

NEWS

Environmental initiative established around Eglin, Tyndall Air Force bases

Northwest Florida Daily News/USA TODAY NETWORK

Published 3:31 p.m. ET Feb. 25, 2022

EGLIN AFB — Nearly 8 million acres in Northwest Florida — including the areas around Eglin Air Force Base, Tyndall Air Force Base, Naval Air Station Pensacola and six other military installations — have been designated as a Sentinel Landscape by the the Department of Defense (DoD) and other federal agencies.

The Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape also includes Naval Air Station Whiting Field, Naval Support Activity Panama City, the Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range, Hurlburt Field and the Navy's Saufley Field and Corry Station.

Among the missions at the nine installations are activities integral to Air Force training, weapons testing and special operations and that provide the initial training of all Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard aviators.

Missile milestone:: F-15EX successfully fires air-to-air weapon on Gulf test range

Recent contracts: Two Niceville businesses among area companies to earn multimillion-dollar defense contracts

“DoD is proud to support the growth of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership ...” said Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Real Property Ron Tickle. “These new landscape designations will leverage DoD funding and programs to protect the missions at ... key DoD installations and ranges, protecting essential testing and training operations, enhancing resilience to climate change, and preserving our nation’s natural resources and working lands.”

The Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape is part of a collaboration among the DoD, the Department of the Interior (DoI) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) that will leverage environmental efforts among federal, state and local governments and private-sector programs across more than 7 million acres of Northwest Florida.

Those efforts will be aimed at restoring and increasing resiliency and sustainability of habitat and water resources; retaining working agriculture and forest lands as compatible, resilient and sustainable land uses in conjunction with their military uses; mitigating risks to coastal areas and increasing the climate resilience of military installations.

“These new Sentinel Landscapes are a testament to the power of collaboration and partnership,” said USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Terry Cosby. “By using USDA's conservation programs to protect and enhance farmland, rangeland, forestland and grasslands around military installations, we can invest in critical water resources and wildlife habitat on working lands and support climate-smart agriculture, while also advancing military training and testing opportunities.”

Assuring the ongoing viability of the various military missions across the area also is part of the initiative.

The Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape, one of a number of areas across the country now named by the DoD as Sentinel Landscapes, earned that designation in part because it contains rural and agricultural lands, iconic longleaf pine forests and habitat for threatened and endangered species.

The three federal agencies define Sentinel Landscapes as areas in which natural and working lands are well-suited to protect defense facilities from land use that is incompatible with the military's mission.

Once an area is designated as a Sentinel Landscape, the USDA, DoD and DoI work with local partners to support private landowners in accessing the resources necessary to carry out sustainable management practices on their properties. Sustainable management practices such as farming, ranching and forestry, not only offer economic and ecological benefits, but also protect defense facilities from incompatible development.

Sentinel Landscapes accomplish their objectives by connecting private landowners with voluntary state and federal assistance programs that provide agricultural loans, disaster relief, educational opportunities, financial and technical assistance and funding for conservation easements.

Since 2013, Sentinel Landscapes initiatives have worked with private landowners to permanently protect more than 515,000 acres and implement sustainable management practices on an additional 2.7 million acres around military testing and training areas across

the United States. Those efforts have preserved wildlife habitat, bolstered agricultural and forest production and reduced land use conflicts around military bases.

“The USDA Forest Service is proud to partner with the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership,” said Forest Service Chief Randy Moore. “We are committed to investing in this collaborative conservation effort with our fellow federal partners in the spirit of shared stewardship. The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership provides a great opportunity to support military readiness while securing conservation benefits for communities.”

Martha Williams, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Principal Deputy Director said, "Programs like the Sentinel Landscapes are shining examples of ... collaborative locally led conservation efforts. Working together, our diverse federal, state and local partners can improve vital landscapes, wildlife habitat and natural resources that benefit all Americans.”

Also announced this week by the DoD as a new Sentinel Landscape is the Camp Bullis Sentinel Landscape in the Texas hill country and the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape.