



2026 Department of War

# Environmental Awards

Environmental Quality – Non-Industrial Installation  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

## Introduction

Nestled between the shores of Cook Inlet and the Chugach front range, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) provides 79,000 acres of rugged terrain ideal for training Soldiers and Airmen in Arctic and mountainous warfare. JBER is home to the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Force, Headquarters Alaska Command (ALCOM), North American Aerospace Defense Command, the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, and 75 tenant organizations. More than 50,000 acres of natural training environment includes maneuver areas, drop zones, ranges, and impact areas. JBER also permits recreational access to thousands of hunters and community members annually. JBER serves as the gateway to more than 65,000 square miles of special use airspace in the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex used by all service branches and allies for large-scale, live-fire exercises.

The 673d Air Base Wing maintains \$15B in infrastructure, ensuring the installation remains the nation's premier strategic power projection platform. This includes hosting Alaska's Veteran's Affairs Healthcare Campus, servicing one in ten Alaskans and their families. JBER has a workforce of over 13,000 service members, civilians, and contractors, and is home to over 40,000 personnel, family members, and retirees. The local economic impact of the installation exceeds \$3.66B annually. JBER's mission is Agile Arctic Combat Support accomplished through Protecting the Homeland, Projecting Joint Forces and Empowering the Joint Base. The environmental element at JBER directly enables this mission and is part of a united team of Alaska-tough warfighters – ready to deter and defeat adversaries in any theater or climate, at home or abroad.

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## Background

As the nation's power projection platform in the Arctic, JBER sustains numerous missions critical to the Combatant Commands it supports. JBER's 673d Civil Engineer Squadron Environmental Element is responsible for Environmental Compliance, Conservation Law Enforcement, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and Natural and Cultural Resources Management. The twenty-person JBER team includes biologists, physical scientists, environmental engineers, archaeologists, and law enforcement whose mission is to maintain compliance while safeguarding the warfighter. The key to their success is the strong relationship with both internal and external partners, supported branches, and tenants.

JBER has developed a robust Environmental Management System (EMS) which is the framework for tracking and improving environmental performance. It ensures proactive management and minimizes negative environmental impacts. The program manages and oversees 370 hazardous waste (HW) satellite accumulation areas, 85 hazardous material (HM) locations, 10 environmental management plans, and 16 regulatory permits. The team enabled critical missions by completing one Environmental Impact Statement and three Environmental Assessments (EAs) in FY24 and FY25. These efforts supported live-fire training, expeditionary force readiness, aircraft fuel system expansion, and the security of the installation's drinking water. The team developed nine plans and permits during this period, addressing cultural resources, air quality, bird aircraft strike hazards, solid waste (SW), wildland fire, and HW.

The 86 Unit Environmental Coordinators, 96 tank custodians, 236 HW managers, and 229 HM managers play a vital role in executing JBER's Environmental Inspection

Process. JBER's environmental inspection team conducted over 1,500 functional-level inspections across eight regulated programs for the United States Air Force (USAF), Army, multiple Military Reserve units, and 55 tenant organizations.

Community partnerships are critical for the execution of JBER's Environmental mission. In collaboration with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) the team manages marine mammals, eagles, and other sensitive species. JBER cooperatively manages Bird Aircraft Strike Hazards with U.S. Department of Agriculture, USFWS, and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). ADFG also supports dangerous wildlife mitigation and hunting/fishing activities. Effective land use and encroachment minimization is driven by strong relationships with the Municipality of Anchorage, State of Alaska, and Eklutna Incorporated. Wildland fire prevention and containment is made possible through synergy between JBER Fire, Security Forces, Anchorage Fire Department, Air Force Civil Engineer Wildland Fire Branch, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and community councils.



### Dangers of Dumpster Diving

A black bear is frustrated by a bear-resistant dumpster. Human food sources attract bears, so JBER employs a multi-faceted approach to minimize bear attractants and train personnel and residents across the installation.

Dangerous wildlife is a challenge at JBER. Waste attracts bears, moose, and other wildlife to neighborhoods, work centers, and

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recreation areas and can result in critical injury, property damage, or death. Weekly environmental awareness briefs educated over 40,000 residents and personnel. Wildlife safety briefs prepared more than 7,400 service members to safely navigate life-threatening encounters with bears, moose, and wolves. JBER formed the SW and Wildlife Working Group to manage this risk, educate personnel and residents on proper SW disposal, reporting wildlife, and acquisition of bear-resistant dumpsters.

