



2019 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation Award

Each year since 1962, the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) has honored installations, teams, and individuals for outstanding conservation achievements, innovative environmental practices, and partnerships that improve quality of life and promote efficiencies without compromising the Department of Defense's (DoD's) mission success. The 2019 SecDef Environmental Awards cycle encompasses an achievement period from October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2018 (Fiscal Years (FY) 2017-2018). A diverse panel of 58 judges with relevant expertise representing Federal and state agencies, academia, and the private sector evaluated all nominees to select one winner for each of the nine categories that cover six subject areas: natural resources conservation, environmental quality, sustainability, environmental restoration, cultural resources management, and environmental excellence in weapon system acquisition.

About the Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation Award

The Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation award recognizes efforts to promote the conservation of natural resources, including the identification, protection, and restoration of biological resources and habitats; the sound long-term management and use of the land and its resources; support of the military readiness mission; and the promotion of a conservation ethic. Protecting sensitive plant and animal species on our installations and other DoD lands, particularly those listed as either threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, ensures the preservation of these valuable environmental assets for current and future generations, and assures the availability of these resources to sustain military readiness. Large installations have more than 10,000 acres and can include leased, military owned, or administered outlying ranges or training practice areas. The 2019 winner of the Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation award is *Eglin Air Force Base, Florida*.

About Eglin Air Force Base, Florida

Eglin Air Force Base (AFB) is positioned along Florida's Emerald Coast and extends into the heart of the Florida panhandle. Eglin is the largest forested military reservation in the U.S. and the largest Air Force installation in the world, encompassing 464,000 acres of land and 123,000 square miles of water test ranges. This extensive area supports essential Defense missions and diverse ecosystems that provide sanctuary to 106 rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species. The installation is responsible for the development, acquisition, testing, deployment, and sustainment of all air-delivered conventional weapons for the Air Force. Eglin AFB is home to the 96th Test Wing, which hosts eight wing/wing equivalents and 37 associate units, and is comprised of 3,065 military personnel, 2,859 civilians, and 2,109 contractors. The installation's total economic impact to the area exceeds \$2.75 billion annually.



Mr. Travis Davis, an Eglin Air Force Base (AFB) contractor, applies foliar herbicide to a highly invasive stand of cogon grass on the installation. Eglin AFB works with multiple partners to proactively manage invasive and exotic plant species. In fiscal years 2017 and 2018, staff completed treatment efforts on 1,835 acres of land infested with non-native species.

Major Accomplishments in FY 2017-2018

- As part of the multi-agency Gopher Tortoise Candidate Conservation Agreement, Eglin AFB is partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Texas A&M University to translocate 6,000 tortoises in six years. The installation showed its commitment to the agreement's goals and objectives in FY18 by translocating 1,030 gopher tortoises displaced by urban development in peninsular Florida to Eglin AFB. The gopher tortoise is a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and its presence or potential presence on 23 military installations across the southeast would result in significant operational impacts if the species was indeed listed under the ESA.
- Eglin AFB manages the Air Force's largest prescribed fire program, and in FY17 and FY18, the installation conducted 160 prescribed burns across more than 145,000 acres on base. These burns removed 290,000 tons of hazardous fuel biomass, reduced wildfires caused by mission activities on test areas by 20%, and decreased wildfire suppression time by over 300 man-hours.
- The installation obtained \$530,000 in Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) funding to conduct habitat and species management efforts on 3,500 acres on the Escribano Point Wildlife Management Area (EPWMA) for the critically endangered reticulated flatwoods salamander. This was DoD's first ever REPI project that did not include a DoD land acquisition component. By duplicating decades of habitat management activities at Eglin AFB, EPWMA habitat quality has improved, and the landscape may be able to support one to two orders of magnitude more reticulated flatwoods salamanders than it currently supports. This project will continue for the next five years and will support species recovery efforts that should greatly reduce long-standing training restrictions on the installation.
- Eglin AFB manages DoD's largest natural resources-based outdoor recreation program. During the achievement period, the installation supported opportunities including hiking on 71 miles and cycling on 36 miles of designated trails, canoeing and kayaking on more than 186 miles of rivers and streams, and camping at 13 designated primitive camp sites. These recreation opportunities promote public awareness and an appreciation of the efforts to preserve Eglin AFB's natural environment.
- Eglin AFB is a member of the Gulf Coast Plain Ecosystem Partnership which has grown from seven original partners to 15, and from a land base of 840,000 acres to approximately 1.25 million acres since 1996. In FY17 and FY18, the Partnership helped Eglin AFB implement 41 prescribed burns totaling 45,152 acres, which established two 100-acre gopher tortoise relocation pens that now house over 500 tortoises.



Mr. Brett Williams, Eglin Wildland Fire Section, takes wind measurements with a portable weather meter during a prescribed burn on Eglin AFB. Applying landscape-level prescribed fire helped expand the fire-dependent, federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker's population while breaking new ground in wetland habitat restoration for the reticulated flatwoods salamander.



Eglin AFB partnered with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Longleaf Alliance to greatly accelerate habitat restoration and population expansion efforts for the reticulated flatwoods salamander. The installation accomplished this feat by obtaining \$530,000 in Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration funding to conduct habitat and species management efforts on property adjacent to the installation.