



Conservation Lands as Compatible Use Buffers

Background

When the United States established military installations many years ago, they often were built away from population centers. As the Nation's population has grown during the past few decades, residential areas and strip malls now abut many military installations. Noise, dust, or smoke levels from guns, vehicles, or aircraft prompt citizens to call local authorities to have military activities stopped and military commanders frequently must choose between being good neighbors and meeting training and testing requirements. Noise concerns, the presence of cultural and historic resources, and the distribution of invasive or endangered species can result in training restrictions affecting military readiness. The adverse effects of these incompatible land uses has prompted the Department of Defense (DoD) to find solutions.

To strike a balance between military operations and good relations with neighbors, DoD and various partners are establishing conservation land buffers between installations and communities. The military services, in partnership with land trust organizations, Federal and State agencies, Tribes, non-government organizations, and the private sector, are reaching out to solicit interest and identify mutual objectives in preserving habitat corridors and preventing the development of critical open areas. Everyone benefits when noise, smoke, or visual impacts resulting from military operations are minimized. In turn, the military can conduct training and operations with little compromise and local communities jointly assume habitat, biodiversity, and wildlife management responsibilities.

The Army took the lead in acquiring easements on lands with suitable habitat for endangered species, notably the red-cockaded woodpecker, to gain

mitigation credit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for training activities on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The Marine Corps saw the value in acquiring easements to prevent incompatible land use and took similar action on land proximate to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, also in North Carolina. The Army and Marine Corps "land buffer initiatives" resulted in a win-win for both conservation and military interests. To streamline the process for all the DoD services, the Department of Defense drafted proposed legislation to provide direct authority to transfer funds for conservation buffers.

Congressional Authority

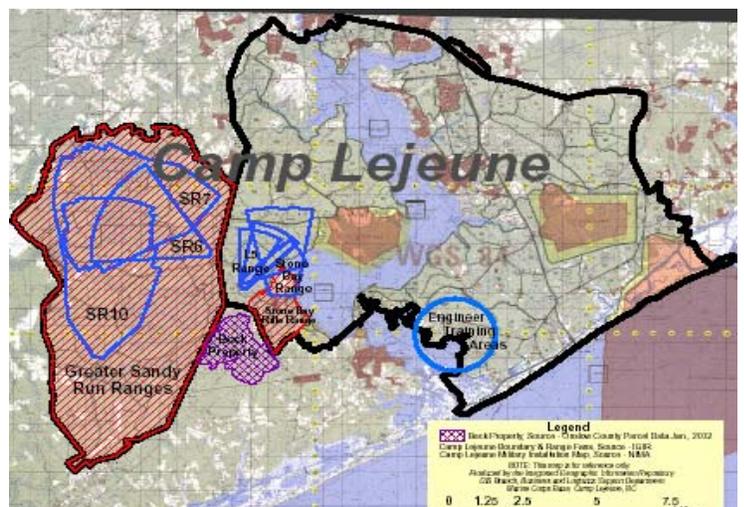
The U.S. Congress authorized the authority to enter into conservation land use partnerships in November 2003 through the National Defense Authorization Act. Section 2811 states that the Secretary of Defense or a Military Department may enter into an agreement with a State or private entity to limit development or property use that is incompatible with the mission, to preserve habitat, or to relieve anticipated environmental restrictions that would restrict, impede, or interfere with military training, testing, or operations on the installation.

The process to establish a conservation easement on buffer lands varies with each military service, partnership, and local real estate condition. Typically, a land conservation trust organization purchases lands from the owner with funds

contributed by the military and the participating partners. In exchange, the military service receives a restrictive easement or other assurances that the property will be perpetually protected. Proposed development or land use changes need DoD service approval to ensure compatibility with the mission.

Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune

At Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, 2,500 acres were planned for high-density residential housing and a golf course, directly between a rifle training range and a major tank and artillery range. Realizing incompatible land use could encroach on the military mission, the Marine Corps established a Conservation Forum. The North Carolina (NC) Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) took the lead to identify potential partners and hosted the first meeting. Participants included representatives from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, FWS, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, USDA Forest Service, the Endangered Species Coalition, NC Coastal Federation, NC Coastal Land Trust, NC Department of Transportation, and the USDA Natural

