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## Monday Close-Up: Camp Williams gets funding for land preservation

By Connor Richards Daily Herald

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U.S. Army Sergeant Dominic Vigil, left, listens as Master Sergeant Chris Branch instructs Vigil while they stand near a M howitzer during a live-fire artillery exercise held Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018, at the artillery range of Camp Williams State M Reservation located north of Eagle Mountain. Isaac Hale, Daily Herald

Isaac Hale, Daily Herald

Nearly 400 acres of agricultural land near Camp Williams became permanently protected on Wednesday in an effort to prevent residential development near the military training site as population growth booms in Utah County.

The Utah Army National Guard, United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and The Conservation Fund — a Virginia-based environmental advocacy nonprofit — announced Wednesday that the grassland area surrounding the training base would be protected in order to prohibit "future incompatible development" and preserve "a migration corridor and habitat for mule deer and other wildlife."

The federal and state funding for land preservation is a response to population increases near the west Utah County military training site and across the state.

"In recent years, Salt Lake and Utah Counties' rapid population growth has introduced subdivisions near Camp Williams, impacting certain training abilities and posing risk to the operational needs while staying sensitive to nearby residents," a news release from The Conservation Fund said.

The Utah Army National Guard-operated training site is made up of "combat-training areas resembling the same types of environments encountered by those ... (who served) in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom," according to the National Guard's website, and provides demolition, grenade, artillery and firearm training for soldiers and airmen.

Camp Williams was surrounded by empty desert and mountain terrain when the National Guard first established it in 1914. But today, "several developing communities are pushing against the camp's borders, posing operation risks to those communities and the base," the press release said.

State funding for the land preservation was made possible through the West Traverse Sentinel Landscape Act, which the Utah State Legislature passed in 2018.

The act, which was part of House Bill 257, created a committee to "develop strategies and recommendations to encourage landowners within the sentinel landscape to voluntarily participate in and begin or continue land uses compatible with Camp Williams's military mission," according to the bill's text.

The bill passed unanimously through both the House and Senate and was signed by Gov. Gary Herbert in April 2018.

Jim Smith, who owns land surrounding Camp Williams, said he supported creating a land buffer around the training site to give National Guard soldiers “the best training possible” and preserve land in west Utah County.

“I am confident that these buffer areas could be the only significant open land in this area in the future,” Smith said in the news release.

Utah’s congressional leadership voiced support for creating a land buffer, including Democratic U.S. Rep. Ben McAdams, whose district covers Camp Williams.

“This effort will preserve open space and support the critical mission of Camp Williams and benefit the daily lives of Salt Lake and Utah County residents while strengthening our state’s defense capabilities,” McAdams said in the news release.

U.S. Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, said preserving land around Camp Williams was a good move from both a national security and conservation standpoint.

“While supporting our military readiness at a time when the U.S. faces increased threats around the world, this initiative will also ensure that communities continue to have a voice in the management and conservation of their lands,” Romney said.

According to The Conservation Fund, more than 2,000 acres around Camp Williams have been protected through the partnership with the Utah Army National Guard and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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Connor Richards covers government, the environment and south Utah County for the Daily Herald. He can be reached at [crichards@heraldextra.com](mailto:crichards@heraldextra.com) and 801-344-2599.

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## **Connor Richards**

Connor Richards covers government, the environment and south Utah County for the Daily Herald. He can be reached at [crichards@heraldextra.com](mailto:crichards@heraldextra.com) and 801-344-2599.