

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING WITH MILITARY INSTALLATIONS



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDANCE

Military installations are critical infrastructure for national security, used for training grounds, weapons testing, depots, housing, medical care, logistics, and much more. Defense communities include towns, cities, and regions that host or support military installations and ranges. These communities share infrastructure, natural resources, and economic ties with nearby installations.

Military readiness depends upon the ability to conduct realistic live-fire training, weapons system testing, and essential operations vital to preparing a more lethal and resilient combat force. Conversion of natural and working lands that are compatible with military operations to commercial or residential development or other incompatible land uses near installations can restrict training and testing activities. In addition, natural hazards—such as storms, flooding, drought, wildfires, and extreme heat—can disrupt both communities and military missions, strengthening resilience is a shared priority.

This guidance provides best practices for working with military installations to assist defense communities and partners plan and implement projects that support both the military mission and community priorities. This guide was developed through a series of interviews to assess barriers to engagement and reviews from professionals within the military, Sentinel Landscape coordinators, and others that work closely with installations.

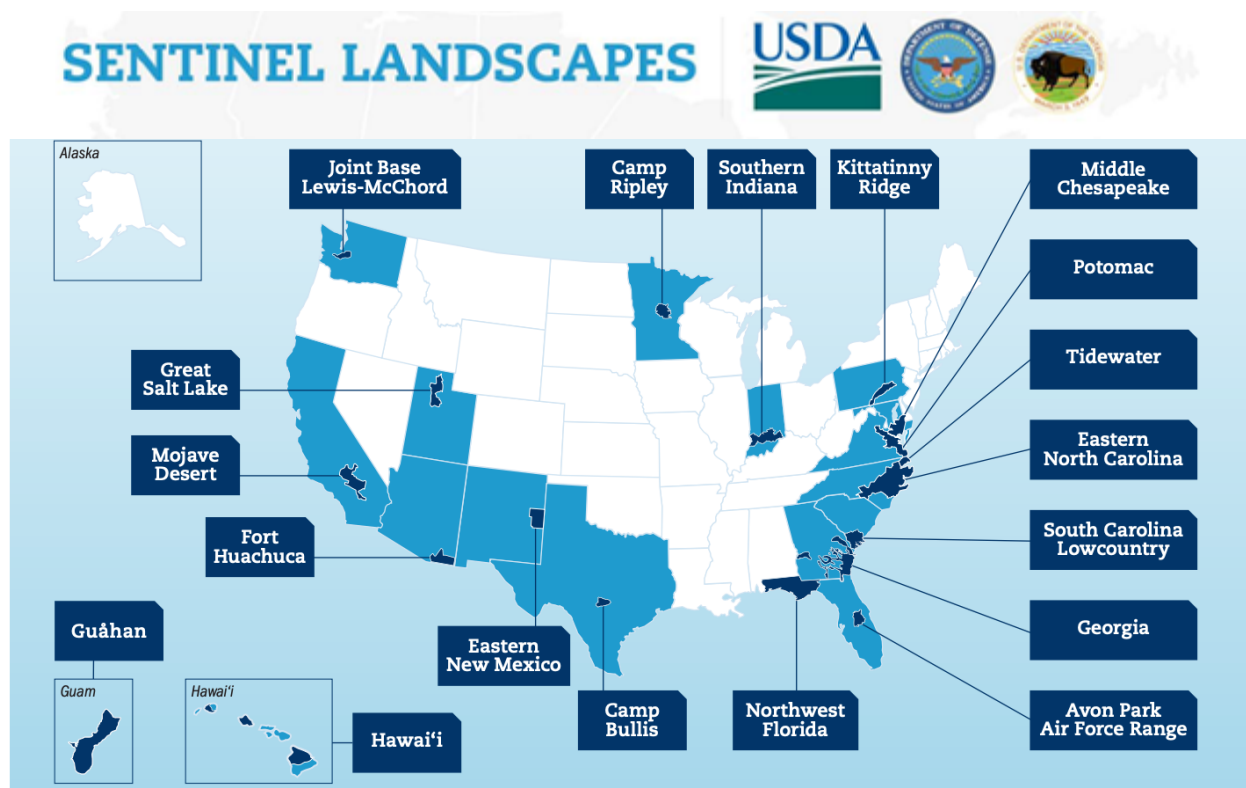
Significant barriers addressed in this guidance include a lack of information and understanding of Department of War priorities, command structure, and communications. Information about points of contact follow [general rules of thumb](#), but each of the military forces, installations and ranges will be different. In addition, each location will vary in its relationship to the local community, their environmental challenges, and the mission supported. This, in turn, may frame how personnel engage in initiatives and respond to outreach.

