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GEORGIA SENTINEL LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP DESIGNATED TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES, ENHANCE HABITAT AND MILITARY TRAINING

Washington, D.C., Dec. 20 2017 – The Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Defense (DoD) and Interior (DoI) have designated parts of southern Georgia as the newest Sentinel Landscape designed to protect natural resources, enhance habitat for several key species and maintain military readiness. Through this partnership, more than 20 federal, state and local partners with similar goals work together to sustain working farms and forests, protect vital habitat for several important species and enhance military readiness.

Building on a legacy of successful, collaborative land protection in Georgia, a diverse group of partners have identified about 1.3 million acres as critical to helping the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.

The Georgia Sentinel Landscape includes nine important military installations and ranges, including Fort Stewart, Fort Benning and Townsend Bombing Range.

“It is critical to protect agricultural lands and wildlife habitat for current and future generations,” said Acting Agriculture Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Robert Johansson. “This unique partnership can achieve greater gains by protecting private working and natural lands that are compatible with the military’s need for open space to conduct sensitive missions. Together we will keep our nation strong militarily, while also continuing to ensure it provides food and fiber to the world.”

The military network stretching over portions of southern Georgia offers diverse testing, training, and operational resources and capabilities to service men and women from each military branch.

Identifying land for conservation

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA), as part of the new USDA Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area, which also includes the [Risk Management Agency](#) (RMA), will be working with the other Georgia Sentinel Landscape partners to identify and help private landowners and agricultural producers voluntarily protect and improve working agricultural lands to sustain Georgia’s food and fiber production. This partnership leverages technical and financial assistance available through Farm Bill programs and other resources.

“It’s critical, now more than ever, that we all work together” said Terrance O. Rudolph, USDA NRCS state conservationist. “Our FPAC agencies are poised to assist other project partners, to help our customers improve their land’s productivity and impacts on the environment and community.”

Together, the FPAC agencies will ensure that landowners and producers within Sentinel Landscapes have access to the tools and resources they need to keep their land in agriculture and to support the next generation of farmers and private forest landowners. Offering several farm safety net programs, credit and voluntary conservation programs, FSA, NRCS and RMA programs address a variety of farming needs and related conservation issues.

This new partnership in Georgia will help the federal and state government agencies involved to work closer together with the private organizations to meet the three primary goals of protecting natural resources, creating or maintaining habitat for diverse species and enhancing military readiness.

Through programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program, NRCS helps producers develop a conservation plan and funding to implement conservation practices. Meanwhile, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program enables landowners to protect agricultural lands and wetlands for the long term, which offers an income source while helping them to improve the quality of their land.

Protecting wildlife and natural resources

The Georgia Sentinel Landscape partners seek to leverage broad goals and shared priorities to ensure the continued viability of important military installations and support the protection of habitat corridors for diverse important species such as the gopher tortoise, red-cockaded woodpecker and eastern indigo snake.

Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield Garrison Commander, Colonel Jason A. Wolter stated, "Fort Stewart is extremely proud to be part of the Sentinel Landscapes initiative and we are excited about the new opportunities to ensure mission sustainability, encourage economic prosperity and strengthen conservation programs throughout the coastal community."

The partnership seeks to protect a core of at least 5,000 acres of important farmlands within the next five years. Another goal calls for the protection of more than 136,000 acres in the Savannah River watershed over the next 20 years.

Partners also hope to protect more than 20 additional viable gopher tortoise populations over five years in order to make it unnecessary to list this species under the Endangered Species Act.

Additional partnership goals include increasing public access to outdoor recreational opportunities, improving management practices on private lands and expanding outreach activities to private landowners within the landscape.

State partner, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Mark Williams said, “This designation as a Sentinel Landscape will allow our coalition of partners to continue to work in concert to sustain our military bases, provide more recreational lands for Georgia’s

public, protect our natural species and collaborate with private property owners on programs to help conserve their lands.”

About Sentinel Landscapes

The Georgia Sentinel Landscape joins six other designations since USDA, DoD and DoI launched the effort in 2013 through a Memorandum of Understanding. They are Fort Huachuca (Arizona); Avon Park Air Force Range (Florida); Patuxent River Naval Air Station (Maryland) also referred to as Middle Chesapeake (Maryland, Delaware and Virginia); Camp Ripley (Minnesota); Eastern North Carolina (North Carolina); and Joint Base Lewis-McChord (Washington State).

Learn more about this partnership by visiting the [Sentinel Landscapes website](#). For more information on conservation programs available through NRCS and FSA, contact your [local USDA service center](#).

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