

Wednesday, May 25, 2025 – 3PM

Virgil Thornton II, General Engineer

William K. Steinmetz, Environmental Compliance Officer

Virgil

What is your name, position, and status within the Dam Repair project? Feel free to include any other key players here too.

Bill

Bill Steinmetz, NIEHS Environmental Compliance Officer / Environmental reviewer for the Discovery Lake dam repair and shoreline fortification project. Cameron Thompson, NIH Structural Engineer, Facilities Management Branch RTP / Project COR for the Discovery Lake dam repair and shoreline fortification project.

Virgil

What was the purpose of the Dam Repair project? What are its benefits?

Bill

The Discovery Lake dam was constructed in 1977 to control downstream flooding. The primary purpose of this project was to repair deteriorating drainpipes within the dam. The repair was accomplished through slip-lining, which means that slightly smaller plastic pipes were inserted into the existing, original metal pipes. This method minimized land disturbance that would have been associated with excavation and maintained the overall structural integrity of the dam. A secondary purpose was to fortify eroded portions of the shoreline. These shoreline repair efforts featured a combination of rock walls, riprap, and vegetation.

Virgil

What is some interesting history about Discovery Lake?

Bill

The name “Discovery Lake” was chosen from over 500 entrees submitted by employees in a lake naming contest during the summer of 2012. The lake had previously been called NIEHS Lake, Drew Lake, Noname Lake, and unnamed tributary to Burdens Creek.

Virgil

How does Discovery Lake interact and contribute to the local ecosystem?

Bill

Discovery Lake is the centerpiece of the NIEHS / EPA Campus for employees and wildlife. The lake and surrounding ecosystem host a variety of aquatic and terrestrial animals including deer, fox, bobcat, beaver, otter, waterfowl, snakes, turtles, and around 150 different bird species. Markers along the lake trail provide history, wildlife, and habitat information for employee enrichment.

Virgil

What were some interesting things you saw or learned throughout the course of the project?

Bill

Turtles seem to disappear from Discovery Lake each winter. We learned that this annual disappearance is called brumation. During the brumation period, which is a hibernation-like state of conserving energy, turtles bury themselves in the mud on the lake bottom. Very little food or oxygen is required while turtles brumate. The turtles return to the surface for sunning, foraging, and nesting, once warmer weather returns.

Virgil

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Bill

The area of Discovery Lake is about 29 acres, and the deepest point is 14 feet. Also, volunteers assembled and installed fish structures at several near shore locations to enhance aquatic habitat.