



## State-wide Conservation Forums to Facilitate Cooperative Conservation

# 6-331

### Background:

Conservation forums are inclusive regional gatherings of diverse organizations focused on land and natural resource conservation as a mutual interest. They are led by a State agency or non-governmental organization, and open to all interested Federal and State agencies, and non-governmental organizations and individuals. The forums can mature into partnerships with formalized charters agreed to by all participants to outline their purpose and govern activities. Conservation forums have launched successful partnerships in North Carolina, South Carolina, California, and Hawaii.

Military installations have a keen interest in working with other agencies and regional conservation organizations to ensure that surrounding land uses remain compatible with military training activities and operations. Ensuring compatible land uses around military installations ensures the long-term sustainability of the mission by securing training capacity and flexibility now and in perpetuity. Conservation forums serve as the conduit for initiating conversations with stakeholders and engaging in long-term partnerships required to achieve compatible land uses that benefit the mission, environment and the community. Virginia has significant military assets with activities and operations that cannot be duplicated at other locations, and significant potential for increased mission requirements. Without immediate coordination of conservation efforts, access, capability and capacity at these military installations can be constrained or even permanently lost. Virginia is also at critical juncture with individual conservation efforts and a state-wide goal to conserve 400,000 acres of land by 2010. An investment now at the state level to coordinate conservation activities will provide the necessary impetus to activate a sustained effort towards cooperative conservation and sustainability and support enduring military installations.

### Objective:

This DoD Legacy project aimed to initiate a conservation forum at the state-wide level in Virginia. This forum included an educational component to provide community and installation outreach, and explained the DoD and Service-specific processes for compatible land use planning and how it can support the Governor's land conservation initiative and objectives. Finally, the forum's goal was to lead official agreements at the state level to coordinate future regional cooperative conservation partnerships in the Potomac and York River watersheds.

### Summary of Approach:

The project began with selection of forum participants based on each stakeholder's ability to contribute to the event and the potential for long term partnership opportunities with the military. Once confirmed, participants were sent a brochure with meeting agenda, directions and purpose of the meeting. During the meeting, high-level military and state officials, and NGOs provided background on recent success stories. Then meeting participants divided into three small groups by region, consisting of the Northern, Tidewater, and South-central Virginia regions. Small groups allowed for effective close dialogue among state, regional, and military stakeholders whose common interests toward long-term partnerships can help achieve the state's land conservation goal. Each region identified common goals, tools, and actions required to establish long-term partnerships and land conservation initiatives on military and non-military properties. Each realized there are overlapping objectives, and further regional meetings can assist in articulating areas of interest for future partnering.

### Benefit:

Virginia has significant military locations for all Services, and increased activities as a result of base realignment and closure. Associated realignments will increase joint training and testing requirements and the need for coordination among and between Services and with other agencies and conservation organizations. The forum included an educational component that allowed state agencies and local conservation organizations to explain objectives and focus areas, and provided an overview of Department of Defense (DoD) and Service-specific processes to address encroachment with compatible land use planning. The forum has set the stage for enabling partners to coordinate partnerships. For OSD, the forum has outlined the following specific actions and recommendations that can be taken to ensure long term partnerships with Virginia stakeholders.

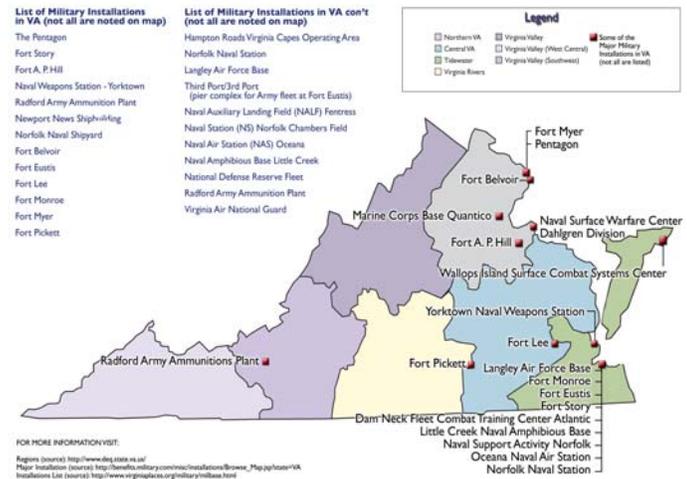
- ◆ Establish a mechanism for continued communication among forum participants regarding future events, common objectives, and opportunities, with links to existing systems and partnership networks.

- ◆ Identify specific opportunities for partnerships in the South-central, Northern Virginia, and Tidewater regions, including military locations for all Services not in attendance (see Figure 1. Locations of Installations in Virginia).

- ◆ Add an additional overlay of DoD areas of concern to the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation geographic information system to identify common priority areas where the DoD could partner with the state and other partners to preserve them.

- ◆ Continue state and DoD cooperation to ensure that national security considerations are included in criteria for land conservation priorities and funding.

Figure 1. Locations of Installations



**Accomplishments:**

Commitments were made by the forum attendees for three follow-on regional forums to explore specific conservation partnerships in the Northern Virginia area that includes Fort A.P. Hill, Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren, and Marine Corps Base Quantico; the south-central region that includes Fort Pickett; and the Tidewater region that includes Fort Eustis, Fort Story, Langley Air Force Base, and the Oceana Naval Air Station. These specific partnership meetings expect to explore details of regional compatible land use planning and encroachment and other factors that can affect the military’s ability to continue to execute training and testing requirements at facilities in Virginia. Further, state and federal officials agreed to continue dialogues at the policy level to determine other areas of coordination and partnership.

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