FEMA enlists Forest Service, Park Service to keep vaccine mission rolling

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PHILADELPHIA - Since being tasked by President Joe Biden in the nationwide vaccine rollout in January, FEMA has taken an “all-hands on deck” approach to its mission – including the enlistment of staff outside the agency.

Members of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and National Parks Service (NPS) joined the agency’s efforts, lending their skills and talents in support of the West Virginia FEMA team’s planning efforts. Among their accomplishments were the creation of maps to help staff at West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters track community clinic volunteers and the formulation of goals for next steps in vaccination planning. They also provided support for several county mobile vaccination clinics.

In addition, the Forest Service sent public information officers to assist FEMA Region 3 in supporting Joint Information Centers at community vaccination clinics in Philadelphia, Greenbelt, Md., and Norfolk, Va. At FEMA’s Maryland center, USFS staff ran point on speakers bureau engagements on the vaccine effort, as well as serving as vaccine equity liaison to ensure underserved populations had access to doses. At the Virginia center, a USFS PIO took the lead in creating a “Reasons Why” wall, a collection of posts where vaccine recipients shared what led them to get their COVID-19 shot. The promotion spread to centers across the region to help inspire others to get vaccinated

“This cooperation among federal agencies is accomplishing exactly what our National Response Framework was designed to do,” said Janice Barlow, Acting Regional Administrator, FEMA Region 3. “One group helps the other to complete the mission, ensuring that we all succeed.”

This kind of collaboration not only between federal agencies, but with local and state governments, volunteer organizations and private sector partners, is the hallmark of the greater effort to promote vaccination and the defeat of COVID-19.

Learn more about the National Response Framework at https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/frameworks/response. Read about the president's efforts to combat COVID, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/National-Strategy-for-the-COVID-19-Response-and-Pandemic-Preparedness.pdf.



Sgt. Nicholas Rhodes, with the West Virginia Army National Guard, left, and Shawn Nagle, from the National Parks Service Interior Region 2 office in Atlanta, seen on March 23, 2021, helped support the West Virginia Division of Emergency Management at the state Joint Interagency Task Force for vaccinations at the National Guard base in Charleston, W.Va. Nagle was part of the federal response effort assisting with the West Virginia FEMA team's planning function. (Philip Maramba/FEMA)



Eric Schmeckpeper, a retired U.S. Forest Service officer from Atlanta, helped register participants at a mobile vaccination clinic sponsored by the West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster in Belle, W.Va., on March 25, 2021. Schmeckpeper was part of the federal response effort assisting with the West Virginia FEMA team's planning function. (Philip Maramba/FEMA)



A FEMA staffer at the Norfolk, Va., Community Vaccination Clinic straightens out the “Reasons Why” wall papered with thoughts shared by participants on what led them to get their COVID-19 shot. U.S. Forest Service Public Information Officer Cindy Frenzel started this effort in early April; now the walls are covered with hundreds of “Reasons Why.” Frenzel was part of the federal response effort assisting with the Norfolk FEMA team’s external affairs function. (Patsy Lynch/FEMA)