor centers and support facilities (access roads, parking, etc.) are restricted to fee lands. Acquisition of additional lands to accommodate Visitor Centers, or their support facilities is not authorized. The Master Plan (MP) or the Supplement (if necessary) shall address visitor center facilities and program requirements in general terms, including information on future construction, rehabilitation, and the interpretive prospectus.

e. Specific operating guidelines for individual visitor centers are left to the discretion of the Operations Project Manager and District staff. In addition to regular paid staff or contract services, Operations Project Managers should make full use of volunteers and cooperating associations.

f. All visitor centers and exhibits shall be reviewed for relevancy, accuracy, timeliness, and safety at least once every five years by a district level review team. The review team shall be interdisciplinary, consisting of one representative from each of the following office elements: public affairs, natural resource management, information management, engineering, safety, security and history (if available).

g. The Operations Project Manager and/or District should foster cooperation with Federal, state and local agencies, non-profit educational, or other interest groups and individuals in order to facilitate the operation of visitor centers. In addition, Visitor Center Managers may consider the development and use of Cooperative Agreements. These Agreements are between nonprofit, tax-exempt corporations established for educational, scientific and/or interpretive purposes and the Corps, acting through the District Commander.

h. Development and funding procedures for renovations, rehabilitations, new equipment, and brochures must follow those established by the District and MSC, and by HQUSACE where applicable (annual budget EC).

i. Operation. It is imperative that Visitor Centers be operational during periods of heaviest visitation and accommodate large groups. All Type A and B Visitor Centers will have

adequate staff to ensure that they are operational during these periods. Specific operating guidelines for individual visitor Centers are properly left to the discretion of the Project Manager and District staff.

(1) Permanent Personnel. It is the District's responsibility to ensure that adequate FTEs are authorized for proper operation of Regional and Project Visitor Centers. If FTEs are not available, districts should consider the use of contract personnel. Regional Visitor Centers will be staffed at a minimum with one full-time permanent position. This employee will hold the primary responsibility for operation of the facility.

(2) Contract Services. If adequate staffing cannot be maintained through permanent and seasonal personnel, districts are authorized to contract for these services with O&M funds. Control or ownership of Visitor Center facilities or contents will not be conveyed to an operating contractor. Visitor Center design and planning remain a Corps responsibility in contract operated facilities, as do management decisions such as those regarding hours and days of operation, specific operation guidelines, and visitor center objectives. Should the Corps contract for the operation of a Visitor Center, it is the Corps' responsibility to provide adequate training for contract personnel on the Corps history, operational procedures, and interpretive materials in the center.

(3) Volunteer Services. Individual or group volunteers may be used to staff Corps Visitor Centers if adequate Corps staffing is not available. However, the Corps must provide adequate training and supervision to ensure quality service to the visiting public.

j. Public Food Service facilities, including beverage, candy, and cigarette machines will not be provided by the government or be accessible to the public.