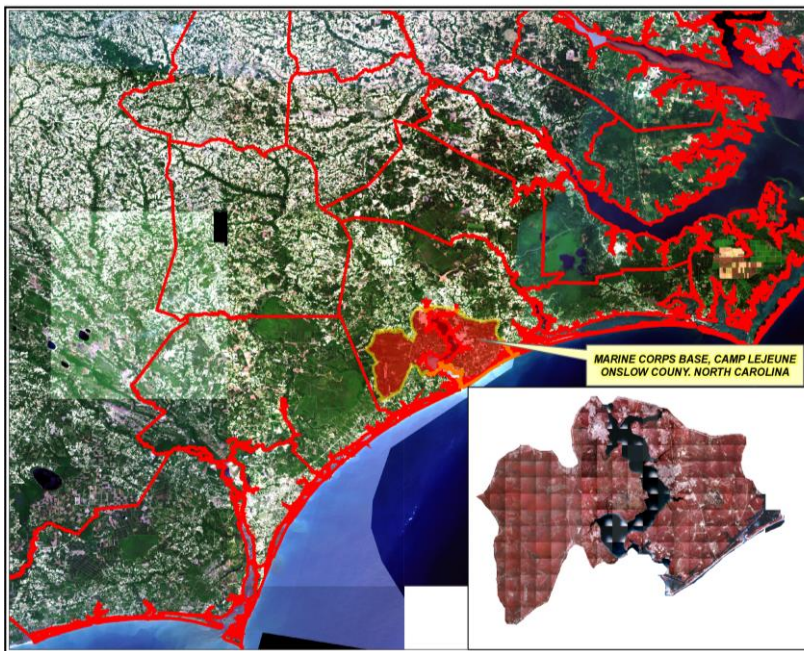


Secretary of Defense - Secretary of the Navy
FY 2006
Natural Resources Conservation – Large Installation

Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina

Introduction

Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, located on the North Carolina coast is the nation's largest Marine Corps Installation on the eastern seaboard. Camp Lejeune supports the Marine Corps's most complete expeditionary training program and is the home of the II Marine Expeditionary Force. The mission of Camp Lejeune is stated simply, to maintain combat ready units for expeditionary deployment. The complexity of this mission is clear when one considers the requirements for providing a sustainable training environment for approximately 41,000 active duty Marines, Sailors and other related military services. Directly contributing to this mission are approximately 4,500 civilian employees and the 67,000+ retirees in the local area at the ready to support our active duty members.



Camp Lejeune's physical location along the Atlantic Seaboard creates training opportunities not found in other areas of the nation. The combination of ocean, beach, swamp, and upland environments provides a diverse platform for military training.

Camp Lejeune training areas. Of these sites, 11 are considered of state or national significance due to unique and sensitive plant communities. Two sites are officially entered on the NC Registry of Natural Heritage Areas. Of the 1121 officially recorded archaeological sites found on Camp Lejeune, 14 are eligible for National Register status, 271 are potentially eligible and require further assessment, and the remaining 836 are not eligible.

Camp Lejeune supports the wildlife and plant associations typical of the southeastern coastal plain fire-maintained ecosystem. Recreational hunting takes place on approximately 102,000 acres and anglers have 71 acres of freshwater ponds and 26,000 acres of estuarine and brackish water associated with the

Located within Onslow County, Camp Lejeune occupies approximately 153,000 acres that includes dynamic beach and sand dune complex's along the Atlantic Ocean, ecologically diverse embayments and estuaries of the New River, extensive bottomland hardwood forests and swamps, with majestic long leaf pine savannahs. The Marine Corps and the abundant wildlife on Camp Lejeune have co-existed in this coastal plain ecosystem for over 60 years.

The Installation has an extensive natural and cultural resources program responsible for continued stewardship of this vast area. It includes active forest management of more than 92,000 acres, and management and protection of eight federally threatened and endangered species. Twenty nine significant natural areas have been identified by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program in

New River to explore. Freshwater ponds, conveniently located marinas, and access to remote beach locations provide valuable fishing opportunities for properly licensed personnel extended this privilege.

Background

Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune's revised Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) provides major program changes for various conservation related activities. Endorsed by State and Federal natural resource agencies the revised INRMP improves military training opportunities while also providing a greater level of protection for sensitive species. In 2004, Camp Lejeune formed a Conservation Working Group (CWG) to address the integration of natural resource conservation issues and military training. The CWG convenes every two months or as needed to facilitate INRMP implementation, address new issues, projects, and other topics as necessary. The CWG also serves as a Natural and Cultural Resources workgroup for Camp Lejeune's Environmental Management System implementation and tracking.



Camp Lejeune provides hunting opportunities on 102,000 acres of land. Each Spring, hunters on Base harvest an average of 25 gobblers.

