

## **Eric Steven Jones**

*Excerpts from The Register-Herald September 9, 2018 article by Mat Combs*

Eric Steven Jones was born in Hinton, WV, the son of Steve Jones. Graduating from Summers County High School in 1997, Jones joined the United States Air Force at 18 years old and served for 20 years as a dual status technician with the 130th Airlift Wing in Charleston.

As a boy, he would play ball at the Bellepoint Park in the shadows of the Bluestone Dam. “I specifically remember finishing ball games and coming over to the dam to see if you could run up the side of it where it has a sloped face,” Jones said. While unable to run up the massive concrete structure as a boy, Jones has made his way to the top of the dam, becoming the resource manager for all of the U.S. Corps of Engineers’ some 22,000 acres of property, including the 2,000-acre lake and the dam itself.

As the resource manager, Jones is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the dam, safety meetings and training, water flow monitoring both downstream and upstream, lake patrols, environmental stewardship, and recreation — all done through his work or supervising the six other full-time employees on staff.

During his time in the service, Jones got a degree in environmental science and with a maintenance background got a job as a maintenance mechanic at the dam in 2014 after leaving the service. Moving up, he became the facility operations specialist for the entire Kanawha area before moving to Huntington in a supervisory role.

When the resource manager position opened up at the Bluestone Dam, Jones jumped at the opportunity, beginning his role as resource manager in early August of 2018.

Along with Jones own personal connection, his wife’s grandfather helped build the dam and his grandmother worked at the facility when completed. He could not have picked a busier time to take the position, With safety upgrades under way at the dam since 1999, construction activities are currently in Phase Four with the Corps of Engineers announcing in July 2018 that funding for the last phase, a staggering \$574 million, had been appropriated.

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In between helping coordinate efforts between the everyday maintenance side of work at the dam and the improvement project, Jones also has to oversee contracts to maintain the operation of the facility.

Completed in 1949, the dam controls the flow of water from a watershed the size of Connecticut which stretches through southern West Virginia, into Virginia and North Carolina. According to the Corps of Engineers, nearly half of the water that passes by Charleston first comes through the Bluestone Dam — which in theory has saved the public billions of dollars in flood damage for neighboring Hinton all the way to Point Pleasant. “Our operating cost is relatively low compared to the amount of benefit that society gets from us being here,” Jones said.

While he considers the dam a necessity and the projects to upgrade the dam as needed, Jones is aware that construction activities are beginning to get old for the general public.

“Growing up around here, I know what an inconvenience this construction has been with the local communities here,” the resource manager said, adding that the local public has been very cooperative. Construction has taken away one of the ballparks that Jones himself played on as a child and he said that one of the main reasons he took the job was to be able to add a local voice to how the project would be completed and what recreational facilities will be brought back.

Finishing the project out before he retires means a great deal to Jones, though he hesitated on placing a completion date on the last phase of construction and getting back the recreation area that was lost to accommodate construction.

“It does mean something to me,” Jones said. “Now I’ve got small children who play ball down in this field, and it is good to be home.”

Eric and his wife, Tara Ford Jones live in Hilldale with their sons, Miles and Hudson.

**Eric Steven Jones, We Salute You!**

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