

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS

*CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT INSTALLATION AWARD:
NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE*

INTRODUCTION

Nellis Air Force Base (NAFB), NV, the “Home of the Fighter Pilot”, is situated on 14,000 acres approximately 10 miles northeast of Las Vegas. NAFB is the largest composite flying wing in the Air Force, the largest operating base in the Air Combat Command (ACC), and with a workforce of more than 9,500 military and civilian personnel it is one of the largest single employers in Nevada.



1st Lt. William Harrel “Billy” Nellis was raised in Searchlight Nevada. He was acclaimed to be “intensely patriotic, loyal, trusted officer of unquestioned courage and fidelity.” In 1944, he was a highly decorated 28 years old when he was shot down during his 70th mission, two days after Christmas.

NAFB delivers the most demanding and advanced air combat training in the Department of Defense (DoD) to composite strike forces of Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps air and ground units, pilots of every type of aircraft in the Air Force inventory, and members of allied nations. Other missions on NAFB include tactics development and operational testing, combat search and rescue, development and integration of common unmanned

aircraft systems, and “Red Flag” aerial combat training exercises. Tenants of NAFB include the Air Force Thunderbirds, “America’s Ambassadors in Blue”, the USAF Weapons School, the Air Expeditionary Force Battlelab, and the Joint Unmanned Aircraft System Center of Excellence.

Creech AFB, home to the famed “Hunters” of the 432d Wing and 432d Air Expeditionary Wing, home to the Predator unmanned aerial vehicle, is located near the community of Indian Springs, Nev., approximately 35 miles northwest of the city of Las Vegas, Nev., and assigned to NAFB Cultural Resources Department’s stewardship area.

NAFB also operates and maintains the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR). The 15,000 square miles of air space and 2.9 million acres of Range land form the largest mass of continuous air and ground space in the free world available for military operations and are crucial to honing the skills of DoD aviators and composite strike forces. The NTTR contains some of the oldest, most diverse, intact cultural resources in the United States. NAFB successfully balances mission requirements and military objectives with public and stakeholder demands to discover and preserve the unique and invaluable cultural resources inherent throughout the NTTR.

BACKGROUND

The combination of NAFB and NTTR lands comprise 41% of the seven million acres used by the Air Force worldwide. Range lands operated and maintained by NAFB include the north NTTR, which is withdrawn from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), 75% of the south NTTR which is co-managed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, the Indian Springs Air Force Auxiliary Field (ISAFAF), and the Tolicha Peak Electronic Combat Range (TPECR). Although the aerial combat training mission at NAFB is extensive and includes the deployment of a wide variety of live munitions, decision-making processes have successfully limited military actions to less than three percent of the available range lands.



NAFB provides training in an environment suitable to today’s military missions abroad. USAF Weapons School A-10 Thunderbolt II drops an AGM-65 Maverick missile during a close air support training event over the NTTR. One of many conducted each year.

The Cultural Resources Management (CRM) Program was started in 1996 by Mr. Keith Myhrer, an Air Force archeologist. Myhrer, who held a bachelor's degree in History through Winona State University, invited tribal representatives to actively participate in compliance survey, site monitoring, condition assessment, and document review processes. His efforts facilitated swift and efficient mission clearances and laid the foundation for today's CRM Program.

Today's CRM Program studies and documents the artifacts, structures, and sites left behind by prehistoric to modern day peoples who occupied the land to gain insight into their activities and behaviors. The CRM Program monitors and ensures compliance with applicable federal, state and agency laws, and Air Force and DoD regulations and policies, ensures compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and implements and reports on actions taken to achieve Air Force and DoD set CRM Program goals and objectives.



Pristine lands at a 7,000 foot elevation in north NTTR. The Kawich Range was the traditional homeland of Chief Kawich's Band of Shoshone peoples. His decedents return to this range to conduct pine cone gathering activities and are shown I two NAFB produced pine nut gathering videos.

The CRM Program consults with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), consults and coordinates with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), manages the Native American Program and works with representatives of Native American tribes having an ethnographic association to NAFB, and provides educational and public outreach initiatives. The NAFB CRM Program also creates historical and culturally appropriate videos on the cultural and historical resources on NAFB and the NTTR.



Paiute and Shoshone conduct traditional forest management practices. NAFB and State Historic Preservation Office personnel also participated. These events help build tribal agency relationships and cultural knowledge and appreciation.

