

COE column

Rangers shift to water safety duty in summer



By Michael Lapina, Chief Ranger

Shoreline Management Rangers who generally handle boat dock issues on Lake Lanier will soon be assisting our Park Operations Rangers with weekend patrols to assist with the lake's nearly eight million annual visitors. Increased patrols help rangers promote visitor safety and protect Lanier's natural resources.

Following the success of this shift in duties last summer, the Corps of Engineers has again decided to maximize park patrols and increase promotion of water safety during the busy recreation season.

Bear in mind that at this time of year, our focus turns to water safety. This may mean a slow-down or suspension of some Shoreline Management activities, but rest assured that these Shoreline Management rangers will still be working on their regular duties, which include protecting public property from unauthorized use or damaging activities.

Safety first all year long

The summer is, of course, the busiest season for visitation at Lanier. As such, the Corps maximizes water safety and park patrols during the summer. Weekends are by far the busiest and with school out and families on vacation, we're aware of the increased need to have rangers available to our visitors.

During the patrols, rangers have many responsibilities, most of which revolve around visitor safety, from ensuring there are no immediate safety hazards to the families that come to the lake to regulating traffic flow and parking to ensure emergency services can quickly respond to accidents.

Water safety is of paramount importance to the entire Corps' staff. Park rangers train volunteers to promote water safety and working together hundreds of swimmers and boaters learn life saving tips.

Fun with water safety

The Corps has established partnerships with organizations including the Gainesville Jaycees and Gainesville/Hall County Safe Kids Coalition and others to make learning about water safety fun and lasting. From ranger trading cards for youngsters who answer water safety questions to floatation citations to reward kids for wearing their life jackets, the Corps looks for positive ways to recognize good water safety practices.

A word of caution

Lake levels are up and of course, the lake is open for recreation. However, visitors should remember that the lake is at record lows for this time of year. All of our designated swimming areas are dried out and not currently usable because of the ongoing drought.

Swimmers should always use caution, but especially if they choose to swim outside the beach areas. Stumps, rocks and steep drop offs can all be found outside marked swimming areas. If you choose to swim, wear a life jacket, even if you're a strong swimmer. The Corps does not recommend swimming outside of the designated areas.

Boaters should also be aware of unmarked underwater hazards. Although our rangers have marked many potential hazards as the lake rises and falls, some hazards may not be marked. Be familiar with the lake and travel at safe speeds for the conditions. File a float plan with family and friends so that they will know where you are boating and when to expect your return.