

# JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

Washington | est. 2013



The Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) Sentinel Landscape is anchored by the third largest installation in the U.S. Army, which is home to 43,000 soldiers and airmen. JBLM encompasses 63,000 acres of military training area, including over 7,000 acres of impact area, 86 ranges and mortar points, 13 drop zones, and two airfields. In addition, the sentinel landscape supports the majority of the remaining prairie habitat in the south Puget Sound. For decades, prairie lands in the region have deteriorated due to rapid development and increased demand on natural resources. Conversely, the ecosystem has thrived on JBLM where development is minimal and periodic fires caused by prescribed burning and military training activities have maintained healthy vegetation. JBLM Sentinel Landscape partners have worked together to enact conservation measures to strengthen military readiness through the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

## Endangered Species Work Continues Around JBLM

Despite once extending over 150,000 acres, prairie habitat native to Washington State’s Puget Sound now covers only 23,000 acres, 90 percent of which is located on JBLM. As a result, multiple species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that depend on the habitat—such as the Taylor’s checkerspot butterfly and the Mazama pocket gopher—seek refuge on the installation. Throughout 2019, JBLM continued to support the recovery of these species. Populations of Taylor’s checkerspot butterfly expanded on JBLM due to relocation efforts and habitat management actions taken by the U.S. Army. In fact, in 2019, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recorded the highest number of butterflies at the species’ source site on JBLM to date. In recognition of Taylor’s checkerspot butterflies’ improving status on the installation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and JBLM amended their programmatic biological opinion to

Figure 1: JBLM Sentinel Landscape Map

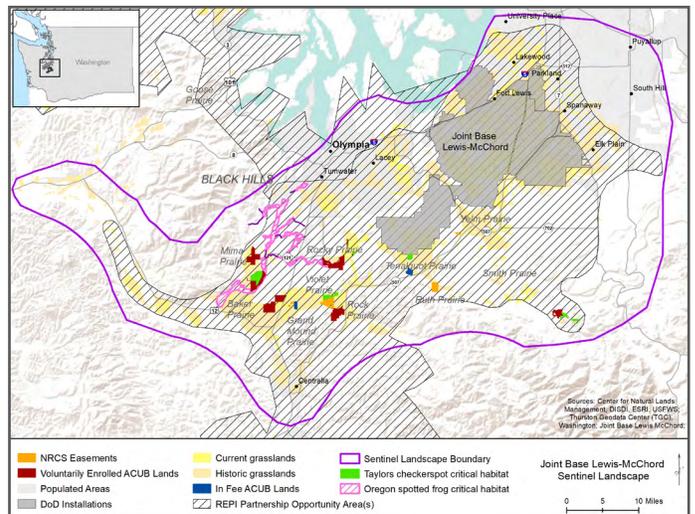


Table 1: JBLM Sentinel Landscape Footprint Details (acres)

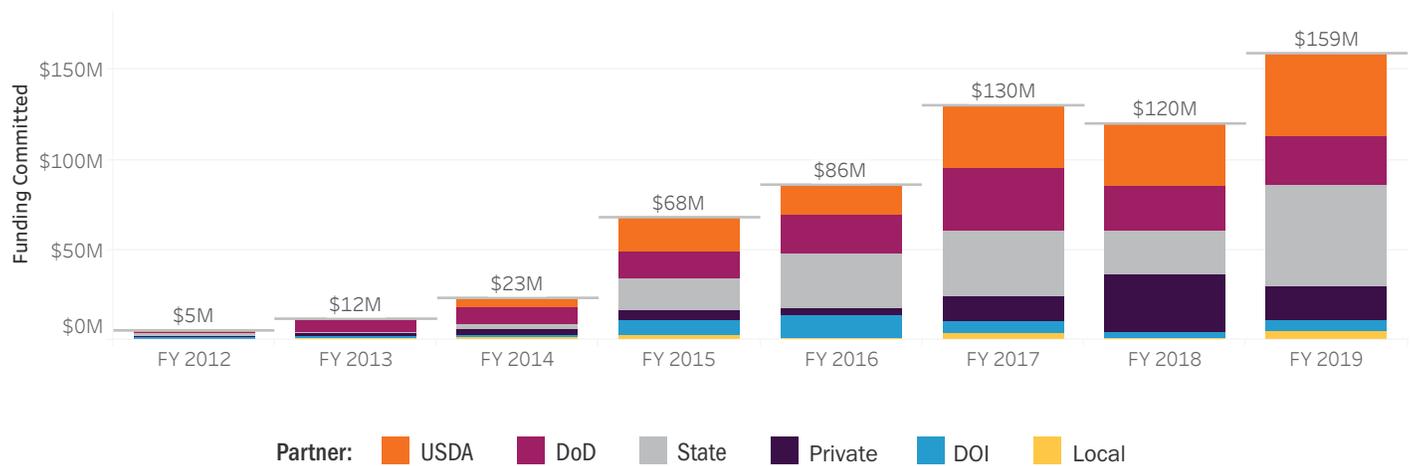
	<b>Total Protected Acres:<sup>1</sup></b>	19,758
	<b>Total Enrolled Acres:<sup>2</sup></b>	78,949
	<b>Active Base Area:</b>	91,322
	<b>Total Sentinel Landscape Area:</b>	196,526