A key component of the CRM Program is the NAFB Native American Program (NAP). The NAFB NAP is the largest and most complex in the Air Force with active representatives from 17 different tribes spanning four states (AZ, CA, NV, and UT). NAFB has successfully established cooperative working relationships with each tribe and created an environment where historically antagonistic tribes (e.g., the Western Shoshone and Southern Paiute) set aside their differences to achieve common objectives. The program uses a Tribal Document Review Committee, encourages tribal monitoring of compliance inventories, site monitoring, and condition document events, facilitates Traditional Cultural Practice Events, sponsors a Graduate Internship Program and a Future Leaders Program for tribal youth, supports a tribal Videography Program, and holds an annual Native American Meeting with the tribal chair persons and two representatives from each of the 17 participating tribes.



A Paiute Future Leader is shown respectfully addressing consultation meeting attendees. This outreach activity brings youth into the consultation process. It's benefits include great understanding of agency as well as tribal responsibilities and activities.

The NAFB CRM Program is executed by Ms. Lynn Wulf with support provided by the Air Force Civil Engineer Center at Lackland AFB, TX. Ms. Wulf is an archeologist employed by NAFB since 2009. She currently executes the NAFB CRM Program where she is leveraging public outreach initiatives to improve the existing databank and toolsets. Ms. Wulf holds a degree in History and is currently a doctoral candidate at Pacifica Graduate Institute where she is seeking a Doctor of Philosophy in Mythological Studies with emphasis in Depth Psychology.

The NAFB Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan (ICRMP) was initially developed by Mr. Myhrer and Ms. Wulf with input from various stakeholders to include installation and range personnel, tribal representatives, the Nevada SHPO, and representatives of the USFWS and BLM. The ICRMP was revised, reviewed, and approved in August 2012.

The NAFB ICRMP is uniquely formatted to be a comprehensive document that will easily fit into a briefcase or field pack. The 2012 ICRMP was modified to include a “Cultural Resources Report Format Template”. The template was developed to correct an identified disparity in the continuity and consistency of compliance inventory data. The new form will ensure future information is completely and consistently captured and will be used to develop future compliance inventory reports. The Nevada SHPO lauded the NAFB ICRMP as “an impressive work that will no doubt serve as a significant guide for the Air Force in the future”.

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NAFB is strongly committed to protecting the vast and unique cultural resources it oversees and has incorporated a “minimal impact” policy into its decision-making processes. For example, mission related expansions in the NTTR are made in zones known to contain minimal resources in order to preserve irreplaceable prehistoric, ethnohistoric, and historic archaeological sites. As a result, the NTTR is a pristine “outdoor museum and scientific laboratory” that is astoundingly superior to similar sites on surrounding public lands. The Cultural Resources Program at NAFB instills public and stakeholder confidence without hampering military objectives. Noteworthy successes for this award cycle are highlighted below.



Ethnohistoric Shoshone Burden Basket. One of ten known intact baskets on the NTTR. The presence of this basket and others indicates NAFB’s superior preservation and land stewardship.

Collaboration with Native American Document Review Committee

The Air Force award winning Cultural Resources program worked to obtain tribal approval of CRM reports through the Native American Document Review Committee (NADRC). A unique subprogram of the Native American Program, the NADRC is comprised of representatives from seven tribal nations who cooperatively review proposed projects and visit project areas. The NADRC facilitates confidence and trust, fast-tracks required approvals, and successfully ensures sensitive properties areas remain undisturbed. NAFB’s relationship with the NADRC brings immeasurable benefits not only to the installation’s Cultural Resources program but also to the Nellis mission. For example, the installation met a mission critical need for land and air space by obtaining NADRC consent and other required clearances for more than 5,000 acres of NAFB range lands.

The base’s historic preservation efforts continue to be laudable. The installation participated in the development of the Nevada SHPO Preservation Plan to map Nevada’s cultural emphasis over the next eight years. Additionally, publications and video documentaries on cultural and historical items of interest at NAFB and the NTTR were developed and distributed to state, private and federal agency offices, schools, special interest organizations, and private citizens.



Paiute videographer documenting NAFB Field event. One of the two original videographers, she initiated a tribal group to conduct in-home elder interviews. Utilizing her NAFB training and experience, she has now instructed six tribal members in videography.

