

County to expand Shoal River Buffer (DOCUMENT)

By KARI C. BARLOW | Daily News

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Okaloosa County plans to use \$1.7 million in Department of Defense grants to purchase 961 acres of land around the Shoal River from Haiseal Timber.

The acreage will greatly expand what's known as the Shoal River Buffer, an area that protects Eglin Air Force Base as well as Okaloosa County's future water supply, said Jeff Littrell, director of water and sewer for the county.

"This is another example of where we have worked together with our brothers and sisters at Eglin and what we have is a win-win," Littrell said. "If it wasn't a win-win, we wouldn't be doing it, and neither would they."

[See more about the purchase.](#)

The county will use \$1.1 million in Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration grants and \$600,000 in Defense Infrastructure grants to fund the land purchase, which is expected to be completed by Dec. 31.

Under federal rules, the REPI grants must serve a dual purpose – protecting the environment and military interests.

The Shoal River Buffer – which is undeveloped forest and wetlands – fits the criteria, Littrell said.

"(The grants) protect the watershed of the Shoal River, which is good for the environment, but they are also taking land out of the future development pool, which protects the mission at Duke Field," he said.

"A lot of what they do, they do at night," Littrell said. "Therefore, the Air Force would prefer the land ... not be developed."

In 2006, the county purchased 353 acres of Haiseal Timber land on both sides of the Shoal River for 2 to 3 miles for the Shoal River Buffer.

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