



POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

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Federal funds will help preserve farms and forests around NC military bases

BY KATHRYN TROGDON
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RALEIGH — Working farms and forests surrounding military bases will be protected through state efforts and a \$9.2 million federal grant recently awarded to the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, state officials said Tuesday.

The funding will be used by a partnership of federal and state agencies, military branches, local governments, nonprofits and others to establish conservation easements with willing landowners to ensure that farms and forests around Camp Lejeune and the Dare County Range remain for agricultural purposes and are not developed.

“The partnership will help ensure that farmers and foresters maintain their livelihoods, wildlife habitats and natural resources are protected, and compatible uses for military training and operations are provided,” N.C. Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler said.

Of the \$9.2 million, \$5.8 million will be used by the Marine Corps to establish an easement and to support the creation of a habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker, which can be found in the area, on more than 12,000 acres.





N.C. Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said the federal funds will 'help ensure that farmers and foresters maintain their livelihoods, wildlife habitats and natural resources are protected, and compatible uses for military training and operations are provided.'

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The federal funding will be used to further red-cockaded woodpecker conservation efforts by the Marine Corps by adding more land to allow the endangered species' population to grow.

“The net effect is the Marine Corps and Camp Lejeune will now have the flexibility and capacity to develop more ranges for vital training,” said Nat Fahy, director of public affairs for Marine Corps Installations East.

The Air Force will use the remaining \$3.4 million to protect more than 4,500 acres needed at the Dare County Range for airspace. This site is the primary training range for F-15E aircraft crews at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro.

The award will be matched with funds from other sources, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, the N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the Air Force and the Marines.

This announcement comes at a time when agricultural land, as well as military training areas and airspace are facing increasing development pressures, Troxler said.

“I think we all know that there’s been encroachment around military bases,” he said. “They can’t train like they want to or do as much as they want to. There’s a lot of low-level military flight training that goes on in North Carolina, and development of high towers and lights impede that training.”

In 2016, the N.C. General Assembly created the North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Committee to help further efforts to protect working or natural land important for national defense.



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Steve Troxler, N.C. commissioner of agriculture

“As we grow, there are a whole lot of threats that are showing up constantly,” Senate Majority Leader Harry Brown said. “It’s a challenge for all of us to figure out how we are going to mitigate those challenges as best we can.”

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