

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE

Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties

463,448 acres (185,379 ha)

LOCATION: in southeastern Santa Rosa County, southern Okaloosa County, and southwestern Walton County, bordered by the Yellow River, Shoal River, and Titi Creek to the north, Highway 331 and private land to the east and northeast, Choctawhatchee Bay and the Gulf of Mexico to the south, and Escambia Bay to the west. Eglin is approximately 52 miles (83 km) east to west and 18 miles (28 km) north to south, and is nearly contiguous with the Blackwater River State Forest IBA to the north.

DESCRIPTION: Eglin Air Force Base formerly was Choctawhatchee National Forest, but was converted to military use at the beginning of World War II. The U.S. Air Force uses the Base to test and develop conventional munitions on 60,000 acres (24,000 ha) of test ranges. The Base receives ____ recreationists and ____ hunters annually.

OWNERSHIP: U.S. Air Force

HABITATS: *sandhills, *riverine, *coastal strand, longleaf pine flatwoods, pine plantation, sand pine scrub, fields, hardwood swamp, bayhead, lacustrine

LAND USE: *conservation, *military training, recreation, hunting, timber production

IBA CATEGORIES: significant populations of Endangered and Threatened species; complete diversity of longleaf pine flatwoods and sandhills species; significant overall diversity; and significant natural habitats [long-term research for RCWs?]

AVIAN DATA: This vast IBA supports the fourth-largest population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers remaining in the world, as well as all other species of longleaf pine flatwoods and sandhills. [what about diversity of coastal strand? – overall shorebirds?]

SPECIES	DATES	NUMBERS	COMMENTS
“Southeastern” American Kestrel	2000	74 nests	only a “small sample” (R)
Snowy Plover	1989	at least 53 nests	at least 26% (R)
	Jan–Feb 2001	20 birds	5% (R)
Red-cockaded Woodpecker	2000	301 active clusters	23% (R)
Overall diversity	Undated list	324 natives	second most diverse IBA in Florida
		3 exotics	

Kestrel data provided by researchers from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, plover data from +Gore and Chase (1989) and provided by Jeff Gore (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), other data provided by Bruce Hagedorn (U.S. Air Force)

OTHER RESOURCES: Eglin Air Force Base is the largest forested military installation in the United States. It is recognized by The Nature Conservancy as an area of global significance for biodiversity, with 34 natural communities identified, and 118 rare or imperiled species present, including numerous endemics. • It encompasses nearly the entire range of two state-endemic vertebrates: the ♦ bog frog (*Rana okaloosae*) and ♦ Okaloosa darter (a fish; *Etheostoma okaloosae*), and supports 5% of Florida’s ♦ black bears (*Ursus americanus*). • A low density of sea turtles nest at Santa Rosa Island and Okaloosa Island. From 1992 to 1997, numbers of nests along 17 miles (27 km) of beach ranged from 0–16 ♦ green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) nests and 17–32 ♦ loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nests. • Perhaps only 5000 acres (2000 ha) of old-growth longleaf pine remain in the world, and 1712 acres (684 ha) of these are found in four tracts at Eglin, the largest contiguous acreage of old-growth longleaf pine surviving. The largest tract—the Patterson Natural Area—is 928 acres (371 ha) and contains trees that on average are 130 years old and 16 inches (40 cm) in diameter at breast height. Patterson Natural Area recently has been enlarged to nearly 4500 acres (1800 ha). • Barrier islands occur in three separate areas at Eglin Air Force Base: 13 miles (20 km) of Santa Rosa Island, 4 miles

(6.4 km) of “Okaloosa Island” (which seems to be the easternmost portion of Santa Rosa Island), and 3 miles (4.8 km) at the Eglin Air Force Base Test Site (part of the St. Joseph Bay IBA, pages 57–59). The Nature Conservancy has rated Santa Rosa and Okaloosa islands as the highest quality barrier islands in western Florida and Alabama because of the absence of human disturbance and exotic plants, and the presence of rare floral and faunal species. • Eglin supports the following listed species: 73 plants, 10 fishes, 10 terrestrial reptiles and amphibians, 5 marine reptiles (sea turtles), 14 birds, 3 terrestrial mammals, and 6 marine mammals (5 whales). • Cultural resources also are present.

THREATS: *habitat succession, *feral hogs, exotic plants

CONSERVATION ISSUES: Management issues at Eglin balance military use, recreational use, forest use, and ecosystem protection. Forest management practices are moving toward uneven-aged stands of longleaf pine. Most timbering is for removal of sand pines and pine plantations. Prescribed fire was applied to over 202,000 acres (80,800 ha) between 1993 and 1997. • Sandhills restoration activities involve mechanically removing sand pines and hardwoods, replanting longleaf pine (8 million seedlings since 1993), and annually burning over 40,000 acres (16,000 ha), mostly during the growing season. • Exotic plants include several species, with ♦Chinese tallowtree (*Sapium sebiferum*) and ♦cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) posing the most severe threats. Control measures are underway. • Collisions between birds and aircraft (bird air strike hazard; BASH) are the focus of the Bird Hazard Working Group. BASH events at Eglin are considered “sporadic” and have required lethal control for only short periods. Most of the collisions involve Cattle Egrets and Ring-billed Gulls. [what about feral hogs?]

NOMINATED BY: Bruce Hagedorn (U.S. Air Force)

REFERENCES: +Eglin Air Force Base. 2001. Integrated natural resources transitional plan. Natural Resources Management. Eglin Air Force Base, FL. • +Gore, J.A., and C.A. Chase, III. 1989. Snowy Plover breeding distribution. Final performance report, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee, FL.

WEBSITE: <<http://www.eglin.af.mil/newcomers/leisure.htm>>

Eglin Air Force Base Test Site at Cape San Blas, a non-contiguous part of Eglin Air Force Base, is included in the St. Joseph Bay IBA, on pages 57–59.