



2017 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation Award

Each year since 1962, the Department of Defense (DoD) has honored installations, teams, and individuals for outstanding conservation achievements, innovative environmental practices, and partnerships that improve quality of life and promote efficiencies without compromising mission success. The 2017 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards cycle encompasses an achievement period from October 1, 2014, through September 30, 2016 (Fiscal Years (FY) 2015-2016). A diverse panel of 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 that cover six subject areas: natural resources conservation; environmental quality; sustainability; environmental restoration; cultural resources management; and environmental excellence in weapon system acquisition.

About the Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation Award

The Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation award recognizes efforts by large installations 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 endangered plant and animal species on our installations and other DoD lands 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 2017 winner of the Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation award is *Camp Ripley, Minnesota Army National Guard*.

About Camp Ripley, Minnesota Army National Guard

Camp Ripley is the largest training center for the Minnesota Army National Guard (MNARNG). Its 53,000 acres are home to abundant natural resources and provide critical training to support readiness not only for MNARNG, but also for the entire northern Midwest region. Camp Ripley is home to 665 plant, 203 bird, and 51 mammal species; incredible habitat diversity; and 18 miles of Mississippi River frontage. In addition, the installation is home to 88 species that require special conservation measures to halt significant population declines. The installation's Natural Resources Conservation (NRC) program supports the training mission and has a long record of excellence, distinguished by commitment to the Army's Triple Bottom Line: Mission, Environment, and Community. With a comprehensive approach to wildlife, land management, forestry, encroachment protection, and community outreach and partnerships, Camp Ripley balances an NRC program that supports the operational needs of over 365,000 annual man-days of training and employment of 850 full-time employees.



Working with the National Eagle Center, Camp Ripley Natural Resources Conservation staff began participating in the Golden Eagle Project to better understand the bird's habitat and prey needs, and its breeding and migration habits. Once a golden eagle was observed feeding regularly at one of the installation's bait stations, a capture and release project was implemented in 2015.

Major Accomplishments in FY 2015-2016

- Camp Ripley successfully implemented the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program through cooperative agreements and partnerships. The ACUB program allows commands to partner with eligible entities to restrict access to buffer areas adjacent to the installation to protect training and operations. For example, in FY 2015, Camp Ripley partnered with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to complete 39 ACUB land transactions totaling 3,457 acres at no cost to MNARNG. Though the ACUB program is primarily funded by DoD, BWSR staff were able to secure \$1,200,000 in state funding in FY 2015 to support ACUB acquisitions.
- The installation built upon its expertise with the ACUB program to launch the Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape program. This Sentinel Landscape program will engage other Federal and state agencies in joint conservation and habitat preservation goals on a regional level to simultaneously protect the mission and the land. Through the Sentinel Landscape program, MNARNG can more effectively compete for Federal funding outside of DoD to yield a higher return on investment for installation conservation projects.
- The NRC program coordinated with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Audubon Minnesota, and Central Lakes College to use a solar-powered satellite backpack transmitter to track "Ripley," a golden eagle, on her migration of 1,800 miles north to the Arctic Circle and back to the installation. Tagging and tracking this species, which is protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, helps the installation to better understand the bird's habitat, breeding and migration habits, thereby improving species management and sustaining the military mission. Local schools integrated this and other radio tracking efforts into their curricula to encourage conservation awareness and education.
- Proactively responding to the northern long-eared bat listing as a federally threatened species, NRC program staff launched studies in FY 2015 to learn about the bat's maternity roosts and habitat requirements. The goal of the studies was to combat widespread bat population declines that can greatly restrict mission readiness. Using radio telemetry transmitters, NRC staff were able to identify colonies on post and determine 73 unique roost locations so the installation could protect those sites and avoid costly delays and workarounds.
- Camp Ripley conducted emergence surveys to confirm specific trees on base that female bats selected for roosting. In FY 2015, staff completed 76 emergence surveys using a combination of telemetry data and acoustic detectors. In FY 2016, NRC staff used military-grade night-vision equipment to dramatically improve the accuracy of the emergence survey count. These surveys helped to identify tree species that female bats preferred for roosting so the installation could protect those tree species and avoid potential mission impediments.



Radio telemetry collars have allowed Natural Resources Conservation staff to track wolves on Camp Ripley. Staff partnered with local schools to help purchase radio collars with classes "adopting" particular wolves. Local teachers have used grant funding to participate in the project and track their animals' movements. The telemetry data has shown that buffer areas are particularly beneficial to the wolves that reside on and adjacent to Camp Ripley.



Hoping to identify as many maternity colonies on post as possible, Natural Resources Conservation staff attached 35 transmitters to female bats. Staff then tracked the bats daily to their roosts until the transmitters fell off or the signal was lost. Individual bat tracking lasted six to seven days on average helping staff learn how to best manage the species.