



# COUNTIES AND MILITARY INSTALLATIONS 101

LEVERAGING THE FARM BILL TO PROMOTE COMPATIBLE  
LAND USE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



# PURPOSE

- Highlight the importance of building relationships between county and DOD leaders to coordinate land use and community development decisions.
- Provide information about how counties can leverage programs within the 2018 farm bill to help meet compatible use objectives and preserve critical habitat and working lands, while supporting DOD's mission and the long-term stability of our communities.
- Highlight ongoing compatible land use partnerships between counties, DOD and other partners that have successfully addressed key local land use, development and natural resource concerns.

# INTRODUCTION

Across the country, communities near military installations are growing quickly, posing economic development and land use challenges both for the installations they support and the communities in which they are located. If not managed carefully, local development has the potential to inhibit the training and security objectives of our nation's military, while training activities can simultaneously impact communities and residents' safety and well-being.

Over 400 counties have military installations in or near their jurisdictions. Counties are responsible for the health, well-being and safety of their communities, and are tasked with maintaining roads and bridges, 911 and emergency services, disaster preparedness and recovery, environmental protection and water and wastewater management. America's counties rely on strong intergovernmental partnerships to fulfill many of these responsibilities to our residents. Likewise, state and federal programs and regulations are often implemented at the local level by county leaders. As a result, coordination and collaboration among county, state and federal partners is crucial to providing Americans everywhere the best services possible.

Counties are also important partners in supporting the mission of nearby installations, and it is important that county and local U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) leaders collaborate to address the various development, land use and natural resource issues that can result from or impact community development and DOD training activities.

Fortunately, initiatives such as the U.S. Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program exist to provide critical resources to county residents and the local landscapes surrounding military installations by enhancing military readiness, protecting local habitats, strengthening military-community relations and creating partnerships among local stakeholders. Counties are key participants in REPI initiatives

at the local level, operating on the frontlines of supporting the economic development of our local communities. While this may be one of the most visible ways counties partner with DOD to promote compatible land and strong community and economic development, it is not the only way; numerous other programs and resources can help meet these same goals for America's counties and the military bases we support.

The 2018 farm bill, titled the Agriculture Improvement Act (P.L. 115-334), is one major tool that can help facilitate compatible land use near U.S. Department of Defense installations in support of DOD's mission, preserving working lands and critical habitat while strengthening local communities. This document outlines programs included in the most recent farm bill reauthorization that counties can leverage to help promote compatible land use around military installations, while managing the impact that nearby training and testing activities (such as live fire training and weapon testing) have on local communities.

Additionally, this report highlights successful examples of existing partnerships between counties and local military installations that have leveraged farm bill funds to help support local land use objectives in military communities. While many counties partner with their local installations on compatible land use issues, a few in particular have been highlighted for their efforts to leverage farm bill resources alongside other partnerships to achieve similar outcomes as the REPI program.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE .....II

## **FEDERAL PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE COMPATIBLE LAND USE**

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP) ..... 2

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP) ..... 3

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM (ACEP) ..... 4

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP) ..... 5

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCP)..... 6

COMMUNITY FORESTS PROGRAM ..... 7

## **PARTNERSHIPS IN PROGRESS**

COUNTY EFFORTS TO PROMOTE COMPATIBLE LAND USE ..... 8

## **ABOUT NACo**

The National Association of Counties (NACo) strengthens America’s counties, including nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to advocate for county government priorities in federal policymaking; promote exemplary county policies and practices; nurture leadership skills and expand knowledge networks; optimize county and taxpayer resources and cost savings; and enrich the public’s understanding of county government.

## **MISSION**

Strengthen America’s counties.

## **VISION**

Healthy, safe and vibrant counties across America.



# ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

## OVERVIEW:

EQIP is administered by the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service. *Counties are newly eligible for EQIP funds after the passage of the 2018 farm bill.* EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns. It also provides opportunities to improve the quality of soil, water, wildlife habitat, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. Financial assistance covers part of the costs of implementing conservation practices, generally geared towards working farms, ranches and forests (about 200 eligible practices depending on where land is located, including prescribed grazing, cover crops and forest improvement). EQIP also assists producers to meet federal, state, Tribal and local environmental regulations

## HOW TO APPLY:

Visit your local [USDA Service Center](#) to apply or visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted).

