



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

REPI

READINESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION INTEGRATION PROGRAM



The Symbiosis Between Land Conservation and Military Mission in the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape

Deputy to the Commanding General at Fort Huachuca Jeff Jennings details his experience with the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.

When the [Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape](#) in southern Arizona was designated in 2015, Mr. Jeff Jennings, Deputy to the Commanding General at Fort Huachuca, admits that he initially had a difficult time seeing the nexus between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of the Interior (DOI), and Department of Defense's (DOD) different goals for working in the landscape. However, as the partnership within the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape took shape, he quickly learned that a symbiotic relationship exists between land conservation and military mission.

In a recent interview with the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, Mr. Jennings detailed the shared understanding that Fort Huachuca has developed with federal and state partners, ranchers, and land trusts regarding how protecting natural and working lands can combat encroachment on military mission. This interview been edited for length and clarity.

How have you seen the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape partnership establish and develop over the years? What are your thoughts about how the sentinel landscapes model has grown to be more important in addressing threats to military training missions, natural resources constraints, agricultural viability, wildlife habitat restoration, etc.

When the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape was designated in 2015, I had just retired from the Army and was brand new to my role as Deputy to the Commanding General at Fort Huachuca. What I remember most early on was I could not truly explain what conservation and land management meant, and I couldn't see the nexus between the USDA, DOI, and DOD's goals.

At the very first meeting where the federal and state partners, ranchers, nonprofits, and the military first got together to discuss the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape, everyone was sitting around the table suspiciously staring at each other. I would describe those in the room as cats and dogs. My first thought was, "This is never going to work."

However, I soon learned that preserving the landscape in its natural state, enhancing traditional ranching practices, and combating encroachment on the military mission were all related. I would even say land conservation and military mission are a match made in heaven. The room of cats and dogs became a cohesive group of partners who had each other on speed dial.

Since designation, the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape has received much more funding and resources than in the past. I would estimate that prior to the designation, the landscape was receiving \$1 million a year in REPI funds, which was still a significant amount of money. Now, it receives an average of \$13 million in REPI funds a year. Just this year, the landscape received \$2.8 million for climate resilience projects through the REPI Challenge.

How have you seen the Sentinel Landscape Partnership support DOD's ability to foster and strengthen partnerships between Fort Huachuca and local communities?



I'll use the example of Manuel Murrietta, a fifth-generation cattle rancher whose property sits on the very western boundary of the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape. To preserve the land that his grandfather passed down to him and expand his ranching operation, Murrietta sold 800 acres of the ranch's developmental rights to the Arizona Land and Water Trust. He then reinvested the funds he made from the transaction into purchasing a neighboring ranch, which was already under a conservation easement. This doubled the size of his ranch and herd.

There is an interesting symbiosis at work here – about a kilometer from the fence line of Murrietta's ranch is a location within the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape where the Army conducts drone pilot testing. These drones have little lawnmower-like engines and take off and land 12 hours a day, flying 1,000-1,500 feet above the ground. All of this testing can occur while Murrietta's cattle graze undisturbed.

Murrietta is just as important to our national defense as the people that are building the planes and the tanks because he enables the military to conduct the development and training required to compete against our enemies. Murrietta knows and appreciates the important role he plays for the DOD as a good neighbor to Fort Huachuca.

You served in the military for over 31 years and worked as a civil servant for over 7 years, traveling around the world to carry out your duties. What do you think is unique about the work you've done with the Sentinel Landscape Partnership in southern Arizona?

The shared vision of the diverse set of partners involved in the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape is incredibly unique. Though the DOD, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and other landscape partners have different missions, they have found common ground on many issues. For example, in addressing wildfire threats. They have been able to learn from one another, find mission connection points, and pull together resources and funding to address common challenges while also strengthening national security.

As climate resilience challenges like drought and wildfire continue to worsen across the United States, what role will the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership play in protecting communities, the environment, and military mission?

The Sentinel Landscape Partnership plays a key role in developing and highlighting the symbiotic relationships that exist between those involved in conservation, land management, and national security. For example, the land conservation and groundwater recharge projects taking place in the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape have enhanced watershed resilience, protected endangered species, and enriched the natural land that ranchers and their cattle thrive on. All of these benefits exist interconnectedly while also enhancing military mission.

How do you envision the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership growing in the coming years and what advice do you have for those that will be involved in the future?

I encourage other landscapes to bring academia into the fold. The Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape has partnered with the University of Arizona's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to produce a forthcoming documentary film that tells the story of a multi-generational rancher working to protect and restore the natural environment within the landscape. The film will depict what the landscape looked like in the past, how it has changed over time due to human activities and climate change, and how multi-level partners are actively working to return the landscape to its natural state. This academic partnership has



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allowed us to highlight the success of federal agency efforts to preserve natural land and shows the link between protecting natural resources, food and water security, and national security.