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Sentinel Landscape preserves land and defense mission: Thursday program highlights Camp Ripley designation

By [BRAINERD DISPATCH](#) Today at 11:44 a.m.



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On Thursday, Camp Ripley invites the public to learn more about a program designed to preserve local landscape and protect the facility's military mission.

Camp Ripley, a state of Minnesota National Guard training facility near Little Falls, is one of six sites in the nation to be federally designated as Sentinel Landscapes.

"Sentinel Landscapes are working or natural lands important to the nation's defense mission—places where preserving the working and rural character of key landscapes strengthens the economies of farms, ranches, and forests; conserves habitat and natural resources; and protects vital test and training missions conducted on those military installations that anchor such landscapes," per the Sentinel Landscape mission statement on its website.

In July of 2016, Camp Ripley was designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense and the Department of Interior as a Sentinel Landscape.

This federal designation falls closely on the heels of the 2015 Minnesota Legislature's work led by Rep. Ron Kresha, R-Little Falls, in the House and Sen. Paul Gazelka's in the Senate to pass a bill designating Camp Ripley as a State Sentinel Landscape with a team of state and local agency partners tasked to develop the footprint or map of such a designation.

Throughout 2015-2016, this team worked to consider Camp Ripley, local, state and federal partner priorities within the greater Camp Ripley landscape. The team considered what programs and practices added value to all of the partners and private landowners within the Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape while protecting the vital training mission of Camp Ripley.

In 2004, Camp Ripley launched the Readiness Environmental Protection Integration program locally known as the Camp Ripley Army Compatible Use Buffer program or ACUB. This program has worked with willing landowners interested primarily in protecting their working lands with conservation easements. Limited acquisition through cooperation with willing landowners has also occurred leading to the development of the DNR Little Nokasippi Wildlife Management Area, Mississippi Overlook Park in Baxter and a key parcel addition to the Crow Wing State Park allowing for the completion of the Paul Bunyan State Trail.

The success of the Camp Ripley ACUB program led Camp Ripley to rebrand that program as the Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape. The primary focus on conservation easements close to camp will continue, but now with a larger group of partners, programs and funding prioritization at federal and state levels the Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape can offer more to private landowners in the form of USDA programs under the U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service. Most recently the Morrison Soil and Water Conservation District in partnership with Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape was awarded \$2.8 million for its Regional Conservation Partnership Program. That award brings funding for known federal farm bill programs through Natural Resource Conservation Service such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and Healthy Forest Reserve Program.

The Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape partners will present more information on this program and have booths set up allowing those attending to visit with program partners about opportunities within their area. The event is 6 p.m. Thursday in the Hangar facility at Camp Ripley. Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the DNR, the Board of Water and Soil Resources, USDA-NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be set up to facilitate discussion. The event will be kicked off by a welcome from Post Commander Col. Scott St. Sauver followed by a short presentation by staff.

Sentinel Landscape event set Thursday

What: See a short presentation about the Sentinel Landscape project at Camp Ripley. The event is open to all and light refreshments will be served.

When: 6 p.m. Thursday.

Where: the hangar facility at Camp Ripley.