

DoD and National Public Lands Day & Park Rx Day

Background

[National Public Lands Day](#) (NPLD) is the nation's largest, single day volunteer effort for public lands. In past years, upwards of 200,000 Americans came together on the fourth Saturday of September to volunteer their time to improve parks, refuges, local waterways, recreation areas, trails, community gardens, and historical sites. The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) has been coordinating NPLD events across the country with federal, state, and private partners since the event began in 1994. Through NPLD, NEEF works to connect people to the public lands in their community, inspire environmental stewardship, and encourage use of public lands for education, recreation, and general health.



Volunteers at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek restore and stabilize dunes in 2016.

DoD Involvement

DoD joined the NPLD partnership in 1999. Through the Legacy Resource Management Program (Legacy Program), DoD provides funding to support natural and cultural resources projects on military installations. Since 1999, DoD has awarded approximately \$3.2 million to fund more than 585 NPLD projects that have directly benefited military lands throughout the United States.

Objective

NEEF's goal through NPLD is to bring together those who use public lands for recreation with those who care for these lands. NPLD educates Americans about the need for shared stewardship of our valued, irreplaceable natural and cultural resources.

Benefit

Natural and Cultural Resources

NPLD projects enable volunteers to enhance and conserve cultural and natural resources on installations, including manmade assets. For example, Legacy

Program funding can be used for small maintenance, repair, or rehabilitation projects, or installation of signage, benches, and other improvements for historic structures, visitor centers, cemeteries, and trails.



Air Force personnel and NPLD volunteers convert rock beds to pollinator gardens at Maelstrom AFB in 2015.

Partnerships

NPLD builds partnerships between the public sector and local communities based upon mutual interests in the enhancement and restoration of America's public lands. DoD's Natural and Cultural Resources Programs partner with NEEF to support NPLD projects. From 2012 to 2019, 8,121 volunteers contributed a total of 34,367 hours to improve military installation sites.



Outreach

NPLD provides an opportunity for the military to strengthen its relationship on base and with the local community. By inviting military personnel, their families, and the local community to participate in NPLD projects on installations, all of them can learn about the lands and their elements, and understand the unique challenges surrounding natural and cultural resources management on DoD installations.

DoD Installations

Participating in NPLD provides natural and cultural resources managers an opportunity to complete small installation-specific projects that, due to resource constraints, might not otherwise take place. Past projects included removing invasive species, planting native trees and pollinator gardens, cleaning up trash, building or maintaining trails or park areas, installing interpretive signage, providing secure and stabilized access paths for recreational and interpretive purposes, and installing or repairing site boundary fencing and edging. Collectively, these efforts help keep installation areas suitable and available for their intended purposes, and often reduce the need for future more intensive and expensive management efforts. More importantly, NPLD provides an opportunity for the on-base and surrounding communities to better understand the unique challenges surrounding natural and cultural resources management on active military installations.



Over several workdays in 2016, volunteers rehabilitated Bellows Air Force Station's Native Hawaiian burial vault.



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NPLD Project Selection

Through a competitive proposal process, NEEF awards Legacy Program funds for service projects at approximately 15 to 25 military installation sites across the nation each year. To be eligible for DoD NPLD funding, installations must have some lands open to the public for recreation. Volunteer-based projects emphasize habitat restoration, and preservation and interpretation of historic properties and cultural sites. Funds have been used for equipment, materials, and supplies. Information and application instructions are available on NEEF's website: [NPLD DoD Awards](#). Applications are due every summer.



At Fort Bragg, volunteers removed invasive plants and installed pollinator beds.

Park Rx Day

The new [Park Rx Day](#) encourages everyone to consider visits to parks and public lands as important contributors to health and wellness. Park Rx Day, which takes place on the last Sunday in April, was designed in collaboration with health and community partners that use parks, trails, and public lands to improve individual and community health.

Much like NPLD, NEEF is offering Legacy Program-funded opportunities for military installations to participate in the new DoD Park Rx Day events. Eligible projects encompass guiding principles of the Legacy Program, safeguarding and enhancing natural and cultural resources. In addition, projects will engage servicemembers, their families, retirees, and veterans in educational activities that promote safety and occupational health; physical, social, and emotional health; and environmental health. DoD Park Rx Day events will provide opportunities for military personnel and their families to lead installation-specific preservation efforts, increase outdoor physical activity, and build camaraderie with one another while also building relationships with the community.

Fall 2020/Spring 2021 Summary

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, NPLD and Park Rx Day events took place or are scheduled to take place through calendar year 2020 and into 2021. NEEF provided about \$150,000 in DoD funds to support [15 projects for NPLD 2020](#) and [six projects for Park Rx Day 2020](#) on military installations. Following are a few highlights from recent DoD NPLD efforts:

- **Bellows Air Force Station (2017)**: volunteers cleared invasive plants and out-planted native Hawaiian flora on the wetland perimeter of Pu'ewai wetlands and the adjacent Hawaiian burial vault.
- **Fort Bragg (2018)**: volunteers installed over 400 native trees and shrubs in a migratory bird sanctuary, which helped to mitigate damages from Hurricanes Florence and Michael.
- **Hurlburt Field (2019)**: volunteers fixed boardwalks, trimmed vegetation, picked up garbage, and replaced picnic tables to keep the Grace Brown Natural Trail safe and enjoyable for recreation, thus achieving several INRMP goals such as outdoor recreation, volunteerism, and wildlife conservation.
- **Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Hawaii (2020)**: volunteers will recreate a traditional architectural structure that once served the caretaker of the fishpond. This structure will be repurposed as a space for traditional healing practices of land, spirit, and body, transforming one of the few national lands on Pearl Harbor accessible to the general public, service members, and their families into an active sanctuary for the cultivation of peace, healing, and connection to nature.

For 2021, DoD is asking our applicants to **think creatively!** How can NPLD help DoD Natural and Cultural Resources Managers work more effectively due to restrictions and impacts from COVID-19? We seek proposals that enhance broader strategic or programmatic objectives, **particularly for cultural resources.**

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