- Complete the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, and submit to the field office in the county in which the land is owned.
- A conservation planner will help the applicant develop their conservation plan and an EQIP schedule of operations. The schedule will then be evaluated and ranked for selection purposes.
- If the application is selected for financial assistance, the applicant will make an appointment with NRCS to sign the contract for fund obligation.

For more information on application requirements and applicant responsibilities, [click here](#).

## ELIGIBILITY INCLUDES:

Publicly owned land (federal, state or local government) may be eligible if it meets all the following criteria:

- The land is a working component of the applicant's agricultural land operation.
- The applicant has control of the land for the term of the contract.
- The conservation practices to be implemented on the public land are necessary and will contribute to an improvement in the identified natural resource concern.

*Note: In order to be considered an agricultural producer eligible for EQIP, the applicant must have a vested interest in production on agricultural or non-industrial private forest land. Land enrolled in other conservation programs may be ineligible. EQIP does not pay for the same practice on the same land that has received payment or other benefit from any other EQIP contract or any other USDA conservation program. If an overlap exists for any part of the same practice, that practice would be considered duplicative and would not be authorized for payment under EQIP.*



# CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

## OVERVIEW:

Administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), CRP provides annual rental payments to producers to voluntarily replace crops on highly erodible and environmentally sensitive land with long-term resource conserving plantings. The long-term goal of the program is to reestablish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. Under the Conservation Reserve Program, acceptable conservation practices include wildlife buffers, riparian buffers, grazing and wetland restoration.

The 2018 farm bill expanded the number of total acres that can be enrolled in CRP each year through 2023, and now also allows for emergency haying and grazing on CRP-enrolled land.

## HOW TO APPLY:

Participants can enroll in CRP in two ways:

- Through a competitive process known as CRP General Sign-up. General sign-ups are announced on a periodic basis by the Secretary of Agriculture; they do not occur according to any fixed schedule.
- Through CRP Continuous Sign-up, which operates on a rolling basis. All enrollment offers are processed through your [local FSA office](#).

## ELIGIBILITY INCLUDES:

- Eligible lands include, but are not limited to, agricultural land prone to erosion, pasture or agricultural land that borders river or stream banks or field margins.
- Generally, to be eligible for CRP, a farmer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to the previous CRP sign-up period.



# AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM (ACEP)

## OVERVIEW:

This program is administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. ACEP consists of two components: Agricultural Land Easements (ALE), which was formed by consolidating the former Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and Grassland Reserve Program, and Wetlands Reserve Easements.

ACEP protects the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses through Agricultural Land Easements (ALEs). Land eligible for agricultural easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forest land. Through the Wetland Reserve Easements, ACEP helps provide habitats for fish and wildlife; improve water quality; reduce flooding; recharge groundwater; protect biological diversity; and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and recreational activities.

This program provides matching funds that counties can use to purchase conservation easements on agricultural land, grasslands and wetlands, thereby limiting non-agricultural uses and preserving productive working lands. With the enactment of the 2018 Farm Bill, landowner donations may also count toward the matching requirement for recipients.

## HOW TO APPLY:

- To enroll land through agricultural land easements, eligible partners may submit proposals to their [NRCS state office](#). Land eligible for agricultural easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forest land. NRCS will prioritize applications that protect agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize protection of contiguous acres for agricultural use.
- To enroll land through wetland reserve easements, landowners may apply at any time at a [local USDA Service Center](#).

## ELIGIBILITY INCLUDES:

- State and local governments and NGOs that have farmland, rangeland or grassland protection programs.
- American Indian tribes.



# CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

## OVERVIEW:

Administered by USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), this program provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers wishing to maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. Activities supported by the CSP program aim to improve grazing conditions, increase crop yields or develop wildlife habitat. The program can also help producers schedule timely planting of cover crops, develop grazing plans, implement measures to reduce erosion or manage forested areas in a way that benefits wildlife habitat.

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, the limit on the number of enrolled CSP acres has been removed, instead authorizing USDA to spend \$700 million in 2019 regardless of enrolled acreage. This total will rise to \$1 billion in 2023.

## HOW TO APPLY:

- Applications are accepted at any time throughout the year, though NRCS does set specific deadlines for ranking and funding opportunities. Contact your [local NRCS field office](#) for more information.

## ELIGIBILITY INCLUDES:

- Private and Tribal agricultural lands, cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland and nonindustrial private forest land.
- Lands in agricultural use under the control of a farmer or rancher, even if not owned by the producer (i.e. rented/leased).
- All producers, regardless of size or type of crops. Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian tribes.



# REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

## OVERVIEW:

This program is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Under RCPP, landowners and agricultural producers can enter into program contracts and easements with NRCS. The program advances conservation, restoration and sustainability efforts on regional or watershed scales and encourages partners to cooperate with producers in project implementation. Numerous types of projects can be completed under RCPP, including public works, land management and restoration practices, or a combination of multiple approved activities.

Following passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, RCPP is now a standalone program and is funded at approximately \$300 million annually. The national funding pool has also been removed; 50 percent of RCPP funds are now available through a state/multi-State funding pool, with the other 50 percent available for use in [Critical Conservation Areas](#). Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill now requires reporting on environmental outcomes in an effort to emphasize overall project outcomes.

## HOW TO APPLY:

- First, partners interested in submitting a proposal must [create a USDA eAuthentication account](#) and obtain [level 2 eAuthentication permissions](#).
- RCPP applications must be submitted using the [RCPP portal](#). You may request access to the RCPP Partner Portal [here](#).
- Additional detailed information can be found on the NRCS [RCPP web page](#).

## ELIGIBILITY INCLUDES:

- State or unit of local government.
- A water district, irrigation district, rural water district or association, or other organization with specific water delivery authority to agricultural producers.
- A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity.
- An entity, such as an Indian Tribe, state government, local government or a nongovernmental organization that has a farmland or grassland protection program that purchases agricultural land easements, as defined in 7 CFR Section 1468.3.





# COMMUNITY FORESTS PROGRAM

## OVERVIEW:

This program authorizes the U.S. Forest Service to provide matching financial assistance – including for the acquisition of forest land – to local governments, Tribal governments and qualified nonprofit entities to establish community forests that provide public access and recreation, protect water resources and wildlife habitat, and can provide economic benefits from timber and non-timber products. As part of the program, lands acquired through CFP funds must provide public access and be actively managed according to a community forest plan.

## HOW TO APPLY:

- The Forest Service publishes an annual request for applications for the Community Forest Program (CFP) in the [Federal Register](#) with application details and requirements. The most recent request for applications was published August 8, 2019. Those interested in applying may contact their [CFP Regional Contact](#) for more information.

## ELIGIBILITY INCLUDES:

- Private forest land that is threatened by conversion to non-forest use; not held in trust by the United States; provides defined community benefits; at least five acres in size, suitable to sustain natural vegetation and is at least 75 percent forested.





## **PARTNERSHIPS IN PROGRESS: COUNTY EFFORTS TO PROMOTE COMPATIBLE LAND USE**

### **THURSTON COUNTY, WASH. – JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD (JBLM)**

The area surrounding JBLM, including Thurston County, was named a Sentinel Landscape in 2013 – the first in the nation to receive the designation. Sentinel Landscapes are defined as areas in which working lands and other habitat are well-suited to prevent incompatible land use and development near DOD facilities. The partnership, involving the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, U.S. Dept. of the Interior and U.S. Dept. of Defense, began due to the overlap of critical species habitat, the base itself and the surrounding area.

While nearby development contributed to habitat deterioration outside the base, limited on-base development allowed species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to survive within the base's boundaries. However, ESA restrictions needed to protect these threatened and endangered species have negatively impacted the ability to conduct training activities at JBLM, necessitating a coordinated effort to preserve habitat surrounding the base and support species recovery.

Thurston County has developed a Habitat Conservation Plan that conforms with the objectives of the Sentinel Landscape partnership. The plan lays out strategies for ensuring the preservation of critical species habitat across the Sentinel Landscape's boundaries, which will help avoid negative impacts on JBLM's mission.

In its effort to preserve habitat and working lands around JBLM, Thurston County continues to seek ways to acquire land and easements using funding from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and other sources. These funds

are used to purchase easements (agricultural easements, conservation easements, etc.) that will help promote habitat preservation and align with compatible use objectives.

As of 2018, Thurston County is participating in a research collaborative with Washington State University via its local extension branch, the Center for Natural Lands Management, land trusts and other partners. Using funding provided by the USDA's Western Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education Institution (WSARE), which is funded through the farm bill, the collaborative is studying how working lands can assist in conservation and species preservation. The research collaborative also recently began exploring the economic benefits of such practices. Ultimately, the goal is to exhibit how working lands can provide not only economic but ecological benefits to the local landscape, which may increase the ability for working and agricultural lands to receive assistance in habitat management.