The Environmental Conservation Branch (ECON) is charged with INRMP development, implementation and revision, continues to evaluate and analyze long-range planning, project implementation, along with other emerging requirements. The ECON Branch, with a combined staff of 40 professional and technical personnel (consisting of civilian employees, interns, and contract support) is well structured to lead INRMP implementation. ECON includes professional wildlife biologists, professional foresters, National Environmental Policy Act staff, an archeologist, and conservation law enforcement staff.



Camp Lejeune's Onslow Beach provides the most diverse amphibious training opportunity within the Armed Forces. The sustainability of Onslow Beach is critical to the Marine Corps and the future of expeditionary forces.

Program Summary

The Department of Defense is faced with progressively more difficult encroachment issues at large military Installations. While external encroachment pressures are easier to define and address, internal pressures such as soil conservation and endangered species protection and management also threaten military training opportunities. Integrating the balance between the primary mission of maintaining combat ready units for expeditionary deployment and natural resources management responsibilities is frequently a challenge.

As the nation's largest amphibious training Installation, accessibility and use of Camp Lejeune's Onslow Beach training area is critical to expeditionary unit training and deployments. The general use patterns by

diverse and sometimes competing interests at Onslow Beach were leading to conflicts between military training, recreational use, and threatened species protection efforts. As highlighted under accomplishments below, Camp Lejeune continues to make positive strides in maintaining a mission oriented focus.



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Camp Lejeune's Conservation Volunteer Program provides direct support to natural resources management efforts and INRMP implementation. Through volunteerism, Camp Lejeune was able to meet or exceed INRMP objectives during the reporting period. Volunteers were extremely active during 2006 and assisted in planting 20,000 sea oat plants for dune stabilization; planted native shrubs and herbaceous wetland vegetation within a reclaimed borrow area; repaired, replaced and maintained 80 bluebird nesting boxes; provided valuable assistance to a long-term USGS sponsored painted bunting research effort; and assisted with archery skills testing for recreational hunters. The combined volunteer effort provided many hours of quality outdoor environmental education and hands on experience for volunteers interested in natural resource management careers.

Resource-based outdoor recreational activities are vital for many members of our military community, enhancing their quality of life through individual pursuits and providing important contact with family and friends. Recreational users at Camp Lejeune logged over 205,000 hours engaged in hunting and fishing activities. Wildlife biologists at Camp Lejeune scientifically manage wildlife and fisheries resources to meet the demand of recreational users and to balance wildlife with habitat conditions. A total of 3,400 fish have been stocked in 6 freshwater ponds and 1,400 deer, 55 turkeys, and 100's of other small game have been harvested within the last two years by hunters. Camp Lejeune's INRMP established goals and objectives to augment the Installation's approach to ecosystem management while accommodating uses supplemental to military training. Of the "must fund" projects proposed during the reporting period that are still valid, all have been completed or are on-going.

Accomplishments

With such diversity and extent of natural habitats- ranging from oceanfront, wetland areas, upland forests, and urban areas - it's easy to see the challenges faced by natural resources personnel while ensuring Camp Lejeune remains a premiere training facility.

Conservation Working Group

The Conservation Working Group is a permanent governing body given oversight responsibility for the successful revision of Camp Lejeune's INRMP in FY2006. The key to the Conservation Working Group's (CWG) effectiveness is the participation and buy-in from Base and Tenant command staffs. The CWG is comprised of permanent and on/call members from the civilian and military community at Camp Lejeune.

The diversity of this stakeholder group, with its broad connectivity to various mission components, provides vital INRMP integration and fosters focused communication among all aspects of the Camp Lejeune Community. The CWG and other Installation stakeholders have creatively developed changes to natural and cultural resources related programs which have had and will continue to have a positive effect on military readiness, sensitive natural and cultural resources, and will not affect the Installation's duty to conserve threatened and endangered species. With support from the command, the Conservation Working Group will continue to oversee the successful implementation of the INRMP while gaining the support of regulatory and non-regulatory stakeholders in the community interested in the goal of enhanced land use planning, training area sustainability, fire prioritization on the landscape, and regional initiatives aimed at conservation.



Local Boy Scout Troops and community members assist with dune restoration at Onslow Beach. Recycling of Christmas trees helps establish growth in the dunes while eliminating disposal at the landfill.

During FY2006, the CWG tackled a number of significant issues for Camp Lejeune to include bird/animal strike hazard (BASH) mitigation, minimizing impacts to training from archaeological resources,

Conservation EMS Working Group

MCB Camp Lejeune

MCB Camp Lejeune

POLICY
PLANNING
IMPLEMENTATION
CORRECTIVE AND PREVENTATIVE ACTION
MANAGEMENT REVIEW

minimizing the threat to sea turtles from beach lighting, and minimizing threats to endangered species from off road recreational vehicle use at Onslow Beach. Camp Lejeune has effectively folded EMS Executive Order 13148 into a routine business practice by leveraging the CWGs' diverse membership to address EMS Natural Resources Objectives.

