

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

est. 2017



The Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape spans 11 million acres across a 33-county region in North Carolina’s Coastal Plain and Sandhills. The sentinel landscape is home to five key military installations and ranges: Fort Bragg, Dare County Bombing Range, Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Lejeune, Marine Corps Air Stations (MCAS) Cherry Point and New River, and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. Behind agriculture, military-related activity is the second largest economic driver in the state, making up about two percent of state GDP. For years, Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape partners have worked together to support endangered species recovery, while simultaneously strengthening the military mission and stimulating local agricultural economies.

The Intersection of Conservation and National Defense

In 2019, the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust used funds from the Department of Defense’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program to acquire Salters Creek Landing, a 5,400-acre parcel adjacent to MCAS Cherry Point’s Piney Island Bombing Range. This project supports national security by reducing the risk of incompatible development around MCAS Cherry Point that would compromise the installation’s electronic and special warfare training mission.

“Through [the U.S. Marine Corp’s] partnership with the Coastal Land Trust and the State of North Carolina, we have shared the burden of protecting this strategic property which will help us sustain training capabilities at Piney Island for future generations.”

- Col. Todd Ferry, **Commanding Officer at MCAS Cherry Point**

Figure 1: Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Map

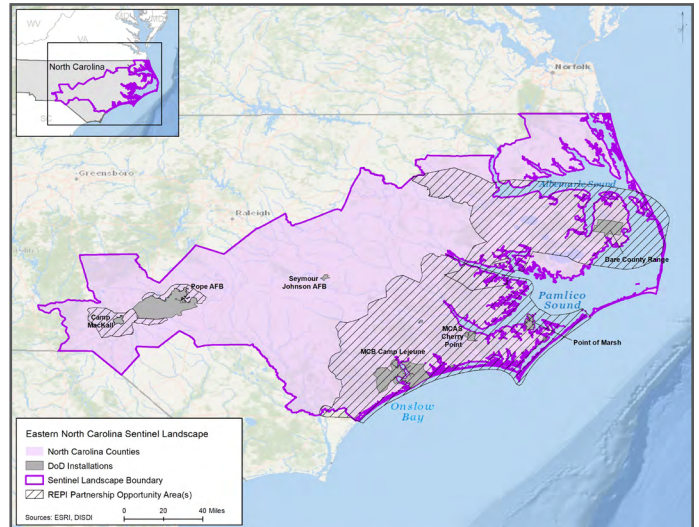






Table 1: Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Footprint Details (acres)

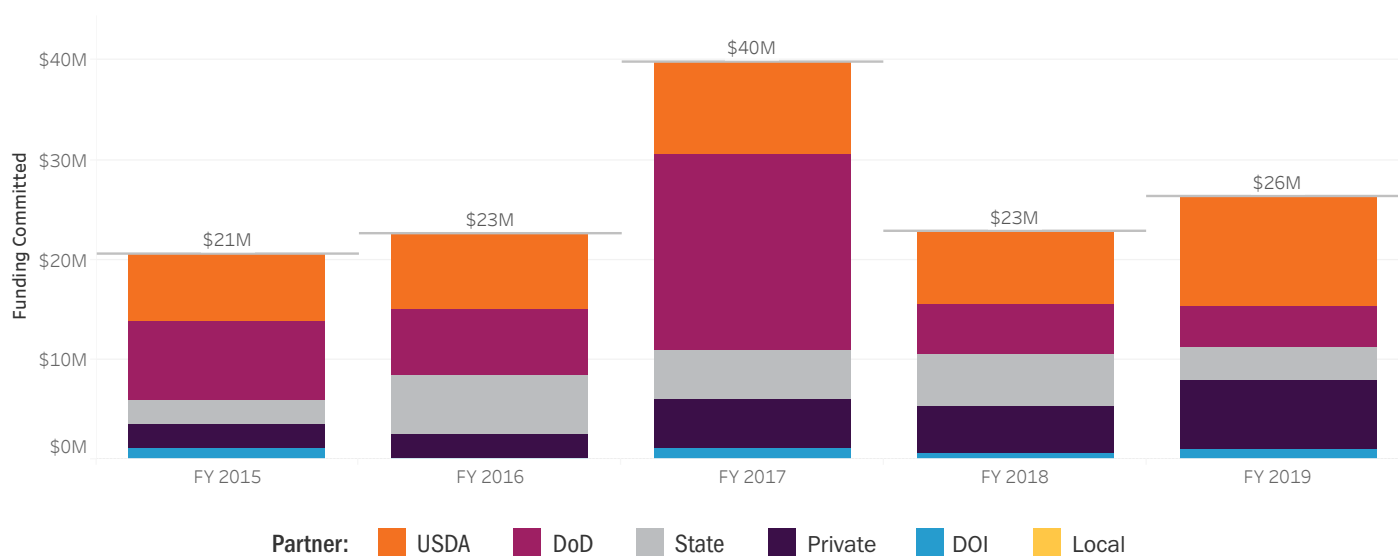
 Total Protected Acres:¹	138,633
 Total Enrolled Acres:²	770,137
 Active Base Area:	267,913
 Total Sentinel Landscape Area:	10,990,233