relax several of the restrictions on military training activities that were previously activated by the ESA. JBLM is also working to open a section of prairie habitat on the base that the U.S. Army will manage with prescribed fire and invasive plant control, which is expected to increase pocket gopher populations. Off base, partners conducted similar habitat improvement projects across the sentinel landscape. In 2019, USFWS restored 67.5 acres and

<sup>1</sup> Represents total acres protected by projects administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2012

<sup>2</sup> Represents total acres enrolled in technical assistance programs administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2012

**Figure 2: JBLM Sentinel Landscape Total Funding by Partner**



maintained 129 acres of prairie habitat through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Likewise, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife restored 373 acres of prairie habitat. Lastly, USFWS partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to hire a full-time biologist to support species recovery across the landscape.

### Research Collaborative Searches for Conservation Solutions

In 2018, a group of farmers, ranchers, academics, and county governments formed a research collaborative to determine whether certain agricultural practices can help restore Washington State’s rapidly deteriorating dry prairie habitat. Using a grant from the USDA’s Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Institution, the team evaluated the impacts of conservation grazing practices on native plant communities, federally threatened gophers, and rare butterflies on three ranches across the JBLM Sentinel Landscape. The team consists of representatives from the Center for Natural Lands Management, Washington State University, the University of Idaho, USDA NRCS, and Thurston County. Using the data collected from the effort, the partners hope to demonstrate the economic and ecological benefits of conservation grazing practices. If successful, this would expand the government

benefits available to working landowners for habitat management. The group has already begun to share findings with the local farming community through a well-attended workshop series.

### Stewardship Plans to Help Restore Important Habitat

Private landowners play a significant role in restoring prairie habitat in the JBLM Sentinel Landscape and are critical to sustaining military readiness at JBLM. Understanding this, partners work with private landowners to develop individual stewardship plans, which recommend parcel-specific conservation practices that will improve prairie health and align with the landowner’s management goals. In 2019, Thurston Conservation District completed plans for properties within the Deschutes Watershed and the Chehalis Watershed. The parcels encompass over 100 acres of oak-conifer forest and multiple soil types preferred by the Mazama pocket gopher, a threatened species under the ESA. Introducing conservation practices on these properties will align with existing efforts at JBLM to restore habitat health and improve training access. By uniting a diverse group of partners from various government assistance programs, the JBLM Sentinel Landscape has enabled Thurston Conservation District to better explain the financial and technical benefits available to private landowners in the region.

## Organization Makes Farming Accessible for Veterans

A core tenet of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is to support the national defense mission. This pursuit extends beyond protecting current testing and training activities. This year, JBLM Sentinel Landscape partner Enterprise for Equity worked to ensure that veteran-owned businesses have the tools necessary to succeed in the agricultural sector. Enterprise for Equity is a non-profit that helps people with limited resources start small businesses. In 2019, the organization received a grant to provide training, technical assistance, and microloans to companies that focus on agriculture or conservation within the JBLM Sentinel Landscape. Since receiving its grant, Enterprise for Equity has serviced nine businesses, including Legends Harvest, a veteran-owned farm that produces mushrooms, microgreens, and market vegetables—all pesticide free.



*Volunteers assist with native prairie restoration at Wolf Haven, a property enrolled in the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program. Credit: Sanders Freed, Center for Natural Lands Management*



*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with its partners to protect important habitat for the Mazama Pocket Gopher, a federally-listed threatened species. Credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kim Flotlin*