

2013 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD NOMINEE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION – INDIVIDUAL
U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION OCEANA
MICHAEL F. WRIGHT

NARRATIVE

BACKGROUND:

Michael Farrell Wright is a Natural Resources Specialist, who has been designated the installation level Natural Resources Manager and Team Leader. She is employed by NAVFAC MIDLANT, and is assigned to the NAS Oceana Public Works Department.

POSITION DESCRIPTION:

Michael Wright is a Natural Resources Specialist (NRS) who directly oversees the management and implementation of 3 Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans (INRMPs) covering 4 primary naval properties under two separate Commands: NAS Oceana (NASO), NASO Dam Neck Annex (DNA), Naval Auxiliary Landing Field Fentress (NALFF), and Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads Northwest Annex (NSAHR NWA). She provides direct leadership to the Region's only conservation law enforcement officer, a biological science technician, several student hires, and a multitude of volunteers. She provides technical oversight and guidance with regards to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) NR reviews for her primary areas of responsibility and additional properties under the NASO Public Works department's purview, such as: Navy Dare County Bombing Range (NDCBR); 7 Naval Operational Support Centers (NOSCs) located in VA, NC, and WV; and several other special use assets in VA and NC.

Mrs. Wright's major routine duties and responsibilities include: implementing, updating, and managing 3 INRMP's under two different commands; acting as the local technical expert on all Natural Resources related subjects (~18 different program areas); training local and regional support personnel on surveying techniques; briefing the command on natural resources concerns and how the natural resources program can assist the military mission; communicating and coordinating with local, state, and federal regulators/agencies; budgeting and obtaining funding for natural resources projects; scheduling, obtaining, managing and coordinating support personnel (1 biological science techs, 1 conservation law-enforcement officer, 50+ volunteers annually, 2-4 interns/student-hires, etc.); preparing award and grant applications (i.e. CESU Agreements, National Public Lands Day Legacy Funding, Tree City USA Awards, requesting Agricultural Outlease or Forestry Reserves Funding); conducting NEPA reviews of all proposed projects for potential Natural Resources Impacts and working with planning and the requesting activities to avoid and minimize potential impacts; coordinating with regulators and regional NR staff in preparing and obtaining required permits to accomplish the military mission; conducting education and outreach initiatives as time allows; providing safety briefings to support personnel working under the NR program; and ensuring that all support personnel working under the NR program have obtained all necessary training (technical and safety) to adequately and safely accomplish the mission.

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Mrs. Wright provided assistance to any US Department of Defense (DoD) facility, primarily in the state of Virginia, related to bird management as part of her duties as a DoD Partners in Flight (PIF) representative. As part of her duties as a DoD PIF representative she reviewed and provided feedback on all DoD Legacy Project proposals related to birds in FY12 and 13. She also provided updated bird related information as it became available to her maintained list of installation Natural Resources points of contacts in the State of VA.
- Mrs. Wright provided assistance to any DoD facility, nationwide, related to Bird/Animal Aircraft Strike Hazards (BASH) as part of her duties as a National Military Fish & Wildlife Agency (NMFWA) BASH working group co-chair. Mrs. Wright was nominated and awarded this co-chair position in FY12.
- Mrs. Wright actively pursued and participated in multiple partnerships with such groups as the US Fish & Wildlife Service, State and Local Governments, Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit Participants, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, Chesapeake Bay Program, VA Army National Guard, etc. An example of how her initiative to participate with these organizations has benefited the military mission is how she enhanced Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration project coordination and submissions and subsequent awards. She provided much needed technical expertise, advising on which parcels could provide the best benefits to conservation initiatives within various watersheds; what could be done to a parcel to enhance its conservation value; what should not be allowed on the land to avoid Bird/Animal Strike Hazards; and which parcels may have potential for the Navy to obtain or create conservation banking credit opportunities. With wild lands being developed it leaves the installations as the only “undeveloped” places for many wildlife species to inhabit. As species arrive to the installations and as species keep being added to the Endangered Species Act list, installations are vulnerable to restrictions being placed on them due to protected species impacts. Identifying, and when able, obtaining conservation banking credits is prudent to ensuring existing and future military missions and required new construction can continue on schedule. Obtaining restrictive easements or other property types in support of other mission requirements such as airfield safety zones and communication frequency zones and creating a situation where conservation banking credits could be obtained is also a cost savings measure to DoD.
- In FY12 Mrs. Wright worked to obtain funding for and coordinated the award or implementation of over 38 Natural Resources Projects, obligating \$1,827,286.53 dollars; and in FY13 she did the same and awarded or implemented 41 projects, obligating \$460,189.25. This was made possible by Mrs. Wright’s ability to identify needed INRMP requirements and take the initiative to get those action items completed. Mrs. Wright coordinated with NAVFAC MIDLANT and LANT Natural Resources and Acquisition’s staff as well as State and Federal agency partners, installation tenants, installation commands, volunteers, and contractors to award and implement many of these projects. In FY13 she also completed the POM16 budgeting cycle identifying needs and requirements for 3 INRMPs from 2016 to 2020. The template she created for preparing project cost estimates and justifications has been recommended and provided to other installations in the Navy as a model exhibition.
- In FY 12, Mrs. Wright worked to award a project to identify Threatened and Endangered Species and Vegetation Communities of concern on NASO, NALFF, and NSAHR NWA. It had been 10 years since the last inventory for NASO and NALFF and it had been anywhere from 9 to 19 years depending on the species being inventoried at NSAHR NWA. None of the previous inventories were fully comprehensive. The field efforts from these comprehensive

projects resulted in the identification of several State listed species of concern and one species proposed for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. In FY13 the Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), proposed for federal listing, was found on NSAHR NWA (see photo 130730-N-SA818-001). This was the 1st documentation of this species on the installation and it appeared to be part of an undocumented healthy population of the species. This information was submitted to USFWS to aide in their determination of whether this species warrants federal protection.