The Sikes Act directs the Secretary of War, in cooperation with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state fish and wildlife agencies, to carry out a program for the conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources on military installations. The Sikes Act allows for the sustainable, multipurpose use of natural resources subject to military security and safety requirements. (U. S. Code [16 U.S.C. §§ 670a–670o](#)).

SENTINEL LANDSCAPES AND DEFENSE COMMUNITIES

Sentinel Landscapes are regions where conservation, working lands, and national defense interests converge. Anchored by at least one installation or range, these landscapes contain priority lands for the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, and the Department of War. By protecting natural and working lands, these landscapes minimize development that is incompatible with military mission, reduce environmental threats, and support long-term mission readiness. Natural areas and agricultural working lands help reduce encroachment pressures around defense facilities and also mitigate environmental threats—such as wildfires, floods, drought, and rising sea levels—that increasingly affect military operations.

Defense communities increasingly partner with installations to conduct vulnerability assessments, invest in infrastructure upgrades, and restore natural systems. The Department of War provides funding and support for these efforts through the **Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC)** and the **Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI)** program.



GETTING TO KNOW DEPARTMENT OF WAR

DEPARTMENT OF WAR

The [Department of War](#) (the secondary title for the Department of Defense and abbreviated DoW) is the United States' largest government agency, with over 2 million service members and civilians in their workforce, 4,800 sites in over 160 countries and a \$849.9 billion national defense budget (2025).

The mission of the agency is to provide the military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's security. The Department is led by a civilian secretary of war, deputy secretary, and other leaders in the Office of the Secretary of War (OSW) that are responsible for policy development, planning, resource management and program evaluation.

THE U. S. MILITARY FORCES

The United States has [seven military forces](#), each with different missions and organizational structures.

Army

- Largest and oldest military branch
- Provides ground forces; operates on land and in the air
- Includes the **Army Corps of Engineers**, which delivers essential civic engineering solutions that include flood risk management, navigation, and environmental regulation and military construction projects
- Members of the Army are called Soldiers

Navy

- Protects U.S. interests at sea: on, above, and below the water.
- Members of the Navy are called sailors

Marine Corps

- Part of the Department of the Navy
- Specializes in amphibious and ground units for contingency and combat operations.
- Members of the Marines Corps are called marines

Air Force

- Delivers all aspects of airpower to fly, fight and win.
- Members of the Air Force are called airmen

Space Force

- A component of the Air Force,
- Conducts global space operations to protect U.S., and allied interests in space.
- Members of Space Force are called guardians

Coast Guard

- Maritime law enforcement, disaster response, and transportation management
- Part of the Department of Homeland Security in peacetime and under DoW in wartime*.
- Members of the Coast Guard are called coast guardsmen, or 'coasties' informally

National Guard

- Army National Guard and the Air National Guard units support combat missions, domestic emergencies, and humanitarian efforts.
- Support state and federal roles (not defined as an "armed force" per 10 U.S. Code § 101.
- Members of the National Guard are called guardsmen, or depending on their branch, they can be called soldiers or airmen

Military Personnel Categories

- Active Duty (full-time)
- Reserve (part-time, but can be mobilized to full-time)
- National Guard (part-time, but can be mobilized to full-time for state or federal missions)
- Veterans/Retirees (former service members).

* Coast Guard facilities are not under DoW, the following information may not pertain to Coast Guard.

COMMAND STRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Every installation includes both:

- **Operational commands** are mission-focused units that can be divided into subordinate units (such as divisions or fleets).
- **Administrative commands** support the operational command(s) by providing functions such as infrastructure, training, and quality of life programs.

An operational command is a tenant at an installation, which is managed by an administrative command. Single installations can have multiple operational commands.

Chain of Command Basics

Chain of command is an integral part of military life, and a basic knowledge is critical when communicating with the military. In general, military personnel give orders only to those directly below them in the chain of command and receive orders only from those directly above them.