## Accomplishments

The JBER Environmental Quality (EQ) program excels in balancing critical military missions with exceptional environmental stewardship. Through a robust EMS, proactive planning, wildlife management, and innovative compliance strategies, JBER is not only protecting the Alaskan environment but also enhancing mission readiness, safeguarding personnel, and generating significant cost savings.

### **Recycling & Waste Reduction - EQ in Installation Decisions and Asset Management**

In 2025, following years of negligible sales volumes and low recycling participation rates, JBER reinstated the installation's Qualified Recycling Program (QRP) through a comprehensive overhaul. This began with recruiting personnel with specialized expertise. JBER achieved a 959% increase in sales revenue during FY25, with total sales exceeding \$434,000, compared to combined sales of \$41,000 in FY23 and FY24. Enhanced operational efficiencies and strategic initiatives more than doubled the program's end-of-year financial reserve, maintaining over \$667,000 to ensure the viability of the program. Notably, JBER successfully identified a local market for recycling lead-acid batteries, resulting in a more cost-effective disposal method. While QRP revenue from the sale was modest at \$6,500, the strategic sales agreements,

coupled with recycling 50,000 gallons of mixed fuels, eliminated nearly one million dollars in HW disposal costs.

The QRP was instrumental in enhancing JBER's SW diversion rates and establishing effective data tracking protocols. It involved collecting and monitoring various metrics related to waste generation, recyclable materials, and construction and demolition debris. This comprehensive data management facilitated accurate and seamless reporting, ensuring the appropriate metrics are communicated to Congress. JBER's non-hazardous SW diversion rate increased by 238%, rising from 21% in 2023 to 71% in 2025 exceeding Department of War (DoW) and USAF diversion targets. These efforts, including the sale of 185,000 pounds of expended small arms casings, dramatically increased JBER's total waste diversion rate from 72% to an incredible 97%. This performance exceeds DoW's goal to divert SW from landfill by more than 20% and achieves targeted total diversion rates five years ahead of schedule.

### **HW - Alternative Dispute Resolution**

The Hazardous Waste Program demonstrated exceptional problem-solving by modifying a critical permit. Through collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the team successfully updated the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) permit for an open burn/open detonation site, resolving a complex delayed-closure issue. After the USAF challenged certain permit provisions in front of the Environmental Appeals Board, the team proactively entered into Alternative Dispute Resolution with the EPA avoiding lengthy litigation. This collaborative process, driven by the proficiency of technical experts and high-level legal counsel, led to a favorable outcome and a subsequent Class 2 permit modification. The permit modification clarified notification procedures and optimized corrective actions. Most significantly, this process yielded

valuable lessons learned. JBER shared these insights with program managers, legal teams, and subject matter experts across the DoW and USAF to improve future RCRA permitting actions.

### **Managing Regulatory Engagement & In-House Assessments Improve Water Quality**

The Water Quality (WQ) program safeguarded a \$404M Runway Extension project by resolving 13 state-identified violations and preserving the flying mission. JBER coordinated with stakeholders and regulators to address all violations and improve stormwater management across the 1,000-acre site without any fines or delays. A major effort included installing emergency erosion and sediment controls along the primary munition transportation route and 250 feet of silt curtain to protect an anadromous system and essential salmon spawning habitat, sustaining food source for endangered Cook Inlet Beluga Whales (CIBW).



#### **Protecting Habitat and the Mission**

JBER built a large storm water retention basin for its runway extension to slow runoff, protecting downstream salmon habitat and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations.

The WQ program achieved several major accomplishments in FY24 & FY25. It facilitated permitting for 40 active construction projects valued at \$479M, incurring zero delays. The team oversaw a base-wide inventory of 2,000 lead service lines, confirming no lead contaminants. Additionally, they executed over 1,000 industrial inspections and improved the

management of Oil/Water Separators (OWS). JBER was recognized by the USAF WQ subject matter expert for best practices addressing OWS abuse, to implement across the enterprise. The improved management practices for oil/water separators have been integrated into the EMS, creating a durable framework to ensure sustained compliance and prevent future issues.

### **Resolving Air Quality Impacts & Promoting Operational Objectives**

Hundreds of emission sources are managed under the Air Quality (AQ) program including 124 emergency use generators. The AQ program worked with Airmen at the installation and the Pacific Air Forces Depot level to ensure all aircraft arresting system (AAS) engines met the National Security Exemption (NSE) requirements. The AQ program secured authorization for an automatic NSE for an emergency use generator that supports essential aircraft landing communication equipment ahead of an extended planned outage. This action allowed the emergency generator to support the flying mission, maintain compliance with AQ regulations, and avoid implementing alternative solutions that posed unnecessary life and safety risks to Airmen.