- Mrs. Wright manages and oversees Dune Restoration and Stabilization projects at NASO DNA. In FY12 and FY13 she organized over 150 volunteers to assist with habitat restoration and shore infrastructure protection activities at NASO DNA. During multiple dune restoration events these volunteers, CESU partners, and NR team members planted over 60,000 plants by hand, installed over 2 miles of dune fencing, and recycled over 2,500 Christmas trees (see photo 130109-N-SA818-001). In 2012 she applied for and received a National Public Lands Day Legacy Funds Award to aide with the implementation of her volunteer based dune restoration events. Maintaining, stabilizing and enhancing the dunes at NASO DNA are integral to supporting the military mission at this installation as these narrow dune systems are the only things protecting the training facilities from the intrusion of the Atlantic Ocean. In FY12 and FY13 she coordinated a project to map and evaluate the primary and secondary dunes on the installation. As part of that effort she coordinated with the NAVFAC MIDLANT Coastal Zone media manager and VA Marine Resources Commission points of contacts to ensure the contractors properly mapped and characterized these resources. During a site visit the VMRC representative said the dunes at NASO DNA were likely one of the best, if not the best, examples of successful dune restoration management they had seen.
- In FY12 and FY13, she prepared and submitted packages nominating all 3 properties with INRMPs for awards related to Urban Forest Management. All 3 bases were awarded Arbor Day Foundation Tree City USA awards in FY12 and FY13. Mrs. Wright coordinated Arbor/Earth Day education and outreach events at each installation providing an educational lesson to anyone who attended (see photo 120423-N-SA818-001). She enlisted the support of the local Child Development Center Children to assist with planting a ceremonial native tree at each installation.
- In FY12, she responded to Virginia's 1st federally endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) nest located on NASO DNA. This was the 1st Kemp's ridley sea turtle to nest in VA and the most northern known location of a nesting Kemp's ridley sea turtle in North America. The nest was deemed successful with a total of 84 eggs, of which 72 hatched. Mrs. Wright coordinated with US Fish and Wildlife Services, VA Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, and the VA Aquarium and Marine Science Center and organized over 20 volunteers and staff to protect the nest and sit with the nest over night when it came time for the nest to hatch. Mrs. Wright developed the installation's 1st nest sitting protocol manual, which has been shared with other installations in the area. See photos 120824-N-SA818-001 and 120824-N-SA818-002.
- In FY13, she partnered with VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to help them complete their 1st aerial survey for Feral Hogs in SE Virginia. She provided her technical expertise and was also able to obtain a survey over Navy property at no cost to the Navy, except her time.
- Mrs. Wright was instrumental in continuing and expanding conservation work related to the State Endangered Canebrake rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*, coastal plain population). Work continued at NSAHR Northwest Annex, where University students, State, and Navy staff

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participated in snake round-ups and laboratory operations (see photo 131123-N-SA818-001). Mrs. Wright enlisted the support of NAVFAC LANT and partnered with VA Department of Game & Inland Fisheries personnel to expand conservation work related to these species to NALFF.

- In 2013, mass dolphin/porpoise strandings occurred due to a measles outbreak in the dolphin population in the Mid-Atlantic region. Michael Wright orchestrated her team and implemented an enhanced reporting process to ensure timely responses to stranded dolphins. Typically, in a given year the Natural Resources team may respond to up to 3 dolphin strandings. In 2013 the team responded to over 13 strandings over a 2 month period. (see photo 130826-N-SA818-001)
- Mrs. Wright programmed and was able to get awarded several fish species of concern (particularly catadromous and anadromous species) inventories and habitat assessments at multiple installations in FY12 and FY13. The results of these studies are being used to better understand species distribution, health, and habitat utilization within the watershed. She participated and partnered with VA Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, and enlisted the services of contractors and NAVFAC MIDLANT and LANT staff to accomplish these projects. (see photo 130320-N-SA818-001)
- Mrs. Wright is an active member of and helps to maintain a good professional working environment on the NASO/NALFF Bird/Animal Aircraft Strike Hazard Working Group. She helps coordinate the acquisition of required permits, she reviews plans and proposals and provides feedback related to BASH concerns. She notifies her USDA, AirOps, other appropriate PWD representatives, etc. when she has identified a potential BASH concerns. She makes every attempt to provide sound resolutions to BASH concerns. She oversees the submittal of BASH samples to the Smithsonian and maintains the most up to date database on strike records for the installation.
- In FY12 and FY13 Mrs. Wright coordinated and hosted the annual INRMP Metrics Agency face to face meetings for all installations in southeast VA, Hampton Roads area. She partnered with representatives from Region 5 USFWS, Region 4 USFWS, VA Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, NOAA-National Marine Fisheries Service, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.
- In FY2013 Mrs. Wright became a Navy Representative on the Lake Christine Watershed partnership, where they are working to increase water quality and wildlife habitat within this watershed. She and other Navy representatives is partnering with the VA Army National Guard, the City of Virginia Beach, the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center, and the Citizens of Croatan (a neighborhood community in Va Beach, VA).
- Mrs. Wright's efforts in providing Natural Resources services to her assigned installations and to the region in general were awarded with her promotion to the next GS level in September of 2012. She has received monetary awards for superior and role model efforts in accomplishing her job duties. She repeatedly has scored above average on all of her annual appraisals. She received the NASO Command Recognition Award-Coin and has received several tenant command letters of appreciate for her support in aiding their programs.