¹ Represents total acres protected by projects administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2016

² Represents total acres enrolled in technical assistance programs administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 201614 Office of Economic Adjustment:

³ “Defense Spending By State Fiscal Year 2018”: [https://www.oea.gov/sites/default/files/defense-spending-rpts/FY2018 Defense-Spending-by-State-Report_0_0.pdf](https://www.oea.gov/sites/default/files/defense-spending-rpts/FY2018%20Defense-Spending-by-State-Report_0_0.pdf)

Figure 2: Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Total Funding by Partner



This project also has significant ecological benefits. Located along the North Carolina coast, Salters Creek Landing is a crown jewel for conservationists. The tract is covered in estuarine marsh, tidal creeks, pocosin wetlands, and maritime forest. Year round, the property teems with wildlife, prompting the National Audubon Society to recognize Salters Creek as an Important Bird Area and the State of North Carolina to list it as a Natural Heritage Area. Specifically, Salters Creek provides habitat to 23 rare plant and animal species, including the black rail, a candidate for the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The parcel also shares a boundary with the 15,000-acre Cedar Island National Refuge, contributing to a landscape-scale conservation corridor in one of the country’s fastest-growing regions. Moving forward, part of Salters Creek Landing will be managed as a wildlife refuge, while the remaining portion will be opened to the public for recreation.

Sentinel Landscape Partners Improve Efficiency for Land Protection

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership unites disparate stakeholders around common goals, which often leads to innovation. In 2018, the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape partners set out to simplify the process of securing a conservation easement. Conservation easements maintain the private ownership of a property while permanently prohibiting certain types of development. In recent years, government programs have begun to split the cost of purchasing easements on properties that benefit multiple federal and state agencies.

While this trend is something to be celebrated, the process can be cumbersome for private landowners. Despite sharing the cost of acquisition, government agencies typically record their easement restrictions separately, which means that property owners must consult multiple legal documents to understand their land management responsibilities. To remedy this, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) collaborated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop an Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape common easement template. This model consolidates agency requirements into a single deed, thus creating a more efficient process for landowners. Finalizing a conservation easement typically takes anywhere from three to four years. The NCDA&CS template is projected to cut that time in half. In 2019, NCDA&CS, the U.S. Air Force, and USDA NRCS piloted this new model by acquiring easements on five high priority parcels located beneath a flight path between Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and Dare County Bombing Range.

“This project represents a new level of coordination... agriculture is North Carolina’s biggest industry followed by the military, and it is more important than ever that we work to protect the farmland that produces our food and fiber and maintains our military readiness.”

Steve Troxler, *North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner*

Species Recovery Efforts Strengthen Military Readiness

In 2015, the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to establish the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) Recovery and Sustainment Program Partnership (RASP). The partnership's objective is to enhance training flexibility at MCB Camp Lejeune by alleviating environmental restrictions that were triggered when the RCW was listed under the ESA. To that end, the partners are helping the installation reach and maintain its recovery goal of 173 RCW clusters, as mandated by USFWS. In support of this goal, partners carry out innovative off-base restoration efforts using DoD funds that count towards the U.S. Marine Corps' recovery obligation. Through FY 2019, RASP has protected 130 RCW clusters. . To achieve its final goal, RASP will target its resources towards preserving an additional 60 RCW clusters across two protected properties in the coastal North Carolina region—the 13,000-acre Bear Garden tract and the 3,000-acre Stones Creek Game land. RASP is representative of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership's mission because it increases the amount of land devoted to endangered species recovery, while simultaneously strengthening the military's mission.



Red-cockaded woodpecker at nest cavity in Pinehurst, North Carolina. Credit: Susan L. Miller

Community-Driven Landowner Engagement

Embedded in the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape is an expansive network of farms, ranches, and working forests. In total, cropland and forestland make up 72 percent of land cover across the landscape. This composition is indicative of the industry's wider impact on the state. Agriculture and agribusiness contribute \$92 billion annually to North Carolina's GDP and employ 17 percent of the state's workforce. Farms, ranches, and working forests also support the state's national defense mission by reducing the risk of incompatible development around military installations and ranges. As a result, promoting sustainable management practices on North Carolina's working lands is a top priority for Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape partners. In 2019, the NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation piloted a series of landowner engagement events and community leadership roundtables in five counties across the landscape. The goal of the series was to increase awareness among landowners on the government benefits available to them, educate local decision-makers on the value of the sentinel landscapes model, and seek input regarding future program development from local stakeholders. The Foundation coupled these events with a door-to-door outreach effort, which resulted in 41 letters of interest and 17 Options to Buy Contracts from private landowners.

“Our success is attributed to your persistent and creative approach in reaching this demographic. Your work has been vital to the success of protecting MCIEAST’s military mission.”

- Col. Michael Scalise, *Assistant Chief of Staff for Marine Corps Installations East*



Paratroopers from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division move to an assembly area on Fort Bragg. Credit: U.S. Department of Defense