

Case Study: Documenting Your Encroachment Threat

Determining encroachment threats and crafting appropriate solutions can be tricky and time-consuming. Planners must consider not only the military mission, but also the needs and concerns of the local community and the environmental impacts of what they propose. Successful planning for encroachment at the local and regional levels is evident in the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) plan developed by Oregon National Guard's (ORNG) Camp Rilea and Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point's cooperative partnerships.

Background

Located on the Clatsop Plain on the coast of western Oregon, Camp Rilea is ORNG's premier war-fighter training center, regional emergency response center and force projection platform for the state's soldiers and airmen. It also contains prime habitat for the Oregon silverspot butterfly, a federally threatened species. With the city of Warrenton (population 5,050) on the northeast edge and two major state parks on the northwestern and southern boundaries, planners at Camp Rilea identified a number of encroachment threats to its mission and crafted creative solutions to address them.

Home to the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, MCAS Cherry Point is the largest Marine Corps air station in the United States, covering 13,000 acres adjacent to the city of Havelock (population 22,500). MCAS Cherry Point also maintains Auxiliary Landing Field (ALF) Bogue, which is the only East Coast site for field carrier landing practice, and Piney Island Bombing Range. Coastal North Carolina also contains a wide diversity of animal and plant life, such as the federally listed red cockaded woodpecker, Venus flytrap, and Carolina gopher frog. The region is experiencing rapid population growth that is changing its rural character and threatening the military mission of MCAS Cherry Point. Given the close proximity of the three installations to one another and to nearby Marine Corps Base (MCB) Lejuene, the Marine Corps adopted a regional approach to planning to protect not only the installations but also their flight corridors from encroachment.

Challenge

According to Gerald Elliot, Environmental Program Manager for ORNG, Camp Rilea faces several encroachment threats, including light pollution, inland trespass from the public beach and trails, crab harvesting offshore, clam harvesting adjacent to the installation, and noise complaints from small arms, demolition and helicopter training. In addition, planners identified preservation of the butterfly habitat as a major impediment to the military mission of the installation.

Faced with various environmental factors and increased development impinging on the military missions of its North Carolina installations, Marine Corps planners realized that had to come up with a regional solution. "In 2010 it became apparent that we had to look beyond the immediate area of Cherry Point to the larger issue of airspace over all of the operational areas, including the military transport routes, special-use airspace, and Class D helicopter routes in the region to understand the landscape and encroachment threats we faced. We had to address mission sustainability, incompatible wind energy development, noise complaints and construction of tall structures adjacent to all of the installations in the region," notes Natural Resource Manager Carmen Lombardo. With an area of over 2,300 square miles the problem then becomes how to identify and prioritize the most important parcels to protect.

Solution

Planners at Camp Rilea took a three-pronged approach to its encroachment issues. First, they looked to the Camp's own activities to see what they could do to mitigate the problems. For example, they limited the use of the range to certain hours unless the installation provided notice to the community. "Some of the offending lights have been moved or redirected, and we planted trees to provide future barriers. Our biggest change was a commitment to increased public outreach," notes Elliott. The installation created a web page to provide information on Camp activities and is exploring the feasibility of providing informational kiosks at the adjacent state parks.

Second, planners are working to restrict access to the beach/offshore area when the training ranges are active because the Camp's weapons training ranges face toward the ocean and the surface danger zone for an active range must be clear of all unauthorized people. Planners are seeking to establish a "marine danger zone" through Army Corps of Engineers' regulation, which will allow the ORNG to require all watercraft to vacate the zone when one or more of the weapons training ranges are active. The ORNG is also negotiating an agreement with the state of Oregon to formally allow the ORNG to control public access along the beach when a weapons training range is active (currently all Oregon beaches are public access).

Third, the Camp partnered with the North Coast Land Conservancy (NCLC), which used \$1 million in REPI funds to purchase the Reed Ranch, a 109-acre property that contains prime butterfly habitat. "With the Reed Ranch we provided an alternative habitat area in exchange for the transfer of regulatory mandated habitat management responsibilities from Camp Rilea to Reed Ranch and the new property owner (NCLC). We then incorporated the 68 acres in the Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans (INRMP) and now manage it under the provisions of the Sikes Act," Elliott says. The land trust maintains ownership of the permanently protected property, while personnel from Camp Rilea conduct annual inspections to ensure that the butterfly habitat is managed properly.

In 2003, the Marine Corps, Nature Conservancy and other conservation organizations formed the Onslow Bight Conservation Forum to protect sensitive habitat and to promote compatible development in coastal North Carolina. To supplement the Forum's work, planners at MCAS Cherry Point formed a cooperative partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust to collaborate on projects in the immediate area around the installation. Planners initially used a conservation approach to prioritize parcels for an overall encroachment partnering strategy and then transitioned into a more detailed methodology to address airspace considerations.

The first step in any approach was the identification of Areas of Interest (AOIs) to focus future Cherry Point efforts. Specific to the airspace analysis, planners devised a three-tier approach including conservation, military values, and combined significance values to prioritize parcels. Tier One parcels must have a minimum of 50 acres, fall within the MCAS Cherry Point's airspace, not be federally owned or unavailable for conservation. Tier Two parcels possess military values only, while Tier Three exhibit conservation values only. Even by applying the 50-acre minimum, planners were left with over 7,000 parcels to consider. To narrow the field further, planners then gave each of the parcels a score on conservation values and created a map that highlighted military and conservation priorities. "The map revealed a cluster of five high priority areas that we targeted with great success. We now have over 5,800 acres under easement in key locations, 7,810 acres total in the Cherry Point AOIs," says Lombardo.

Lessons Learned

For Elliot the biggest lessons learned are to take careful notes of all meetings because the planning process takes so long it's easy to lose track of decisions. He also suggests that when dealing with regulators don't be afraid to carefully use his or her superiors: "If we continued to only talk to the local office, we would still be talking only to them," he says. Finally, he suggests that in the first draft an ACUB be sure to include all the parcels you might ever need as it's difficult to add them later.

Lombardo stresses that the success of MCAS Cherry Point is due to conservation partners, so select them carefully: "The North Carolina Coastal Land Trust has a very good track record and good working relationships with state agencies that provide funding. They were able to carry those relationships forward working with the Marine Corps." He also notes that relationship-building is even more important in times of economic uncertainty and changing political climates.

Accomplishments

- 109 acres of prime habitat for the endangered Oregon silverspot butterfly permanently protected
- 68 acres in Camp Rilea released from Endangered Species Act mandated habitat requirements
- 5,830 acres of land conserved for water quality and other natural values within a total of 8,166 acres protected from incompatible development by the Marine Corps in coastal North Carolina
- A regional plan that will promote compatible development in the region around MCAS Cherry Point and its satellite installations of ALF Bogue and Piney Island Bombing Range, which protect critical flight paths