



Sentinel landscape program aims to shield Camp Ripley from sprawl

By Zach Kayser on May 13, 2015 at 8:45 p.m.

The Minnesota National Guard received some new weapons this week in a military mission many might not expect: conserving the environment.

Gov. Mark Dayton on Monday signed a bill into law making Minnesota the first state in the nation to implement its own version of a federal program designed to protect military bases from encroaching development.

The bill, which passed unanimously in both the Minnesota House of Representatives and Senate, designates the land around Camp Ripley as a "sentinel landscape," meaning the state provides financial incentives for nearby landowners to voluntarily limit development.

Camp Ripley's environmental supervisor, civilian Jay Brezinka, helped craft the initiative.

Bases all across the country that were built decades ago on sites chosen for their obscurity are gradually becoming less and less remote as cities expand, he said.

The military can't conduct weapons testing and training if developers build too close, so by protecting the environment around the bases it saves two birds with one stone.

"It's a huge public benefit," Brezinka said. "It's a lot of win-win opportunities."



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The federal Sentinel program is still in its early stages, with only several bases across the country marked so far. Minnesota's new state-level program will hopefully give Camp Ripley a unique edge when it competes for funding, Brezinka said.

Rep. Ron Kresha, R-Little Falls, introduced the bill in the House. The measure essentially lets officials change over land near Ripley from the existing Army Compatible Use Buffer program, Kresha said. Whereas before the base had to rely on state-level money, they now can go after federal funding for their buffers.

"We want to make sure that we don't get in a situation where the landowners and Camp Ripley become sideways with each other," Kresha said. "This is a tradeoff: This allows those landowners to be able to work in the buffer zone, and Camp Ripley to not have to worry about a bunch of encroachments."

Under the new law, the adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard is tasked with creating a coordinating committee between four state agencies by March 1, 2016. The committee will choose land around Camp Ripley it deems important to the "long-term sustainability of the military missions conducted" at the facility, while seeking input from federal, state and local officials. The board's members will consist of the adjutant general, as well as the heads of the DNR, the Department of Agriculture and the Board of Water and Soil Resources, or their subordinates.

However, Kresha said it might not necessarily take as long as next March to get the committee set up.

"They have plenty of time, I think it'll be fine," he said.

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