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NC wins competitive Department of Defense grant with unique partnership

The Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program awarded its full 2017 grant to the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Partnership to protect military installations and conserve wildlife habitat and agricultural lands



(https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.nsm/15420_050217_troxler_announce_mg_03f.JPG)

Col. Michael Scalise discusses the \$9.2 million grant that North Carolina has received for conservation projects near military bases on May 2.
Madeline Gray (<http://www.nsjonline.com/staff/madeline-gray>) | North State Journal

By Jeff Moore (<http://www.nsjonline.com/staff/jeff-moore>)
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RALEIGH — North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler was joined by military leaders and state lawmakers in Raleigh Tuesday to announce the state as the sole winner of a competition for millions of federal dollars for the combined purposes of conservation and protection of military bases from issues of encroachment.

"When you marry forestry, agriculture and the military together, and we can use agricultural and forestry land to protect these military bases, that's as good as it gets," said Troxler at the celebratory event. "I think we all know that there's been encroachment around our military bases. This means they can't train like they want to or as much as they want to."

North Carolina beat nine states for a competitive grant of \$9.2 million administered by the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, which supports initiatives and collaboration across the U.S. Department of Defense to preserve land uses near military installations that conserve natural landscapes in support of military readiness.

The winning bid was submitted by the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Partnership, established just last year as a joint effort between the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, other federal agencies, state and local governments, and nonprofit organizations coordinating to protect rural and natural lands important to the nation's defense mission across 33 counties in the state. Within those counties exist Seymour Johnson

Air Force Base, Dare County Bombing Range, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, Marine Corps Air Station New River, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, and Fort Bragg installations.

Col. Michael L. Scalise, deputy commander of Marine Corps Installations East-Marine Corps Base at Camp Lejeune, spoke at the event stating that the unconventional partnership between agriculture and the military was spearheaded by folks in the Old North State.

"North Carolinians thought of it, and believe in it, and are now to be commended for ensuring that virtually all of the elements needed to be successful are now in place to ensure that the military will be able to train the way we fight well into the future," said Scalise. "North Carolina impressively leads the nation in protecting its military training mission and it's showing once again that this is the most military-friendly state in the nation."

The \$9.2 million grant will, in part, serve to leverage an additional \$10 million in contributions from partners such as the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (RCW) and the N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund to help the partnership make significant progress toward its goal to maintain compatible land uses that enable military training and operations on installations while effectively considering landowner preferences; keeping private working lands in the tax base; and assisting private farmers and foresters to maintain their livelihoods, local wildlife habitats and natural resources.

"Anytime you combine our two largest economic impacts — food and freedom — it's a great day in North Carolina," said House Majority Leader Rep. John Bell (R-Wayne), whose district includes Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. "I think we have proven again that we will do anything in our power to make sure North Carolina will continue to be the most military-friendly state in the country."

Of the \$9.2 million grant, \$5.8 million will be used by the Marine Corps as they partner with the RCW to establish an easement and support management of more than 12,100 acres of state-owned land for RCW habitat and help promote conditions necessary to proceed with the development of new training ranges, expansion of ship-to-shore exercises, and enhancement of tactical tank maneuver areas, as well as ensure operational training realism.

The Air Force will use the remaining \$3.4 million in partnering with the N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Trust Fund to protect more than 5,600 acres of high priority land necessary to maintain viable training airspace for Dare County Bombing Range. The primary training range for F-15E aircraft crews from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and the primary backyard range for F/A-18 squadrons operating out of Naval Air Station Oceana has faced a number of encroachment issues such as windmill projects.

"As we grow there are a whole lot of threats that are showing up constantly, and I think it's a challenge for all of us to try and figure out how to mitigate those challenges as best as we can," said Sen. Harry Brown (R-Onslow) who represents a district that includes Camp Lejeune.

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