



2020 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team Award

Each year since 1962, the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) has honored installations, teams, and individuals for outstanding achievements in Department of Defense (DoD) environmental programs. These accomplishments include outstanding conservation activities, innovative environmental practices, and partnerships that improve quality of life and promote efficiencies without compromising DoD's mission success. The 2020 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards cycle encompasses an achievement period from October 1, 2017, through September 30, 2019 (Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-2019). A diverse panel of 54 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. These nine categories cover six subject areas including natural resources conservation, environmental quality, sustainability, environmental restoration, cultural resources management, and environmental excellence in weapon system acquisition.

About the Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team Award

The Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team award recognizes efforts by individuals or teams 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. The 2020 winner of the Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team award is the *Conservation-Training Enhancement Team, Camp Ripley, Minnesota Army National Guard*.

About the Conservation-Training Enhancement Team, Camp Ripley, Minnesota Army National Guard

The Conservation-Training Enhancement Team is located on the Minnesota Army National Guard's (MNARNG) Camp Ripley, a 53,000-acre regional training center near Little Falls, Minnesota. Camp Ripley's location was selected in 1929 by Minnesota's Adjutant General, Ellard Walsh, who sought a suitable replacement for Camp Lakeview, a 200-acre training camp on Lake Pepin. Camp Ripley trains units from all active and reserve components of the military. Foreign units from Canada, Great Britain, Norway, and the Netherlands also conduct training exercises at Camp Ripley on a regular basis. The installation is known for its extensive Winter Warfare Course and has been designated the Primary Winter Training Site in the United States. Camp Ripley's Conservation-Training Enhancement Team includes staff from three departments: Environmental and Natural Resources, Integrated Training Area Management (ITAM), and Department of Public Works. Together, this team advances the shared goals of conservation and training promotion by working across their directorates and identifying areas where their resources can employ land management priorities. Their work has helped Camp Ripley remain at the forefront of conservation practices while sustaining more than 365,000 annual man-days of training.



This aerial photograph of Camp Ripley shows its incredible habitat diversity that supports hundreds of plants and animal species. Natural resources conservation activities have always been a priority for the MNARNG. The Conservation-Training Enhancement Team takes great pride in managing all natural resources on Camp Ripley, including the 18 miles of untouched Mississippi River shoreline.

Major Accomplishments in FY 2018-2019

- The Conservation-Training Enhancement Team implemented a new forestry management plan for the installation's 28,000 acres of forests, which defines short-term (10-year) management goals based on natural resources and military training objectives. The Team developed a geographic information system viewer for forestry practices that includes layers for military training, wildlife, threatened and endangered species habitat, sensitive habitats, and past and proposed forest management activities.
- The Conservation-Training Enhancement Team repaired more than 500 acres of maneuver damage and maintained more than 1,000 acres of grasslands used for military training in FY 2018 and FY 2019. The Team completed this work with seed collected on the installation, allowing personnel to confirm the biological integrity of seed sourcing while rehabilitating these sites. These habitat improvements directly benefit species like Blanding's turtle and pollinators such as the monarch butterfly and native bee populations.
- The Team developed an annual interagency agreement with St. Cloud State University for three summer internships. Trained and licensed interns treated invasive vegetation such as common tansy, spotted knapweed, and buckthorn by applying herbicide over 900 acres in priority areas identified by Environmental and ITAM Team members. Staff targeted these invasive plant species because they negatively impact military training requirements and native plant species.
- The Team partnered with The Nature Conservancy to obtain a \$150,000 landscape stewardship grant from the U.S. Forest Service to apply prescribed fire on more than 4,000 acres within the Camp Ripley landscape. In all, the team manages approximately 14,000 acres of the installation with prescribed fire each year.
- The Conservation-Training Enhancement Team is monitoring eight black bears with radio telemetry collars, and personnel have implemented a new monitoring initiative for Blanding's turtle hatchlings by using transmitters to track their movement and generate data on habitat use, survival rates, distances travelled, and more. The Team also manages a golden eagle tracking program to facilitate training around eagle presence and demonstrate how these management strategies continue to support eagle habitat needs.



The Conservation-Training Enhancement Team works to achieve the Environmental office's goal of mature forest growth for native plant communities in a manner that supports mature interior forest wildlife.



The Team established a golden eagle tracking program several years ago. A third eagle, Gyllen, was transmitted in February 2019 after the transmitters on the first two eagles, Ripley and Victor, reached end-of-life. This program uses and shares distances traveled over time, habitat use, management strategies and more.