



SERPPAS Focus Area: Sentinel Landscapes in the Southeast

Increased population growth and development, inadequate planning and other incompatible land uses, threatens the ability of military installations to carry out their mission. In response to these growing challenges, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Defense (DoD), and the Interior established the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership as a nationwide collaboration dedicated to promoting conservation, working lands, and national defense readiness. The SERPPAS Sentinel Landscapes Work Group connects currently designated partnerships in the Southeast to address shared challenges, share lessons learned and promote the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership’s mission in the Southeast. The work group helps disseminate information to developing partnerships in the Southeast, and serves as a regional coordinating body between currently designated and future Sentinel Landscapes partnerships. The SERPPAS Sentinel Landscapes Work Group is comprised of representation from currently designated Sentinel Landscapes in the Southeast (FL, NC, GA) as well as proposed landscapes, who are working to become designated. The work group also has representation from the Federal Agencies that are part of the Federal Coordinating Committee (FCC), located in the Southeast Region.

Background

The USDA, DoD, and DOI established the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding in 2013. Agencies from the three Departments coordinate the Partnership at the national level through the Sentinel Landscapes Federal Coordination Committee (SL-FCC).

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership seeks to recognize and incentivize landowners within a designated landscape to maintain and manage land in ways that are compatible with and contribute to the nation’s defense mission. Where shared interests can be identified within a Landscape, the Partnership works to more effectively coordinate programs and services that

Mission Benefit

This SERPPAS focus area will benefit the military mission by (1) promoting compatible land uses near military installations and elsewhere they train/test; (2) strengthening the economies of forests and farms in such areas, (3) increasing coordination between the military services, local governments, and state and federal agencies, and (4) encouraging state interest and prioritization of resources supporting military installations and surrounding communities.

Sentinel Landscapes Partnership Milestones: 2015–2017

- ▶ In July 2016, the SL-FCC designated three Sentinel Landscapes, two of which were in the Southeast: Eastern North Carolina and Avon Park Air Force Range, Florida. The designation of these landscapes solidified the local partnerships in those areas, and allowed them to begin establishing and implementing their goals and objectives.
- ▶ In December 2016, the SL-FCC initiated its first, formal application process, issuing a call for applications from partnerships around the country that were interested in receiving the Sentinel Landscape designation.
- ▶ In June 2017, the first National Sentinel Landscapes Workshop was hosted by the SL-FCC in New Orleans, LA. The purpose of the workshop was to provide a forum to share best practices and lessons learned across the current Sentinel Landscapes and to allow representatives from the partner Federal agencies to respond to challenges that each Landscape faces. The workshop was intended to help form relationships and establish an on-going dialogue between the current Landscapes that will allow for the continued exchange of information and the further development of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.



Background (cont..)

promote habitat conservation and sustain working lands near military installations – land use activities that are compatible with the military’s testing and training. Since the initiation of the Partnership in 2013, the SL-FCC has designated seven locations across the United States as Sentinel Landscapes, including three in the Southeast: Avon Park Air Force Range (AFR) in Florida, Eastern North Carolina, and Georgia.

Given the emphasis placed on local partnerships, each Sentinel Landscape is unique in its priorities, engagement, and accomplishments. However, there are three core characteristics of a Sentinel Landscape as defined by the SL-FCC: A Sentinel Landscape must (1) be anchored by a military installation with a mission that benefits from compatible land-uses outside of its borders, (2) have defined boundaries associated with the anchor installation where Federal, state, local and private programs and efforts can be coordinated to support voluntary conservation and landowner involvement, (3) have articulated goals and outcomes that promote and sustain compatible land uses

- ▶ In December 2017, the FY2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) codified in statute the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, providing a clear mandate for the Partnership’s efforts and establishing a process for its management. The FY2018 NDAA also removed the expiration or “sunset” on the authority that enabled the use of Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program funds as non-federal match for USDA and DOI conservation programs, thereby providing this authority in perpetuity. Thanks to the removal of this expiration, USDA, DoD, and DOI may continue to directly leverage their funding to further collective goals, in Sentinel Landscapes and beyond.
- ▶ In December 2017, the SL-FCC designated the Georgia Sentinel Landscape which includes Fort Benning, Fort Stewart, Townsend Bombing Range, Robins Air Force Base, and Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay as anchor installations in the landscape. Landscape partners from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the military services, the State of Georgia, and a number of private conservation organizations have identified approximately 1.3 million acres as critical to important natural resources, working economies, and military readiness.
- ▶ In January 2018, the SL-FCC, through the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, released a request for proposals from the seven designated Sentinel Landscapes that would help provide the capacity they need to accelerate progress, leverage additional resources, and sustain each partnership’s efforts in the long run. Funds available through the capacity support program will enable designated Landscapes to hire staff or acquire resources that will help to coordinate partner activities, better align priorities, and further collective goals.