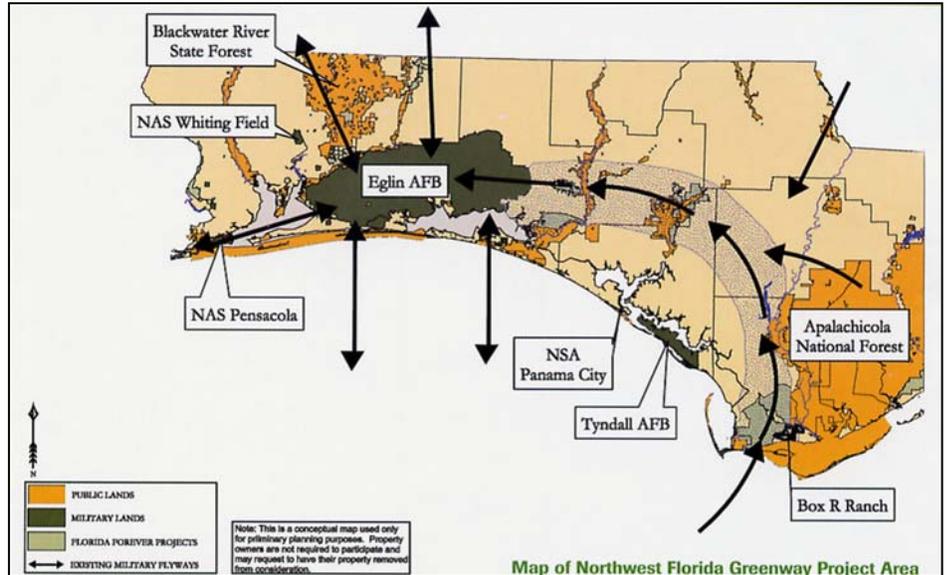
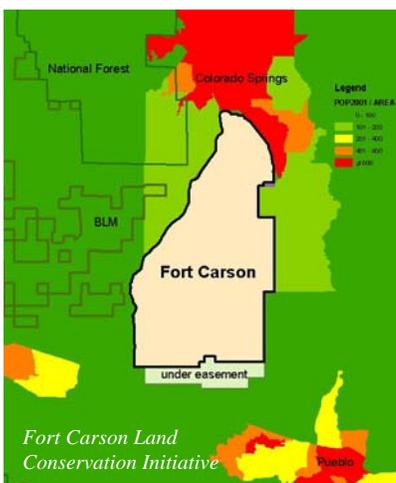


Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina buffer initiative.

Resources Conservation Service. The members signed a memorandum of understanding and, about one year later, TNC purchased the 2,500 acres with the assistance of the Marine Corps and sold it to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC). WRC is preparing a recreational use plan to open the area for public hunting and preserve the forest habitat. As a result, the Marines avoided encroachment of their military training and operation missions.

Fort Carson Regional Partnership

The Army is working to protect 14 linear miles of short-grass prairie along Fort Carson, Colorado's southern boundary, in partnership with TNC and FWS. Less than 50 percent of Colorado's short-grass prairie remains and urban sprawl threatens much of it. As habitat is lost to development, wildlife such as the Mexican spotted owl, mountain plover, greenback cut-throat trout, and black-tailed prairie dog seek refuge in the short-grass prairie and the Piñon pine ecosystems found on Fort Carson. Through the Fort Carson Regional Partnership, TNC is seeking to purchase conservation easements from willing sellers around the installation. In addition, TNC leased a ranch for 3 years along 14 linear miles of the base. Before the terms of lease expire, and if funds become available, the partnership will purchase a conservation easement on the ranch. All parties should benefit; the ranch owner can maintain a way of life that might otherwise be lost to development pressures while preserving some of Colorado's unique habitat and buffering Fort Carson from incompatible land uses.



The Florida Greenway Initiative

The Air Force participated in the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas and minimized encroachment on military testing and training for five installations through the creation of the Northwest Florida Greenway Initiative. The Greenway partners include DoD, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Okaloosa Economic Development Council, Air Force Air Armament Center, and TNC.

The Greenway Initiative establishes a 100-mile protected corridor extending from the Apalachicola National Forest to Eglin Air Force Base. The three Greenway Initiative goals are: 1) Promote the sustainability of the military mission in northwest Florida to meet the national defense testing, operational, and training requirements as outlined in the Joint Gulf Range Strategic Plan, 2) Strengthen the regional economy by sustaining the capabilities of the military in the region and enhancing recreational tourism and, 3) Protect lands that will sustain the high biodiversity in the region, link protected natural areas, preserve water resources, and provide areas for outdoor recreation. The intent is to preserve military installations by creating buffer zones that insulate military aircraft flight paths from encroachment caused by development.

Future Opportunities

The Office of the Secretary of Defense secured \$12.5 million in fiscal year

2005 to support land partnership initiatives. Lands adjacent to DoD installations slated for development that may be incompatible with the military land use requirements are the top priority. The Office of Secretary of Defense is working with the Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, and Navy to pursue effective land use planning with Federal, State, Tribal, private, and non-government stakeholders to preserve both military training areas and biodiversity around military installations.

These partnerships encourage and enable the ownership of private developable lands in the vicinity of military bases to be retained as conservation lands and sold to land trusts such as TNC and/or an appropriate state conservation agency. Conservation organizations are becoming the military's best possible neighbors by collaborating to protect lands adjacent to military installations.

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