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Corps helps students train in swift water

SALTSBURG, PA -- Rescuers-in-training learned to pluck fellow students from swift water April 6, thanks in part to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers controlled release of water just below Loyalhanna Dam here.

The Corps coordinated with the Derry Township Volunteer Fire Department, Bradenville, PA, to provide the fast-moving water as part of Swift Water Rescue and Emergency Response Training.

The exercise helped train ten Water Rescue Squad students in Self- and Shore-Based Swift Water Rescue techniques. The students were from the Derry, Ligonier, Blairsville and Lloydsville Volunteer Fire Departments.

The Corps provided access to the facilities just below the dam. The Corps' Water Management Branch provided support by regulating the lake levels prior to the event and adequate outflow discharges during the training exercise.

"The unique natural features of the area present a challenging but safe training environment," said Dave Bishop, Corps Area Manger. He called Loyalhanna Lake one of the State's best training sites. "The rocks create swift currents and there is a slow moving pool just below the swift water."

Loyalhanna Park Ranger Jim Shusko provided assistance to Water Rescue Instructors Denise Moore from the Derry VFD; Kris Baker, from Keystone State Park; and Scott Grahn from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

Shusko monitored the operations and ensured spectators kept a safe distance, Bishop added.

These students will be the first responders for water-related emergencies at Conemaugh and Loyalhanna Lakes, as well as Loyalhanna Creek and the Kiski River.

"We get to know the individuals who will be there for any rescues and they get to know us and the area," said Bishop. The Corps participates in three or four water rescue exercises a year.

As the weather gets warmer, more people will be visiting the lake. The increase in visitors means there's a greater risk of water rescue emergencies.

The Corps' participation in these events underscores the agency's commitment to practicing water safety.