Beginning in 2024, JBER faced the daunting task of completing and submitting Triennial Emission Inventories (TEI) to the State of Alaska for one major and five minor stationary sources. Completion of the TEIs required compiling detailed information and inputting data for over 320 emission units. JBER met state regulator submittal requirements and tight timelines for all six certified TEI reports.

### **Streamlining Regulatory Engagement to Protect the Built Environment**

JBER's Cultural Resources Management (CRM) program directly contributed to mission readiness by completing archaeological survey of 1,200 acres, issuing 41 findings of effect, and completing 22 National Register of Historic Places

evaluations supporting \$534M in construction projects in FY24 and FY25. Examples of excellence include identifying a mission-enabling solution for a critical readiness project to renovate three historic hangars with no adverse effect, identifying low-constraint sites for ALCOM and Army Northern Command expeditionary and contingency planning, and launching innovative predictive modeling to guide and streamline project efforts.

The CRM team has cultivated an exemplary relationship with JBER neighbors. In collaboration with several Federally Recognized Tribes, JBER led community-driven research on a 1,000-year-old bark-lined cache pit. The findings revolutionized the understanding of early Athabascan use of the Upper Cook Inlet and garnered national and international media attention including features from Fox News, MSN, Smithsonian Magazine, and others. This spirit of partnership is also reflected in the Squadron Commander's morale coin. The CRM team redesigned the coin to incorporate symbols from Athabascan culture, inspiring pride and unit cohesion.



#### **Nike Site Veterans**

Site Summit is a heritage site on the National Register of Historic Places managed by JBER. Alaska Nike veterans tour Site Summit to see the newly restored Nike Hercules missile.

JBER executed an Operations, Management, and Development Programmatic Agreement and streamlined 715 project reviews, saving \$8.5M and 22,000 labor hours during the award period. The DoW recognized JBER's efforts with the prestigious FY24 and FY25 Section 110 Legacy Grant, securing

\$180,000 to document JBER's segments of the Iditarod National Historic Trail. The CRM team's agile approach to preserving heritage sites while meeting critical mission needs has been instrumental to JBER's success.

#### **Promoting the Mission, Protecting Troops & Ensuring Compliance**

JBER's Natural Resources program ensures continued access to land, air, and water resources crucial for realistic training scenarios from coastal to alpine environments. Managing diverse ecosystems provides unique challenges for the installation.

#### Containment and Control of Invasives in Sixmile Lake

JBER executed a rapid response to successfully contain and control elodea following detection in Sixmile Lake. Elodea is an aggressive invasive aquatic weed capable of severely damaging salmon rearing habitat. Statewide, elodea threatens millions of dollars in damage to Alaska's recreational industry, commercial fisheries, and endangered species. On JBER, salmon from Sixmile Lake are an important prey species for the critically endangered CIBW. In partnership with five federal and state agencies, JBER successfully applied four full-lake herbicide treatments. Through coordination with users, the lake remained available for recreation and military training while minimizing the risk of elodea spread to other systems.

#### Mitigating Wildland Fire Risk

Mitigating wildland fire risk is the central tenet of JBER's Wildland Fire Program. The team manages 39,000 acres of complex forest. There are pockets of old growth providing diverse habitats to wildlife and unique environments to the warfighter, highly flammable black spruce bogs adjacent to live-fire ranges, and densely accumulated ladder fuels within wildlife corridors. The team collaborates with the Wildland Fire Branch to prioritize and address the challenges of mitigating risk across the landscape based on risk to life, military assets, and natural and

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cultural infrastructure. JBER's Wildland Fire Support Module works with Natural Resources to conduct prescribed burns of 2,000 acres annually. These burns maintain natural wildlife habitat and reduce wildfire risk to adjacent communities and forested landscapes emerging from live-fire in grassland ranges. JBER's comprehensive approach to mitigating wildland fire risk prevents degradation of mission capabilities, allows unimpeded flight operations, and protects facilities and housing across the installation and surrounding community.

#### Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Monitoring

The CIBW is a critically endangered species that uses the waters in and around JBER. In collaboration with the Federally Recognized Tribe Native Village of Eklutna (NVE), Eklutna Inc., and NOAA, JBER monitors CIBW in upper Knik Arm using passive acoustics. This collaboration allows for monitoring beluga passage through designated CIBW critical habitat, which is essential for species conservation. It also allows the NVE to build organic beluga-monitoring capacity for the Tribe's conservation efforts.



