

Navajo Lake C.A.S. T. Event



By Pat Page, FCCO
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While the mission of the Catch a Special Thrill (C.A.S.T.) for Kids Foundation is to provide special needs and disadvantaged youth the opportunity to enjoy a quality outdoor recreational experience fishing on the water, the motto for the Navajo Lake version of the event might be better suited for that classic line from the Postal Service “Neither snow nor rain nor...” you get the picture. The last few years, the participants at the Navajo Lake event have seen their fair share of unsettled weather, and this year’s event, held May 7, 2016, was no exception. While the weather may have been gloomy, the attitude of the volunteers and the excitement level of the participants was far from it.

Approximately 163 volunteers, representing over 30 federal, state, and local agencies and businesses were on hand to make sure the day exceeded the expectations of the eager anglers – despite the weather. On hand for the event representing Reclamation were Deputy Commissioner of Policy, Administration and Budget Gray Payne, Upper Colorado Deputy Regional Director Brent Esplin, and Four Corners Construction Office (FCCO) Project Engineer Barry Longwell. The three of them, along with FCCO Deputy Construction Engineer Pat Page, were able to get out on the lake and check in with several boats during the event. *(It should be noted that Deputy Commissioner Payne and Pat Page snuck in a few casts to go the extra mile to try to gather “fishery data” to provide to the kids; but alas, their efforts, while extraordinary, were all for not as they both got skunked and thus had no information to share!)* Several FCCO employees including Jere Wales, Cindy Slade, Cliff Drayton, and Chico Quintana led Reclamation’s involvement by volunteering their day to help out in various capacities from registration to boat captains/fishing guides.

The participants and their families, totaling an estimated 70-80 individuals, began arriving at Navajo Lake New Mexico State Park at around 7:30 am. For some, it had been over a 2 and 1/2 hour bus ride! Like a well-oiled machine, the volunteers got to work signing in the participants, handing out t-shirts, providing fishing poles and tackle, issuing personal flotation devices and introducing them to their boat captain.



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After getting their official “team” picture taken, the boat captains and their crews loaded their boats and shoved off in search of fun, adventure and maybe even a fish or two.

After battling typical high-desert spring-time weather for several hours, by noon most of the boats were off the lake and everyone was treated to a well-deserved lunch of hot dogs and hamburgers hot off the grill. After lunch, the sun came out and the participants and their families had the opportunity to interact with many of the agency personnel who were involved in putting on the event. Rather than provide trinkets and other goodies at the time of registration like in year’s past, this year the coordination committee implemented a new concept whereas participants were given an empty bag and had to visit the various “stations” to pick up goodies, ask questions, and get information from the various agencies. This new concept was deemed a success by participants and volunteers alike. The event was topped off with an awards ceremony recognizing each participant and acknowledging the extraordinary efforts of the volunteers, and, as the skies were turning dark once again, everyone headed home happy, tired, full of stories, and perhaps a bit chilly from a long day of fun and excitement that is the essence of C.A.S.T.

Photos below



Student volunteers from Piedra Vista High School in Farmington assemble fishing equipment in preparation for the participants' arrival.



Boat Captains getting registered



Participant enjoying one of the "post-fishing" activities



Deputy Commissioner Gray Payne discusses the “ins and outs” of putting on a C.A.S.T. event with Navajo Lake C.A.S.T. Coordinator Cheryl Moline.

