

How Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Aligns with SECDEF and Military Readiness Priorities



In his “Message to the Force” and subsequent Pentagon town hall meetings, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth emphasized a renewed focus on warrior ethos, lethality, and mission readiness — paired with a commitment to restoring trust in the military and supporting warfighters and their families.

Military installations play a vital role in preserving the Chesapeake Bay’s natural resources, which, in turn, supports operational success and quality of life for service members. This fact sheet explores how U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) installations are advancing Secretary Hegseth’s priorities through strategic conservation, ecosystem management, water protection, and community engagement.

Conserved Lands

The DoD manages approximately 400,000 acres of its own land for national security and international defense, making it the largest federal manager of developed land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Sikes Act and installation Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans ensure the protection of installation natural resources. The DoD uses its undeveloped natural landscapes to conduct realistic live-fire training, weapon system testing, and essential operations. One of the Army’s mantras is “we train as we fight”; for them, the natural landscapes of the Chesapeake Bay watershed may be a good surrogate for future battlefields in forests, bogs, farms, and beaches.



Fort A.P. Hill REPI easement
(Photo credit: Andrew Satterwhite, Fort A.P. Hill)

In addition, inappropriate land uses outside installations can negatively affect military operations, so conserving land around military installations is often another essential component of mission assurance. To address this, the DoD aligns Chesapeake Bay

Watershed Agreement goals for Conserved Lands with the implementation of the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) and Sentinel Landscapes Partnership Programs.

The REPI Program protects military missions by preventing inappropriate development, avoiding encroachment and land-use conflicts near installations, and addressing regulatory restrictions that could inhibit military operations.

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership brings together federal agencies, state and local governments, and private organizations to promote sustainable land use practices around installations and ranges, with a broader regional vision.

Both programs work with federal and non-federal partners to leverage assets, secure real estate interests, and cut operational costs, while ensuring compatible adjacent land uses. These measures can include conserving land to prevent encroachments, implementing groundwater recharge projects or purchasing conservation easements to protect crucial drinking water supplies, protecting wetlands for flood and erosion control, or conserving or re-establishing vegetation and investing in natural and nature-based erosion control structures for installation resilience.





Abundant Life

Abundant natural resources, including trees, grasslands, streams, wetlands and the birds, fish, and wildlife they support, are all critical to sustaining local lethality and mission preparedness. As mentioned previously, natural environments provide diverse training, testing, and operational settings that prepare warfighters for global deployment. They also complement built strategies and reduce the impact of threat multipliers, like extreme heat, drought, wildfire, flooding, sea level rise, and other hazards to operational success.

The DoD safeguards its natural landscapes to protect or restore threatened or endangered species habitat to prevent regulatory constraints on military operations. Healthy natural resources also provide recreational, educational, and spiritual benefits which improve the quality of life for service members and their families.

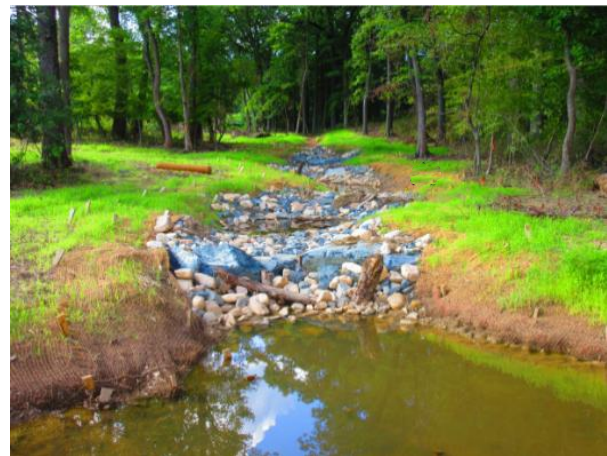


*Joint Base Langley-Eustis (Langley) wetland restoration
(Photo credit: Kevin Du Bois, DoD Chesapeake Bay Program)*

Clean Water

The strategic management of stormwater reduces threats to critical assets and mission readiness by preventing flooding and soil erosion, providing infiltration and groundwater recharge, protecting wetlands, preventing drought, and preserving the availability of clean and safe drinking water to support warfighter health and wellness to maximize locally driven lethality.

Military installations install stormwater best management practices to mitigate nutrient and sediment pollutants in runoff to comply with municipal separate storm sewer system regulations, meet water quality Federal Planning Goals, and prevent regulatory constraints on military operations.



*Fort Meade stream restoration project
(Photo credit: Mitch Keller, Fort Meade)*

Reducing nutrient and sediment pollution and toxic contaminants in local waters also protects Chesapeake Bay living resources to provide abundant recreational opportunities and safe consumption of fish, crabs, and waterfowl.





Engaged Communities

Warfighters, DoD civilians, and their families rely on the Chesapeake Bay’s lands and waterways for recreation, fitness, and overall quality of life. To protect and promote stewardship of these valuable



*Naval Air Station Oceana Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) event
(Photo credit: Kevin Du Bois, DoD CBP)*

resources, installation staff host in-person and virtual events that engage military personnel and their families, DoD employees, public school students, and defense communities. These efforts align with the stewardship objectives outlined in the Sikes Act, Clean Water Act, and Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

DoD environmental education and outreach initiatives foster a shared commitment to restoration and protection, building strong relationships with surrounding communities to promote mutual understanding, reduce conflicts, and encourage collaboration on shared interests. This collaboration builds trust and helps the military address community concerns about noise, safety, and environmental impacts, while maintaining operational readiness.

Conclusion

The DoD Chesapeake Bay Program and its installation partners use their subject matter expertise to improve on- and off-base natural resources in support of multiple installation readiness objectives and provide valuable ecosystem services for defense communities. Their collaborative efforts enhance the quality of life for military service members, civilians, and their families, helping ensure that warfighters remain mission-focused, committed to duty, and ready to deploy as needed.

