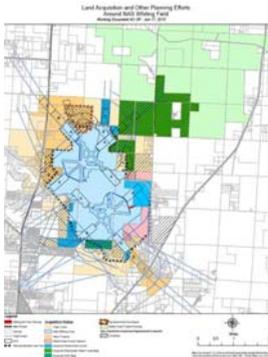


Whiting acquires more land for buffering

From staff reports, pnj.com 3:15 p.m. CDT July 3, 2015



(Photo: Special to the News Journal)

Whiting Field Naval Air Station has purchased 335 acres of easements near the north and south fields to create more buffering for the base.

Buffering through land purchase prevents new development that could be impacted by flight tracks, noise corridors, accidents zones and other military-related engagements on base.

"When air bases are built, they tend to build them in outlying and unpopulated areas," said Jay Cope, Whiting Field Naval Air Station public relations officer. "You try to keep air stations removed from heavy and dense populations, but oftentimes you have things being built closer and closer to the fence line. Buffering prevents residential developments from being built in accident prone places."

Cope said while safety is a No. 1 priority, the most likely times aircraft incidents occur are during takeoffs and landings. Buffering reduces the chances of incidents happening near residential areas while also reducing noise levels.

In addition, the necessary military training to continue enhancing readiness is maintained.



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"It allows us to have mission flexibility, mission protection and to be able to do some small planning," said Randy Roy, Whiting Field NAS community plans liaison officer. "We're just trying to avoid having the development piece in places that aren't ideal, where these critical flight paths are."

Cope added that the base wants to make sure that areas outside the fence line are used for compatible development, like small warehouses or agriculture, rather than residential development.

Whiting Field NAS buffering programs have been in place for several years, according to Cope, and began when a Joint Use Study, paid for by the Navy, investigated ways the land could be used around the installation while still protecting the mission of the Navy.

"The study took place in 2003 and after the process, the recommended changes went into effect in 2006," Roy said. "We took a look at it and thought, what do we have to protect around the base? Where do we not want development, because we need to protect this footprint."



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Advantages to land acquisitions related to buffering also include natural conservation. Acquired land protects forests, creeks and trails from developments while still being open to the public. Animals are also protected with such programs.

All buffering programs are different and Whiting partners with various agencies, such as the Nature Conservancy and Santa Rosa County. Typically, the Navy pays 75 percent of acquisition costs while the other 25 percent is paid for by other partners, depending on the program.

Whiting also gets assistance from grants such as the Defense Infrastructure Grant from the state, provided by the Florida Defense Alliance, and the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Grant.

Cope and Roy said programs like these are a win-win because they help the base become a good neighbor while preserving military operations.

"It's complex set up with a lot of moving parts," Cope said. "But if you like Santa Rosa County and the northern part as an area of natural beauty, and you

don't want to see a lot of development, that's what this program accomplishes."

To date, more than 3,900 acres of land adjacent to the base have been protected, and negotiations for more than 500 additional acres are taking place.

"Whiting and Santa Rosa County's relationship is the model relationship," Roy said. "We have an agreement with the state and the county that complement each other. It's a big program and it's a success because they know how to get it done."



Whiting Field. (Photo: News Journal file photo)

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