- Command relationships between service members depend on their rank/grade, their unit, and their job responsibilities within the hierarchy.
- Rank structure depends on whether the service member is an officer or enlisted. Rank is used when addressing service members (much like a Mr. or Dr.), for example Colonel or Brigadier General
- Officers are the leaders, managers, and decision-makers.
- Enlisted personnel make up over 80% of the active-duty force and are trained in a specialty.

For more information about ranks/grades within the forces, see <https://www.military.com/join-military/military-ranks-everything-you-need-know.html>

Civilian Personnel

The DoW has a large civilian workforce that is integral to the military forces. Many of the DoW programs and installations or ranges that work with communities are staffed by civilian personnel. Many of the community planners and natural resource managers located at an installation are civilian personnel, often with military experience before their current role. Civilian personnel may supervise or be supervised by an active-duty service member, but regardless must follow the appropriate chain of command. While it is typical for active-duty service members to rotate to different locations within 2-5 years, civilian personnel are often long-term employees at an installation and key partners for projects.

*When communicating with retired military members, they may use their military titles, however, they are not used in a way that implies sponsorship or approval by uniformed services or Department of War. Titles should indicate retired status and members conform to the established chain of command. (For example you would write "Captain John Smith, USN, Retired")

MILITARY INSTALLATIONS AND RANGES

Military installations are facilities directly owned and operated by one of the military service branches and shelter military equipment and personnel, as well as provide for training, testing and/or operations. Installations may serve multiple military service branches (Joint Base or Joint Training Center) or have multiple subdivisions of a single branch as tenants. Installations may have housing, and provide food service, shopping, recreation and entertainment for residents and visitors. The military also have academies/colleges.

Some common types of installations:

- Army: Fort, Depot, Camp, Airfield, Arsenal, Proving Ground, Weapons Range, Missile Range, Demolition Range, Ocean Terminal, Support Facility, Training Center, Ammunition Plant
- Navy: Base (NB), Air Station (NAS), Submarine Base (NSB), Weapons Station (NWS), Air Weapons Station (NAWS), Support Activity (NSA), Air Reserve Base (ARB), Surface Warfare Center (NSWC), Shipyard (NSY), Construction Battalion Center (NCBC)
- Marine Corps: Base (MCB), Air Station (MCAS), Recruit Depot (MCRD), Logistics base (MCLB), Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), Warfare Training Center, Bombing Range
- Air/Space Force: Base, Station, Field, Bombing Range

All installations share one core priority: **sustaining mission readiness**. Successful partnerships must clearly connect proposed projects to this priority.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND INSTALLATION RESILIENCE

The DoW owns and manages **27 million acres** of land, more than two times all state parks combined, making conservation of natural resources a DoW imperative. These lands include significant ecological resources:

- Four times more endangered species per acre than other federal lands
- 75 species found only on DoW installations

Under the **Sikes Act (16 USC §670)**, Congress required that every installation must prepare and implement an **Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP)** to sustain natural systems while supporting mission needs. INRMPs are typically prepared by the facility's Natural Resource Manager with some facilities also having a Cultural Resource Manager and a Cultural Resource Management Plan. Some installations have developed plans working across the installation to improve resilience through an all-hazards planning approach. The resource conservation role at each installation is secondary to mission readiness, but proper resources management can avoid unnecessary workarounds and training delays. There is an evolving understanding of the connection of natural resources and resilience to mission readiness that should be appreciated in developing a collaborative team necessary for a successful project.

Military installation resilience is defined as “the capability of a military installation to avoid, prepare for, minimize the effect of, adapt to, and recover from extreme weather events, anticipated or unanticipated changes in environmental conditions, energy or water disruptions, or human-induced hazards with respect to the environment that do, or have the potential to, adversely affect the military installation or essential transportation, logistical, or other necessary resources outside of the military installation that are necessary in order to maintain, improve, or rapidly reestablish installation mission assurance and mission-essential functions.” (U. S. Code [10 USC § 101\(e\)\(8\)](#)).

Maintaining or improving installation resilience helps to prevent impacts to missions due to weather-related threats to training lands, infrastructure, and the safety of military personnel, supporting personnel, and families. Community – based planning projects may address issues that affect installations such as vulnerabilities in transportation, land use, utilities, and stormwater management. Natural infrastructure is also an essential part of many installations and resilience can be fortified by nature-based solutions.

