

Case Study: Off-Post Innovations at Fort A.P. Hill

In 2008, the Army and The Conservation Fund culminated two years of work by signing a conservation easement on Camden Farm, a 1,300-acre farm with multiple sites of historic significance that lies within the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) region surrounding Fort A.P. Hill. This Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) project is significant because it complies with the National Historic Preservation Act, while at the same time supporting encroachment prevention, habitat preservation and the military mission. In leveraging compliance funding to achieve on-post mitigation and off-post buffering, the Army secured a two-for-one cost savings, which translates into \$1.5 million saved.

Background

Fort A.P. Hill lies approximately halfway between Washington, DC and Richmond, VA. Its training and maneuver center focuses on providing realistic joint and combined arms training by active and reserve troops of the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force, as well as other government agencies.

The area surrounding the base is primarily rural, but faces development pressures common to many military installations. The area is also rich with historical significance. It is home to numerous historical sites, including one of the largest and most important seventeenth-century Native American archeological village complexes known in the Chesapeake region and over a dozen native villages mapped by John Smith. In addition, the region includes several Civil War encampments and the farm where John Wilkes Booth was captured and died.

Challenge

With six significant Civil War-era historical sites located in a proposed Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) development area within Fort A.P. Hill, Army planners realized they would need to establish a plan to mitigate the potential adverse effects of the development (the sites didn't require additional archaeological work because no further information could be gleaned from them). Virginia Busby, ACUB Team Leader at the Army Environmental Command, notes: "The team sought to identify what would best serve the public interest in mitigating these sites—whether that would include further excavation of the sites on-post or preservation of known significant sites off-post located on a targeted ACUB property within the Camden Farm National Historic Landmark."

Solution

Planners began by inventorying all the sites in the proposed BRAC development area within Fort A.P. Hill and identifying previously recorded significant sites in the buffer area. With the data in-hand, planners consulted the key stakeholders in the region, including Native American tribes, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Virginia State Historic Preservation Office. It soon became clear to all parties that the public interest and the investment of Army funds would be best served by protecting at-risk Native American villages located in the buffer region in lieu of funding unnecessary excavations of the six Civil War sites located on the post.

With a goal identified, planners implemented a two-pronged strategy by:

1. Drafting a programmatic agreement that described the NHPA Section 106 mitigation measures as including the explicit protection of the archaeological resources through an easement
2. Negotiating an easement that included the terms of the programmatic agreement

The Army cultural resource managers successfully negotiated the programmatic agreement and concomitantly worked with the ACUB program and its partner, Reggie Hall of The Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund negotiated a conservation easement with the landowner, whose family has lived on Camden Farm for seven generations. Hall took care to protect the cultural resources while at the same time ensuring the landowner's future plans for the property were respected. For example, the landowner wanted to keep using a gravel pit so that he could maintain farm roads, and he also wanted reserve four future home sites for his children and their children. Hall notes: "As work progressed, tension grew between the goals of *preserving* the cultural resources while, at the same time and on the same property, *conserving* a working family farm. On the surface, the Camden Farm is a productive agricultural operation with fertile soil that grows corn, wheat and other crops, but that same soil is rich in other ways - artifacts and important archeological sites. One of the farm's most productive fields is also the location of a contact period Native American village. It was definitely a challenge negotiating a conservation easement document that accomplished the goals of Fort A.P. Hill's ACUB program, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the landowner."

As result of the parties' perseverance, patience and good communication, they achieved an easement that met all their needs, and the Camden Farm Project became the first example of the Department of Defense and a state historic preservation office working together to mitigate cultural impacts on a military installation through off-post resource conservation. To date over 9,000 acres in the buffer region have been permanently protected through REPI and the Fort A. P. Hill ACUB Program.

Lessons Learned

Over the course of the project, team leaders learned a number of important lessons. According to John Mullin, Cultural Resource Manager at Fort A.P. Hill, it was critical to coordinate with the archeological community and conduct extensive outreach to local, interested parties: "We tailored the project to meet the needs of the archeological community and made sure that the critical sites were preserved. The outreach we did, particularly to the Native American tribes in the region, led us to a consensus on historic preservation priorities. It made our project easier because we could focus on the most important projects first." Hall notes: "We found success through strong teamwork and good communication among the parties, and, as a result, we were able to craft an agreement that not only preserves the property's cultural resources, but also conserves the family's ability to farm. With the agricultural resources conserved, we identified the village site on a map as an area where future homes could not be built. Also, before the landowner wants to build a home elsewhere on the property, he has to provide sufficient notice to the easement holder so that the sites can be cataloged and preserved."

One of the major lessons Busby learned is that installations can do even more: "Combine your compatible land use efforts with smart growth, heritage tourism, downtown revitalization efforts that involve historic preservation. All of this will help avoid incompatible development in buffer regions. Remember, these types of projects augment what you do on base; they don't limit what you do on base."

Team leaders suggest anyone interested in pursuing a project like the Camden Farm should:

- Build on previous successes and partnerships.

- Develop productive relationships among land conservation organizations working in the region, land use planners and historic preservation groups on- and off-post to identify potential synergies.
- Prepare for the inevitable delays that come with a project of such complexity.
- Ensure that the proper staff members are present at each meeting to save time and avoid miscommunication, which can lead to delays.
- Consider expanding formal partnerships with new partners.
- Take the time to develop a cooperative agreement with your State Historic Preservation Office that lays out the responsibilities of each party.
- Be sure to involve a partner that can translate the often technical language of the REPI and ACUB programs to landowners unfamiliar with Department of Defense jargon and regulations and who understands the requirements of historic preservation and land conservation.

Accomplishments

- Seventeenth-century Native American village sites and an antebellum plantation comprising part of a National Historic Landmark permanently protected.
- 9,000 acres of buffer land permanently protected from incompatible development.
- \$1.5 million saved by leveraging compliance funding for achieving off-post mitigation and buffering.