Southeast Landscape Accomplishments: 2015–2017

- ▶ In 2016, the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) awarded \$7,520,000 to Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina for the Southern Sentinel Landscapes Conservation project. In partnership with the US Endowment for Forestry and Communities, this project will protect and restore 17,500–21,500 acres of longleaf and other working forest habitats on private lands important for at-risk species. The goal of this multistate effort is to reduce the likelihood that target species will be listed under the Endangered Species Act and to demonstrate the compatibility of working lands management with at-risk species conservation.
- ▶ In 2016, the NRCS RCPP awarded \$3,750,000 to The Nature Conservancy in Florida for the Everglades Headwaters Longleaf Pine project. The project area encompasses 15,000 acres of longleaf as part of a mosaic of other habitats and agricultural uses. These habitats are an integral part of the “working watershed” of the Everglades by receiving, storing, filtering and slowly releasing rainfall to numerous creeks, and ultimately rivers, that flow toward Lake Okeechobee. This project will allow for continued productive agriculture (i.e., cattle grazing) and will help ensure the continued ecological integrity, function and promotion of water quality and quantity within this vital landscape and watershed, directly benefitting Avon Park AFR.
- ▶ In December 2016, the SERPPAS Sentinel Landscapes Work Group hosted the first regional meeting focused on the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership in Raleigh, NC. The purpose of the meeting was to seek input to develop a full suite of landowner benefits, services and incentives aligned with the goals of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, and identify ways to effectively increase landowner participation within such Landscapes. The result of this three-day workshop was developing a set of opportunity areas and recommendations for Federal, state, private, and local community action.



Background (cont..)

for military operations while providing tangible benefits to conservation and working lands within the defined Landscape.

- ▶ In January 2017, the SERPPAS Coordinator served as a liaison to partnerships around the Southeast interested in pursuing the application to become a designated Sentinel Landscape. The SERPPAS Coordinator was able to make connections with the partnerships that were forming in South Carolina, Florida and Georgia and included them in the SERPPAS Sentinel Landscapes Work Group to be part of the regional effort to advance the goals of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership across the region.
- ▶ In 2017, the NRCS RCPP awarded \$3,000,000 to Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina for the Sentinel Landscape At-Risk Species Conservation project. The Sentinel Landscape At-Risk Species Conservation project will protect and restore habitat that might preclude listing of the gopher tortoise in Georgia and accelerate recovery of the black pine snake and gopher tortoise in Mississippi. This is a continuation of two RCPP projects from 2015 and 2016 and continues land protection work around the state's major military bases.
- ▶ In April 2017, the Florida Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) successfully coordinated the first ever joint conservation easement template between the NRCS and Readiness and REPI Program. To develop the template, TNC's easement was merged with the NRCS minimum deed terms and subsequently, the joint TNC/NRCS easement was merged with REPI requirements. Federal funding from NRCS's RCPP and REPI will combine with state and local matching funds to protect approximately 1,600 acres within the Avon Park AFR Sentinel Landscape.
- ▶ In May 2017, The REPI Challenge was awarded to the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape. Under the leadership of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA), \$9.2 million will leverage \$10.1 million in partner contributions to help the Partnership make significant progress toward its goals. These include maintaining compatible land uses that enable military training and operations on installations while effectively considering landowner preferences; keeping private working lands in the tax base; and assisting private farmers and foresters to maintain their livelihoods, local wildlife habitats, and natural resources.
- ▶ In May 2017, the NC General Assembly passed Senate Bill 131 which included Section 2.12 establishing the North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee. In its work, the Committee shall develop and implement programs and strategies that (i) protect working lands in the vicinity of and where testing and training occur near or adjacent to major military installations or other areas of strategic benefit to national defense, (ii) address restrictions that inhibit military testing and training, and (iii) forestall incompatible development in the vicinity of and where testing and training occur near or adjacent to military installations or other areas of strategic benefit to national defense.
- ▶ In December 2017, the NCDA partnered with the US Army, US Air Force, US Marine Corps, and others to develop the North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes High Priority Protect Program (NCSLHPPP) for 2018. This project seeks to place agriculture conservation easements on high priority parcels that provide compatible use by both the military and agriculture. Selection of these properties is vital, not only for these industries, but also for the preservation and conservation of wildlife, natural resources, endangered species, and scenic beauty that is threatened by land use change.

Future Focus Area Objectives

The SERPPAS Sentinel Landscapes Work Group serves as a forum for the designated and proposed landscapes in the Southeast to connect, share and advance together. The work group has taken the recommendations that came out of both the regional and national Sentinel Landscapes meetings to assess where they can work to advance the efforts of these partnerships in the region. The objectives of the work group for 2018–2020 are as follows:



1. Develop a shareable composite mission footprint map of the Southeast to better understand the DoD priority areas across the region, and to identify where new Sentinel Landscapes Partnerships would be most valuable.
2. Focus on promoting private landowner interests and explore ways to increase the number and type of compatible land use tools to offer landowners to conserve working lands.
3. Leverage the 'Power of SERPPAS' to attract both financial and non-financial support to increase capacity for the implementation of Sentinel Landscapes designated in the Region.
4. Assess and integrate other SERPPAS focus area objectives into implementation strategies for Sentinel Landscapes in the region, to create more conservation opportunities that support the natural resource and military missions.
5. Use the SERPPAS network to share information, resources and lessons learned of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, as well as demonstrate the value and purpose of these partnerships.

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