Natural resource management supports mission readiness by:

- Reducing training delays
- Preventing environmental constraints
- Supporting nature-based solutions that improve installation resilience

The Natural Resources Management Branch in the Army are within the Environmental Management Division, part of the Directorate of Public Works.

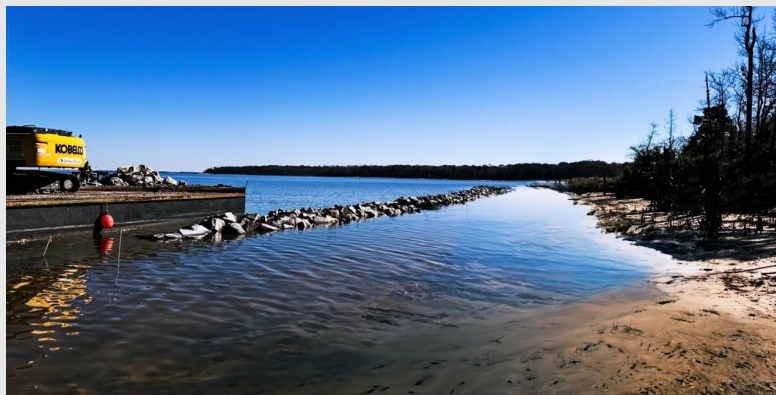
The Natural Resources Branch that serves the Navy is part of the Navy Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) and are typically organized under the Environmental Department or Public Works.

The Natural Resources Management Branch in the Marine Corps is usually part of the Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Division under the Facilities and Environment section.

The Natural Resources program in the Air Force is structured under the Civil Engineer functional area and supported by the Air Force Civil Engineering Center (AFCEC) Environmental Directorate.

Living shorelines at MCAS Cherry Point

Located along the Neuse River in North Carolina, MCAS Cherry Point experienced steady erosion of their shoreline as well as severe impacts from Hurricane Florence in 2018. Many structures including housing, training areas and recreational areas were threatened, putting readiness at risk. A project was completed in 2025 to replace failing bulkheads and other infrastructure with living shorelines, a nature-based management technique that uses natural materials, such as sand, rock breakwaters, and plantings. In addition to stabilizing the shoreline, this technique enhances habitat, boosts water quality, and can reduce long-term maintenance cost over traditional approaches.



TD Eure Marine Construction, LLC via Facebook

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR

Several programs in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War (Energy, Installations and Environment) work with defense communities in support of military installation compatible use and resilience. Among the programs that partner with communities are the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration ([REPI](#)) program, which focuses on land-use and natural resources, and the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation ([OLDCC](#)) (formerly known as OEA, the Office of Economic Adjustment) which assists states and local governments to maximize the support of the military mission. Both are discussed in more detail [below](#). While the OSW programs provide resources that can assist a military installation in responding to compatible use and installation resilience challenges, the primary function of the programs is to support the military installation commanders in their goals for their installations and military mission readiness as it relates to lethality, warfighting, and homeland defense. How military installations engage with defense communities to address these challenges will depend on many factors.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Useful starting points include:

Installation Directory

Search by state or service <https://installations.militaryonsource.mil/>

Most pages provide basic information about the installation and a link to the installation website.

Alternatively, you can access the installation website directly and learn about the history, mission, and the tenant commands located on the installation. Many of the websites will feature information about the base commander and sometimes the commanders of the units assigned to the installation.

Compatible Use or Resilience Studies

Conduct an internet search for: - **Compatible Use Studies (CUPs) / Joint Land Use Studies (JLUS)** - - **Military Installation Resilience or Readiness Reviews (MIRRs)**. These studies identify shared risks, infrastructure vulnerabilities, and opportunities for community–installation collaboration and may identify individuals that can serve as an initial starting point to contact.

INRMPS

Installation INRMPS often provide insight into natural systems, flooding issues, wildlife, and environmental priorities. More on INRMPS here: <https://www.denix.osd.mil/nr/>

REPI Fact Sheets

Each REPI project includes a fact sheet summarizing mission impacts and conservation goals. [Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration > Resources > State Fact Sheets](#)

HOW INSTALLATIONS WORK WITH COMMUNITIES

Installations rely on their surrounding communities for workforce, infrastructure, natural resources, and quality of life. They engage regularly with state and local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), utilities, and regional planning organizations to address: - Infrastructure needs - Compatible land use - Natural resource conservation - Environmental resilience - Emergency coordination

Programs like **DCIP**, **REPI**, and **Sentinel Landscapes** help formalize and fund these partnerships.