#### **Thar She Blows**

Cook Inlet Beluga Whale cow and calf bobbing in JBER waters. Marine monitoring and management minimize impacts to the missions at JBER.

In a landmark project, JBER Environmental collaborated with University of Washington and Seaworld to test active acoustic imaging technology with captive belugas in clear water. The lessons learned from this project were invaluable. The collaboration allowed JBER to refine a novel research method to investigate the predator-prey relationship of the CIBW in the turbid waters of Knik Arm.

In FY24 and FY25 JBER Environmental collaborated with the University of Washington and Microsoft Inc. to train and implement an artificial intelligence beluga-detection model designed to detect beluga acoustic behavior within acoustic recordings. This cutting-edge approach is expected to result in significant reductions in analyst workload and vastly improve efficiency. Together, these innovative methods enable refined avoidance and mitigation measures, maximizing military training and flight missions without adversely impacting the species.

#### Wildlife Awareness Group

JBER leads the DoW's only Wildlife Awareness Group dedicated to the safety of 20,000 soldiers and airmen and uninterrupted execution of military training within dense brown bear habitat. Through a multi-faceted approach, the wildlife program successfully balances military operations with wildlife challenges that include black bears, moose, and wolves. During the award period, the team responded to 1,670 encounters, tagging and safely releasing 32 animals, and developing risk maps to advise commanders. The team partners with Range Control for real-time risk management and response.



#### **Bull Moose on Flight Line**

A bull moose probes the flightline fence. There are more dangerous encounters with moose in Alaska than with any other species.

#### Recreation Access and the Sikes Act

The recreation program managed over 17,000 individuals annually across JBER without impacting military training, showcasing an optimal balance between public access and

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mission readiness. The program supports outdoor recreation and harvest using software to track users and deconflict with military activities. A team of dedicated Conservation Law Enforcement Officers and active-duty Military Conservation Agents enforce compliance. This comprehensive strategy directly enhances force protection and mission success. This self-sustaining program brings in approximately \$60,000 annually. These funds directly support environmental quality management on JBER, including the eradication efforts of invasive elodea in Sixmile Lake.



#### **Training with Brown Bears**

A brown bear sow and cubs cross the road in a highly used training area.

#### **Environmental Planning and NEPA**

The JBER NEPA program sets new standards for excellence across the DoW by championing integrated planning, innovative strategies, and robust community engagement. The team not only ensures environmental compliance but is also a force multiplier; directly enhancing mission readiness, conserving execution timelines, and saving millions of dollars in the process. At the heart of the program's success is a dynamic, interdisciplinary planning team consisting of NEPA specialists, engineers, real property, space management, and community planners. JBER's planning team provided coordinated support to 147 construction and military readiness projects valued at \$534M. By maximizing planning efficiency and proactively resolving constraints early, the team has become a model of integrated execution across the Air Force, supporting existing and evolving mission sets.

In FY24 and FY25, the program completed three installation-level EAs for a fuel station expansion, new water treatment plant, and Combat Support Training Range expansion, with a total value of over \$101M. By implementing new strategies for five major military construction (MILCON) projects, the team expedited the Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP). This saved 18 months in project timelines and \$1.8M, allowing critical funding to be reallocated to other mission priorities. The team also advanced critical airfield development by more than two years by expediting EIAP requirements for the Weapons Generation Complex and executing early resolution of resource constraints. This early engagement approach enabled 215 site reviews and 26 MILCON projects, avoiding adverse impacts and reducing costs by \$2M.

The program fostered exceptional relationships with the community and regulatory partners. The team strengthened community partnerships by leading three key projects: a new elementary school, a micro-grid power substation, and the Port of Alaska storm sewer system. This work saved community partners \$1.25M in independent EA costs and supported \$55M in local improvement grants.

JBER Environmental also developed the Joint Force Alaska NEPA Sync, creating a regional touch point for four installations and 40 remote sites. This initiative sets a unified strategy and tempo for NEPA actions across Alaska and the Pacific theater, amplifying mission success through shared best practices.

JBER's commitment to environmental quality is more than a compliance task, it's fundamental to the mission. By protecting Alaska's air, land, and water, we ensure the long-term operability of our training lands and strengthen our bond with the community, securing our role as a key strategic base in the Arctic.