Cultural Site Assessments and Studies

An assessment with tribal representatives and archaeologists of 349 cultural sites located on NAFB was accomplished this past year. Two previously unidentified resources, tonal rocks and ceremonial red dyed sticks common to the Shoshone and Southern Paiute peoples, not identified in archaeological records were discovered and documented, 48 sites were determined to be of cultural importance with further study required, and the remaining 301 sites were released for mission use. NAFB created a geomorphic model of the 9,000 foot Stonewall Mountain forest range to identify Paleolithic resources and assess the probability of finding intact cultural resources. The model will be used by archaeologists to develop inventory designs and conduct ethno-botanical evaluations.

NAFB completed the largest ethnography study ever conducted in the Great Basin. The installation gathered information that had been provided by more than 190 Native Americans, regional stakeholders, contractors, and various regulatory agencies. The study resulted in the production of 30 videos containing interviews with tribal people, capturing traditional practices to include food gathering and preparation, story-telling, songs, healing herbs, and sharing archaeological knowledge on tribal connections to NAFB.

The base CRM program also completed a Fossil and Paleontology Survey of the entire NTTR, the only study of its kind in the Great Basin, and published 23 full-color geology/GIS maps with the fossil types found in each mountain and valley. The installation's Cultural Resources Program Manager presented findings at the Ninth International Conference on Military Geology, and wrote articles published in several professional journals (e.g., Paleowetlands in Stonewall Flat, CATENA journal, Maturity of Alluvial Fan Surfaces Relating to Botanical Communities They Host, Earth Surface Processes and Landforms). The survey also generated a time-based GIS model.

The installation conducted researched and compiled anecdotal information and archived documents to compile information on military training given at NAFB, the NTTR, and Creech AFB, NV. The final document containing more than 120 historic photographs and crew member interviews was published and distributed throughout Southern Nevada and used as source material to produce a WWII crash video. This effort enhanced public interest and military service pride. Additionally, as part of its outreach program, the installation created a 2012 calendar featuring pristine views on the NTTR and distributed it to Veterans Administration hospitals, schools, military facilities, and city and state governments. Other surveys of historic or culturally significant sites include an inventory of World War II and Cold War structures and collections, including the Cold War Era Thunderbird Hangar, for potential listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Community Outreach

Leveraging on the positive relations built with the tribal communities tied to NAFB and information from the ethnography study, NAFB compiled 700 pages of previously un-captured information on tribal traditions and practices known only to tribe members. Informed Consent" (IC) was used for the first time among ethnographers working in Southern Nevada. This provided USAF coveted culturally sensitive information which may be shared with researchers, academics, and data seeking agency personnel. NAFB sponsored eight intergenerational site visits to 90 members from 15 tribes. The visits gave these families – grandparents, sons, daughters and grandchildren – a rare and unique opportunity to return to lands closed to the public. In addition to strengthening tribal relations, the 26,000 digital photographs and 10 terabytes of HD video housed at NAFB are an invaluable information gem.



Paiute Elder and Son Videographer team interview Shoshone NAFB Future Leader (Foreground). Shoshone Videographer family interviewing oldest living Western Shoshone in region (Background). CRM Program multi-generational events help to increase participation and build NAFB tribal support network.

NAFB contributes to its surrounding community in other ways. The Nellis-led “Future Leaders Program” allows selected tribal youth to attend, participate in, and document leadership meetings, attend field and training events, and create cultural videos and documents to be used in NAFB projects and products.

The Graduate Intern Program allows participants to study anthropology, archaeology, film studies, and ethnobotany. Established in 2010, the program has grown from 1 to 7 interns. The effectiveness of the program is clear as one student has completed a Masters of Arts in Anthropology through work conducted on NTTR, and another has produced a video, “The Students of Stonewall”, that has received favorable attention on social media.

The Native American Videographer Program employs Tribal videographers to create videos for NAFB while utilizing skills for their tribe. Initiated in 2010, the program has grown from two to 15 Tribal videographers and created additional learning opportunities through The Tribal Language Group, which teaches video language skills, and the Heritage Practice Group, which are classes given to tribal members by NAFB videographers. The group has created 14 video’s depicting the cultural practices of the Southern Paiute and Shoshone Tribe. These videos are unique in that Native Americans were used to interview Native Americans to successfully open communication and facilitate information sharing.