BEST PRACTICES FOR MAKING CONTACT

Reaching out to installation personnel may be as easy as going to the installation website and finding a “contact us” form or a phone number for the community affairs office. For more targeted outreach:

Navy & Marine Corps

Contact the **Community Plans and Liaison Officer (CPLO)**.

Air Force, Space Force & Air National Guard

Reach out to the **Community or Environmental Planner**.

Army & Army National Guard

Start with the **Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) Manager** or the **Director of Public Works (DPW)**.

REPI Resources

If the installation participates in REPI, check the fact sheet for the installation’s REPI point of contact - [REPI Fact Sheets](#).

The REPI program also supports the [Sentinel Landscapes Partnership](#), with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior. The areas designated as Sentinel Landscapes are where natural and working lands are well suited to protect defense facilities from incompatible uses by connecting landowners with voluntary state and federal assistance programs that incentivize protecting natural and agricultural/forestry resources. As of 2025, there were nineteen designated landscapes in 17 states and the territory of Guam. Each of these landscapes has a coordinator who organizes the partners at a local level and can help connect projects to the right people at the installations within their landscape. Coordinator contact information can be found on each of the Sentinel Landscape websites at sentinellandscape.org.

REPI also supports several large landscape partnerships that work closely with installations. The Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability ([SERPPAS](#)) is a partnership among leaders from the Department of War and the military services, six states (AL, FL, GA, MS, NC and SC), and the federal natural resource, wildlife, ocean and working lands agencies in the Southeast. These leaders work together to identify where the interests of military readiness, conservation, working lands, and communities overlap, depend on each other, are incompatible or are complementary. SERPPAS provides a regional, collaborative platform that brings together senior leadership from the region that establishes priorities and guides the partnership, as well as hosting work groups that engage a wide variety of partners around topical focus areas to help achieve partner goals.

FUNDING PROJECTS IN DEFENSE COMMUNITIES

DoW recognizes that mission readiness depends not only on conditions within an installation but also on threats originating outside its boundaries. Off-installation pressures—such as incompatible development, habitat loss that triggers environmental restrictions, and natural hazards—can limit access to training and testing areas or otherwise disrupt military operations. To address these external risks, DoW provides financial assistance and cost-sharing opportunities to defense communities through several statutory mechanisms.

DoW uses several statutory authorities to fund resilience work in defense communities:

- **10 USC §2391** — Military base reuse studies and community planning assistance
- **10 USC §2684a** — Conservation partnerships and encroachment management
- **16 USC §670 (Sikes Act)** — Natural resource management and improvement

Natural infrastructure solutions such as restoring hydrology, prescribed burning and living shoreline projects achieve both natural resource and installation resilience goals and can be funded by DOW in defense communities under these authorities.

Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI)

One DoW office that uses these authorities to maximize support of the military mission is the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration or [REPI program](#). REPI supports cost-sharing partnership programs that protect and conserve natural resources by the establishment of buffer programs on natural and working lands near the installation and through partnerships with governments or other entities engaged in nature resource management. The REPI program is focused on avoiding land-use conflicts near military installations to address issues like noise complaints, light pollution, spectrum interference, and security concerns that can restrict training and testing activities.

The REPI program also provides for maintaining or improving military installation resilience by funding nature-based solution that address mission impacts from weather-related threats like drought, flooding

and wildfires. Through the REPI program, partners can work with the installation to implement off-base nature-based solutions projects, such as restoring wetlands, living shorelines or enhancing riparian buffers, in the community. Partnerships among state, local, regional governments, NGOs and other organizations are critical to building military installation resilience in communities. Projects can be cost-shared with DoW through the REPI program. For more details and examples, see the [REPI website](#).

Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation

The [OLDCC's Installation Readiness](#) programs help state and local governments better understand, analyze, and plan actions necessary to maintaining the community as well as the military mission. These programs provide technical and financial assistance to help states and communities work with local military installations to plan, enhance infrastructure, and implement measures that maintain or improve readiness and lethality. This program previously supported the Compatible Use Study (also called Joint Land Use Studies or JLUS) and Installation Resilience Review, also called MIRRs. These studies are designed to comprehensively understand concerns and opportunities near installations and develop a responsive strategy for implementing actions to address those threats. Recommendations from these studies are used to help guide community development and infrastructure investments that preserve military readiness while supporting continued economic development and resilience of the community.

[OLDCC's Defense Community Infrastructure Pilot \(DCIP\)](#)

Provides competitive grants for off-installation infrastructure supporting military value, including: - Transportation systems - Utilities (water, stormwater, energy, telecom) - Community support facilities (schools, hospitals, public safety)

Projects must be completed within 5 years and endorsed by the installation.

TIPS FOR CREATING SUCCESSFUL MILITARY PARTNERSHIPS

- **Start early:** Build relationships before a crisis or funding deadline.
- **Align with mission needs:** Clearly articulate how resilience actions support installation and mission readiness.
- **Use existing plans:** Joint Land Use Study (JLUS), Compatible Use Plans (CUP), Military Installation Readiness or Resiliency Review (MIRR), INRMPs, and REPI fact sheets provide shared priorities.
- **Communicate consistently:** Frequent personnel rotations mean consistent communication is essential. Installation Commanders typically rotate every two years. Ask the Commander which other military personnel you should be interacting with on projects such as the installation's environmental or REPI lead.
- **Build multi-partner teams:** Include federal, state, local, NGO, and university partners.
- **Focus on mutual benefits:** Projects should support both community resilience and mission assurance.
- **Be patient and persistent:** Military timelines and approval processes can be lengthy. Learn annual cycles and add them to your calendars so you can prepare in advance of upcoming opportunities. Establishing a standing monthly or quarterly meeting can help keep projects moving and on schedule. At a minimum, meetings should be scheduled to align with timelines for project deliverables.

Partnerships with Avon Park Air Force Range protects water resources

The Avon Park AFR Sentinel Landscape Partnership worked with Conservation Florida, Polk County, REPI, a private conservation benefactor and other partners to protect natural and working lands in the critical headwaters of the Everglades. In 2024, the partnership permanently protected 639 acres of prime Lake Marion waterfront property, a key piece of the Florida Wildlife Corridor that also protects water resources. The property has become a Polk County park that can be enjoyed by residents and guests to Florida, while also protecting military readiness.



photo: [Conservation Florida](#)

RESOURCES

[SERPPAS](#)

[Sentinel Landscapes](#)

ACRONYMS

ACUB - Army Compatible Use Buffer program supports the Army mission by allowing installations to work with partners to protect off-base natural and working lands through conservation easements or other agreements that prevent incompatible development.

CPLO - Community Plans Liaison Officer (Navy and USMC) supports installation missions by serving as a bridge between installations and the community, local government, and private stakeholders. CPLO manages Encroachment Management programs including Air-Installation Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ).

DoW - Department of War, also War Department, a secondary name for the Department of Defense.

INRMP - Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan is developed by a Task Force led by installation natural resources staff and including U.S. Fish and Wildlife, state Department of Natural Resources and other federal, state or local natural resource agencies. The goal is to develop a guide for the management and stewardship of natural resources on the installation while ensuring mission sustainment. The Sikes Act requires all domestic installations to develop and implement an INRMP.

JLUS - Joint Land Use Study, former name of the Compatible Use Study (Plan or Program), a study funded by OLDCC and led by a state, local or regional government, as a cooperative program with the military installation with the goal of identifying and making recommendations for addressing existing or potential future incompatible development in the area around the installation.

MIRR – Military Installation Resilience Review- a former name for a study, funded by OLDCC and led by a state, local or regional government, that assess and analyze community vulnerabilities that may affect installation missions, and make recommendations for further studies or projects to address priority areas.

OLDCC - Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation funds grants to communities to further the priorities of the National Defense Strategy by supporting the readiness and resiliency of military installations and defense communities across the country.

OSW - Office of the Secretary of War

REPI - Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program, administered by the Office of the Secretary of War, supports military missions by helping remove or avoid land-use conflicts, supports large landscape partnerships that advance conservation and military readiness and foster solutions through community engagement.

USACE - United States Army Corps of Engineers

USMC - United States Marine Corps

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