

Southern Georgia Named ‘Sentinel Landscape’ for Readiness Enhancement

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The departments of [Agriculture](#), [Defense](#) and [Interior](#) have designated southern Georgia as a [Sentinel Landscape](#) to maintain military readiness while preserving local agriculture, natural resources and wildlife habitat, Defense Department officials announced today.

Spanning a significant portion of the southern part of the state, the Georgia Sentinel Landscape joined the cooperative partnership between DoD and the Agriculture and Interior departments, DoD officials said.

In July 2013, the departments launched the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership through a memorandum of understanding to meet three critical goals: preserve working and agricultural lands, restore and protect wildlife habitat, and assist with military readiness.

The first designees were [Joint Base Lewis-McChord](#) in Washington, [Fort Huachuca](#) in Arizona and [Patuxent River Naval Air Station](#) in Maryland. These designees were joined in 2016 by Avon Park Air Force Range in Florida, Camp Ripley in Minnesota and Eastern North Carolina, officials said.

Vital to National Defense

Through the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, the federal agencies work with state, local and private partners to preserve working and natural lands important to the nation’s defense mission.

“This announcement represents a major accomplishment in the effort to protect our land, promote the livelihoods of hardworking Americans, and ensure our nation’s defense,” said [Lucian Niemeyer](#), assistant secretary of defense for energy, installations and environment.

“Maintaining working and natural lands across southern Georgia will not only provide critical habitat for a number of important species and promote the economies of rural communities,” Niemeyer said, “but also enable the military to continue to test, train, and operate at nine key military installations in the state.

“The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is an innovative initiative that protects critical Department of Defense missions through efficient government and private-sector

collaboration,” he continued. “This is a true win for warfighters, taxpayers and the citizens of Georgia.”

Partnership Core Characteristics

Led at the local level, stakeholders work together to ensure that each Sentinel Landscape possesses three fundamental components, according to the partnership’s website:

- An anchor military installation with a military mission that benefits from compatible land uses outside of the installation’s boundaries
- A defined landscape that is associated with the anchor installation’s “mission footprint.” Within this landscape, government agencies, private parties, and nongovernment organizations coordinate their programs in support of ranching, farming, forestry and conservation with the full involvement and partnership of the landowners in the landscape; and
- A coordinated and collaborative strategy or plan that provides incentives and recognition to participating landowners, who adopt and sustain land uses compatible with the military mission while providing tangible benefits to conservation and working lands within the landscape.

Benefits of Newly Designated Landscape

DoD officials said the Georgia Sentinel Landscape encompasses vital military ranges needed to test and train to meet threats as they arise and supports strong and effective conservation partnerships.

The Georgia Sentinel Landscape brings together more than 20 partners at the federal, state, and local levels to sustain working farms and forests and protect vital habitat for a number of important species, thereby promoting land uses compatible with the military mission.

Efforts to coordinate mutually beneficial programs among partners in this landscape will promote the military missions of nine important installations and ranges in Georgia, including [Fort Stewart](#), [Fort Benning](#), and Townsend Bombing Range. The military network stretching over the southern portion of the state provides a wide variety of test, training, and operational resources and capabilities to service men and women from each of the military services, including heavy armor maneuver areas, unimpeded air-to-ground training, live-fire training facilities, and low-level flight routes.

Building on a legacy of successful, collaborative land protection in the state, partners from the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#), [U.S. Forest Service](#), [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#), the military services, the state of Georgia, and a number of private conservation organizations have identified about 1.3 million acres as critical to

important natural resources, working economies, and military readiness within the landscape's boundary.

Leveraging Goals, Shared Priorities

The landscape partners seek to leverage a broad set of goals and shared priorities to not only ensure the continued viability of important military installations, officials said, but also promote the protection of habitat corridors for a number of important species, including the gopher tortoise, red-cockaded woodpecker, eastern indigo snake and other species of concern.

Partners hope to protect more than 20 additional viable gopher tortoise populations in the next five years to make it unnecessary to list this species under the Endangered Species Act, officials added.

The Georgia partnership also seeks to protect a core of at least 5,000 acres of important farmlands in four focus areas within the next five years, as well as more than 136,000 acres in the Savannah River watershed over the next 20 years.

Additional goals of the partnership include increasing public access to outdoor recreational opportunities, improving management practices on private lands and expanding outreach activities to private landowners within the landscape.

"This collaborative effort is a clear example of the value of working across conventional boundaries," Niemeyer said. "When partners at the federal, state, and community levels work together towards a common goal, everyone wins. The Sentinel Landscape program brings together the resources of multiple federal entities in collaboration to promote common interests for military readiness, support for the warfighter, and the safety and security of this nation."