

Garrison Ranger has your “six”

By Cheryl Moore, Public Affairs Specialist

“Got your six” in the military means “I’ve got your back.”

That’s exactly what Nathan Busche, natural resource specialist/park ranger at the Garrison (North Dakota) Project has. He’s got your six, in more ways than one. As the leading provider of outdoor recreation with over 400 lakes and river projects in 43 states, enjoyed by 250 million visitors every year, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers stays on top of boating and water safety. Busche is the epitome of this effort.

Busche was recently awarded the North Dakota “Boating Educator of the Year,” an award presented by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, recognizing him for his efforts on water safety. It is his passion - saving lives. Busche knows that since people don’t float, flotation devices for them are the single most important safety gear to have near the water. Statistics have shown that more than 89 percent of the people who die in water-related accidents were not wearing a life jacket.

Because of this, the Life Jacket Loaner program was started in 2009 and started out with just two stations around Lake Sakakawea. Ironically each station has six hooks on them for lifejackets, which doesn’t prevent more than six loaner lifejackets from hanging up there at each station at a time. Today this life-saving program and awareness for safety on the water has grown to 19 Life Jacket Loaner Stations and growing around Lake Sakakawea and Lake Audobon.

The partnership between the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers keeps life jackets available for all who want to enjoy the beautiful waters in North Dakota, with NO excuse for not staying safe and ultimately following the law. Even the best swimmers can misjudge their skills and abilities while swimming in a lake or river. Save your energy, let the life jacket do the work for you.

The 19 Life Jacket Loaner program stations on Lake Sakakawea, the managing agency, and partners are as follows:

- USACE manages one station at the Downstream Campground and one station at East Totten Trail Campground, partnering with ND Game and Fish Dept.
- ND Parks and Rec. Dept. has two stations at Fort Stevenson State Park, one station at Lewis and Clark State Park and four stations at Lake Sakakawea State Park and partners with USACE and ND Game and Fish.
- Other locations include Indian Hills, Sportsmens Centennial Park, Parshall Bay Recreation Area, Van Hook Resort, Beulah Bay Recreation Area, Dakota Waters Resort, Hazen Bay Recreation Area, Tobacco Gardens Resort, Camp of the Cross, and New Town Marina. USACE partners along with ND Game and Fish Dept. at each of these stations.

“When you think about statistics, it’s more impressive to see the number of stations growing compared to any number of fatalities on our waters,” said Busche. “This proactive approach brings much awareness and meets its purpose, saving lives.”

Earlier in the year Busche taught water safety importance’s of wearing life jackets at the National Marina Day held at Fort Stevenson State Park on Lake Sakakawea.

Campers coming into North Dakota are informed about the loaner stations through signs posted at the Spillway Pond and the Downstream Campground. As the summer season begins to wind down, just remember the most important thing you can do while recreating in or around the water is to wear a life jacket, and encourage others to do so.

As Busche said, “Increased water safety awareness can help ensure that you and your loved ones have fun this summer and return home safely.”



The first Life Jacket Loaner Station placed at the Downstream Campground in 2009. (Photo by Nathan Busche)



Nathan Busche shows his Boating Educator of the Year Award from NASBLA while Brian Schaffer with the North Dakota Game and Fish Dept. stand in front of one of the 19 Life Jacket Loaner stations around Lake Sakakawea.



Nathan Busche, Natural Resource Specialist/Park Ranger at Garrison Project teaches water safety importance's of wearing life jackets during the June 2017 National Marina Day at Fort Stevenson State Park on Lake Sakakawea.