

DoD and National Public Lands Day

Background

[National Public Lands Day](#) (NPLD) is the nation's largest, single day volunteer effort for public lands. In past years, upwards of 200,000 Americans came together on the fourth Saturday of September to volunteer their time to improve parks, refuges, local waterways, recreation areas, trails, community gardens, and historical sites. The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) has been coordinating NPLD events across the country with federal, state, and private partners since the event began in 1994. Through NPLD, NEEF works to connect people to the public lands in their community, inspire environmental stewardship, and encourage use of public lands for education, recreation, and general health.



Volunteers at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek restore and stabilize dunes in 2016.

DoD Involvement

DoD joined the NPLD partnership in 1999. Through the Legacy Resource Management Program (Legacy Program), DoD provides funding to support natural and cultural resources projects on military installations. Since 1999, the Legacy Program has awarded approximately \$3.2 million to fund more than 585 NPLD projects that have directly benefited military lands throughout the United States.

Objective

NEEF's goal through NPLD is to bring together those who use public lands for recreation with those who care for these lands. NPLD educates Americans about the need for shared stewardship of our valued, irreplaceable natural and cultural resources.

Benefit

Natural and Cultural Resources

NPLD projects enable volunteers to enhance and conserve cultural and natural resources on installations, including manmade assets. For example, Legacy Program funding can be used for small maintenance, repair, or rehabilitation projects, or installation of signage, benches, and other improvements for historic structures, visitor centers, cemeteries, and trails.



Air Force personnel and NPLD volunteers convert rock beds to pollinator gardens at Maelstrom AFB in 2015.

Partnerships

NPLD builds partnerships between the public sector and local communities based upon mutual interests in the enhancement and restoration of America's public lands. DoD and the Military Services partner with NEEF to support NPLD projects. From 2012 to 2020, 10,041 volunteers contributed a total of 34,846 hours to improve military installation sites.



Outreach

NPLD provides an opportunity for the military to strengthen its relationship on base and with the local community. By inviting military personnel, their families, and the local community to participate in NPLD projects on installations, all of them can learn about the lands and their elements, and understand the unique challenges surrounding natural and cultural resources management on DoD installations.

DoD Installations

Participating in NPLD provides natural and cultural resources managers an opportunity to complete small installation-specific projects that, due to resource constraints, might not otherwise take place. Past projects included removing invasive species, planting native trees and pollinator gardens, cleaning up trash, building or maintaining trails or park areas, installing interpretive signage, providing secure and stabilized access paths for recreational and interpretive purposes, and installing or repairing site boundary fencing and edging. Collectively, these efforts help keep installation areas suitable and available for their intended purposes, and often reduce the need for future more intensive and expensive management efforts. More importantly, NPLD provides an opportunity for the on-base and surrounding communities to better understand the unique challenges associated with natural and cultural resources management on active military installations.



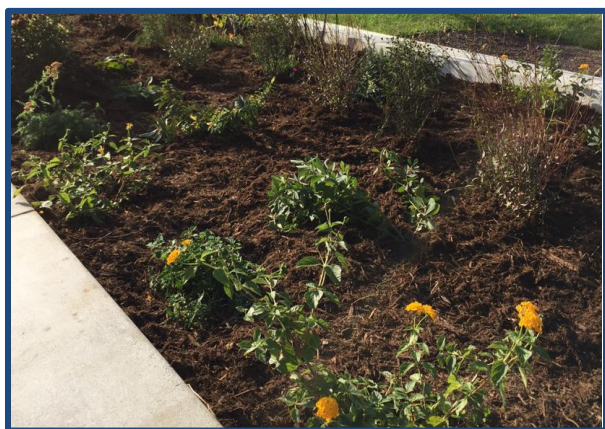
Over several workdays in 2016, volunteers rehabilitated Bellows Air Force Station's Native Hawaiian burial vault.



Enabling the Mission, Defending the Resources
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NPLD Project Selection

Through a competitive proposal process, NEEF awards Legacy Program funds for service projects at approximately 15 to 25 military installation sites across the nation each year. To be eligible for DoD NPLD funding, installations must have some lands open to the public for recreation. Volunteer-based projects emphasize habitat restoration, and preservation and interpretation of historic properties and cultural sites. Funds have been used for equipment, materials, and supplies. Information and application instructions are available on NEEF's website: [NPLD DoD Awards](#). Applications are due every summer.



At Fort Bragg, volunteers removed invasive plants and installed pollinator beds.

Accomplishments

Through NPLD, military families, school children, and interested neighbors have improved habitats for bees, birds, bats, and insects; removed invasive plants; restored riverbeds and planted aquatic vegetation; enhanced dunes and beach habitats; built and maintained trails and wildlife viewing areas; planted native trees and wildflowers; cleaned up and conserved burial sites and cemeteries; improved historic properties and landscapes; and installed educational and interpretive signage. DoD received a 1999 Hammer Award from then Vice President Gore for its participation in, and support of, NPLD.

2021 Summary

NEEF provided about \$100,000 in DoD funds to support [21 projects for NPLD 2021](#) on military installations. Following are highlights from recent DoD NPLD efforts:

- **Bellows Air Force Station (2021):** volunteers helped to restore Pu'ewai wetland habitat and create a buffer zone to protect critical habitat for endangered Hawaiian wetland birds to forage, loaf, and breed.

- **Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story (2021):** volunteers extended the current boardwalk to the new exercise area within Heroes Circle Nature Trail; this increased personnel access through additional unobstructed walking, running, and riding surfaces, thus providing personnel with disabilities a chance to use more of the trail and exercise station.
- **Fort Belvoir (2021):** site managers and volunteers cleared invasive species and shrubs and created a pollinator garden with native wildflowers to promote pollinator habitats while providing educational awareness to the public.
- **Barrigada Readiness Complex – Guam National Guard (2021):** volunteers participated in three educational tree planting events and installed informational signage at the Barrigada Readiness Center site.
- **Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (2021):** site managers and volunteers planted native vegetation and removed invasive vegetation to ensure the structural components of Loko Paaiau, an ancient Hawaiian fishpond that's over 400 years old, were not impacted from tree roots and ground cover. Many native Hawaiians who helped restore Loko Paaiau were descendants of royalty who once resided in the area.

In total, DoD's 2021 NPLD volunteers restored or maintained 526,742 square feet of land; added 3,818 native plants; collected and disposed of 690 pounds of trash; removed 165,519 square feet of invasive vegetation; restored or maintained 26 miles of waterway; restored or maintained 6,343 miles of trail; and built, rebuilt, or repaired 20 installation structures and facilities.

For 2023, DoD is asking our applicants to **think creatively!** We seek proposals that enhance broader strategic or programmatic objectives, **particularly for cultural resources.**

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