In addition to this research partnership, Thurston County is also a member of the South Sound Military and Communities Partnership (SSMCP). This partnership facilitates the relationship between JBLM and local communities including Thurston County, which helps inform planning and land use decisions including lighting and community density.

As the base conducts training and other operations, base leaders work to inform the county and other local leaders on community impacts, especially related to traffic and noise.



## **COCHISE COUNTY, ARIZ. – FORT HUACHUCA**

Fort Huachuca and Cochise County are located in Southeast Arizona near the Mexico border. Critical to the region is the San Pedro River, a highly protected intermittent river that, if not managed properly, may be in danger of drying up completely due to growth and increased stresses on local groundwater sources. Ultimately, the future of Fort Huachuca is tied in part to the health of the San Pedro River, and because the developed area around the base contributes nearly half of the county's property tax revenue, the strength of the county is linked to the success of the base and the surrounding community.

Recognizing this risk, Cochise County and other local stakeholders founded the Upper San Pedro Partnership, which has worked successfully to protect the river. For instance, Cochise County and the Upper San Pedro Partnership partnered with Fort Huachuca to significantly reduce the base's water consumption and local groundwater withdrawals.

In 2015, the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape was designated, which has further helped the base and nearby

community meet compatible land use objectives and address other resource challenges. Achievements of the partnership include conservation measures on over 200,000 acres of working lands near the base. Further, landscape partners have leveraged funds through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) program, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) program for conservation easements and to implement conservation practices on existing agricultural and working lands.



*Note: While previous EQIP funding used in this partnership was secured by the Arizona Land and Water Trust and not Cochise County, counties are newly eligible for the EQIP program under the 2018 Farm Bill.*

## **ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MD. – NAVAL AIR STATION PATUXENT RIVER**

Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River is located in Southern Maryland slightly southeast of Washington, D.C, and was designated as a Sentinel Landscape in 2015. Though historically an agricultural and fishing region, today the area is more developed and is a popular destination for tourism and recreation. This development presents major challenges for NAS Patuxent River, as the U.S. Navy uses the base to conduct, on average, roughly 400 testing and research flights per day. St. Mary's County and other key partners have recognized the need to avoid incompatible development and ensure the preservation of working lands and wildlands in the region to avoid negative impacts on both residents and the mission of NAS Patuxent River alike, engaging in several long-term partnerships.

For instance, the U.S. Navy has partnered with St. Mary's County, the State of Maryland and private organizations to preserve large tracts of critical species habitat and grasslands near the Nanticoke River. Not only has this had significant positive impacts on the region's water quality, it has conserved thousands of acres of land supporting over 100 rare, threatened and endangered species, and reduced noise, safety and other concerns related to testing activities at NAS Patuxent River.

USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service has worked with St. Mary's County and other local partners to help protect over 5,000 acres of working land from conversion to non-agricultural uses and has helped implement conservation measures on another 130,000 acres of working lands using federal support including the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). The county has also worked with the State of Maryland through the state's Rural Legacy Program, which provides funding for land and agricultural preservation and recognizes the county and other local governments' unique knowledge of the local landscape and methods to protect it.

St. Mary's County laid out its overall strategy for parks, open space, agriculture preservation and natural resource protection in its 2002 Comprehensive Plan. In this plan, the county aims to mitigate development pressures by focusing growth in specific areas (i.e., certain town and village centers, along with two development districts in Lexington Park and Leonardtown, the county seat) while preserving other rural areas. The county uses multiple avenues for preserving these rural areas, including zoning rules, Maryland's Rural Legacy Program and partnerships with private land trusts.





## CONCLUSION

Counties across the United States play an important role in supporting the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) mission. Over 400 counties contain DOD installations in or near their jurisdictions. These counties are key partners in ensuring local land use and community development efforts are compatible with nearby installations' objectives, while mitigating impacts on local residents, critical habitats and key natural resources from on-base activities.

In addition to leveraging existing DOD resources that help local governments reach these goals, counties are encouraged to take advantage of the many tools included in the 2018 farm bill to promote the long-term stability and well-being both of our communities and the defense installations we support.

**660 NORTH CAPITOL ST. NW • SUITE 400 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001**  
**202.393.6226 • [www.NACo.org](http://www.NACo.org)**

[facebook.com/NACoDC](https://facebook.com/NACoDC)  
[twitter.com/NACoTweets](https://twitter.com/NACoTweets)  
[youtube.com/NACoVideo](https://youtube.com/NACoVideo)  
[www.NACo.org/linkedin](http://www.NACo.org/linkedin)