Protected Species Management and Military Readiness

Camp Lejeune has developed various strategies to fulfill natural resources conservation responsibilities while enhancing military training opportunity. The Installation, through the Conservation Working Group, has developed a protected species-conservation area strategy that will help conserve species at risk and unique natural community types while having no net loss of military

Camp Lejeune implements EMS EO 13148 in an integrated framework to address pressing environmental issues facing the Installation. All of Camp Lejeune's EMS Working Groups reach high into the branches to find effective and regulatory compliant solutions to reduce impacts to the mission.

training capability. Natural resources managers initially identified known species at risk and natural community type locations on Camp Lejeune and presented these, with recommendations for protection, to the CWG. Through a dialogue with Training & Operations representatives and other interested parties, a new Base Order was developed for Command endorsement that ensured continued viability of several at risk species and provided a measure of protection to sensitive natural community areas.



Vehicle use patterns, as seen in the above photograph, demonstrated the need for tighter controls on recreational vehicle access to Onslow Beach. Base Directives were revised to protect fragile island resources while permitting recreational uses during low impact months of the year.

The patterns of recreational vehicle use at Onslow Beach were having the potential to impact both protected species and military training capabilities. Unauthorized vehicle use and access to beach areas during sensitive breeding periods for sea turtles and shorebirds had been previously documented in the scientific literature as having negative affects to within year nesting efforts for a variety of species. The same deleterious patterns of use were becoming apparent at Onslow Beach. Additionally, conflicts between recreational vehicles and military training posed safety concerns which could not be ignored. Consistent with the Onslow Beach Master Plan,

a major change to off-road recreational vehicle use at Onslow Beach will preserve military training opportunities and provide for significant protection of threatened and endangered species and sensitive barrier island resources. Again, through the CWG, a new Installation directive was promulgated which

increased permitting requirements for recreational vehicles; established a system of controlled, but available recreational opportunities; and reduced human caused impacts to fragile barrier island vegetation.

The focus of management actions for Red-cockaded woodpecker, a federally-listed endangered species, has shifted to an Installation-wide perspective to gain more flexibility for training area and range sustainment, while meeting requirements of the ESA. The basic tenant of the approach, as outlined in the revised INRMP, is a phased reduction in restrictions on military training related to RCW management within specific high-priority training areas. Camp Lejeune was successful in negotiating this management strategy with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service based upon a proven record of providing conservation benefits to the specie and an historic commitment to protected species management. Continued support by the military community for these innovative strategies helps natural resource managers stay motivated in bridging the knowledge gap of how protected species management integrates with military training.

Regional Conservation Initiatives - Addressing Encroachment:

Camp Lejeune continues to make great strides in addressing Encroachment on the training mission stemming from adjacent land use and ecological isolation. Installations and Environment at Camp Lejeune, together with other Base departments, pursued regional conservation initiatives with the aim of curbing encroachment on the training mission while fostering good land stewardship. In cooperation with

Onslow Bight Conservation Forum partners, 3560 acres within 4 tracts of land have been purchased and placed into permanent conservation forever protecting rare ecosystems, sensitive watersheds, and fostering outdoor recreational opportunities for state and county residents. This achievement sets the stage for continued successful efforts that will assist the Marine Corps in its goal to not only retain Camp Lejeune as a premiere training facility, but demonstrate to the community its interest in the conservation of natural resources in the region surrounding Onslow Bay while providing all citizens with a quality of life they desire. Through continued cooperative purchases of conservation easements or fee-simple title to adjacent lands, encroachment issues affecting training or the isolation of rare species can be minimized and even become a thing of the past.

Summary Narrative

Camp Lejeune is committed to natural resource conservation in support of the Marine Corps mission. The 153,000 acre Installation provides habitat for eight federally protected species, provides wildlife enthusiasts with opportunities for the challenging pursuit of game and non-game animals and fish, protects riparian areas adjacent to rich estuaries that support commercial fish stocks, and supports long-rotation production of high quality forest products. The continued implementation and evaluation of Camp Lejeune's Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan will support sustainable military use through the application of an integrated approach to ecosystem management.

Maintaining the operational readiness of Marines Corps forces is the central focus of Camp Lejeune's integrated approach to ecosystem management. The judicious implementation and evaluation of Camp Lejeune's Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan will continue to support the primary mission while providing for sustainable ecosystems that are resilient to current and future changes in military training doctrine.

Natural resource management actions, as stand-alone projects and initiatives, provide significant benefits to individual species, specie assemblages, and native habitats. The linkages between natural resources management program areas and the military mission provide the adaptive framework for a working model of ecosystem management.

Threatened and endangered species programs focus on supporting the eight Federally protected species found at Camp Lejeune and other rare or globally imperiled species and their habitats while minimizing impacts to military readiness; a Conservation Working Group provides a platform for solving complex natural and cultural resources issues having potential to affect military readiness; and an active encroachment partnering effort works diligently to preserve habitats and to address the external threat of incompatible development immediately adjacent to the Installation and across the Onslow Bight landscape. Camp Lejeune remains committed to sound natural resource conservation in support of the Marine Corps mission while fulfilling regulatory requirements and Department of Defense policy guidelines.