

Central Florida Regional Planning Council Organizes Field Day at Avon Park Air Force Range

On January 28, 2020, local planners from the American Planning Association's (APA) Heart of Florida Section visited the Avon Park Air Force Range. Organized by the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), the visit allowed attendees to learn about the importance of the Range and its mission, environmental stewardship, public use opportunities, and the need to ensure compatible development surrounding the Range.

The Avon Park Air Force Range is the US Air Force's largest Primary Training Range east of the Mississippi River at approximately 106,000 acres. Attendees heard from Charles "Buck" MacLaughlin, the Range Operations Officer, who provided an overview of how the Range supports the training needs of visiting units, from Florida and beyond. Attendees learned about the site's history, the types of training that occurs, and the ongoing efforts to modernize the world class training experience offered.

Marisa Barmby, immediate past chair of the Heart of Florida Section of APA Florida, attended the event and stated, "As planners, we help inform decisions related to land use and today's visit has helped us understand the critical work that's happening at the Range, while giving us invaluable first-hand knowledge of the potential compatibility issues."

CFRPC staff Chad Allison discussed the Joint Land Use Study that examines the military training needs of the armed forces, and local land uses to determine compatibility. Attendees were also briefed on the Sentinel Landscape Partnership which coordinates the efforts of the US Departments of Agriculture, Defense, and Interior in support of private landowners to advance sustainable land management practices around military installations and ranges. The partnership connects private landowners with voluntary assistance programs that support defense, conservation, and agricultural missions.

Brent Bonner, the Range's Environmental Flight Chief, described the Range's programs that focus on natural resources, cultural resources, and overall compliance explaining how these are coordinated alongside active training. Highlights include the management of 12 federally listed threatened and endangered species, extensive water quality monitoring, hazardous waste management, and responsibility for 238 active archeological sites. Attendees learned about public use opportunities at the Range including hunting, fishing, and camping and were able to enjoy lunch at one of the Range's public campgrounds.

The day included a visit to a tactical training complex that includes mock villages and airfields as the complex offers training scenarios similar to what soldiers might encounter in a real-world situation. Attendees also had the opportunity to try night vision goggles, demonstrating the importance of dark-sky regulations.

With Florida's booming population and increasing development, these types of engagements help support public health, safety, and welfare alongside an active military, ensuring the needs of all Floridians are met in a successful and compatible way.



