The Department of Defense and Endangered Species

The Department of Defense (DoD) has embraced its stewardship responsibilities for the rich variety of natural resources on the lands it manages, managing them for multiple use, sustained yield, and biodiversity integrity. But management decisions affecting DoD lands are directed by the fact that these lands were set aside to serve military training and testing purposes. The challenge for the DoD is to balance the need to use its air, land, and water resources for military training with the need to conserve these resources for future generations.*

A number of significant actions are affecting how the DoD manages its biological resources, which include rare animals and plants. Many of these changes will improve its management of endangered species:

**Passage of the Sikes Act amendments.**

The Sikes Act authorizes the DoD to manage natural resources on military lands, and the 1997 amendments to the Act provide many opportunities for the DoD to enhance its management. All military installations with significant natural resources are required to develop and implement integrated natural resources management plans (INRMPs) in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the appropriate State wildlife agency. The amendments also provide for public comment on these plans. The DoD’s military mission is also explicitly recognized: each INRMP shall ensure “no net loss in the capability of military installation lands to support the military mission of the installation.” These amendments also substantially raised the visibility of natural resources management within DoD by requiring annual reports to Congress and by giving a higher funding priority to implement natural resources projects listed in INRMPs. Because of these improvements, the INRMPs are better action plans for protecting endangered and threatened wildlife and plants than critical habitat designation while accommodating a base’s military mission.


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Freedom Soars:
DoD Salutes the Bald Eagle

In July 2000, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service unveiled Freedom Soars, a poster saluting the return of the bald eagle from near extinction. Created to recognize the recovery of the bald eagle, this poster highlights the numerous contributions made by DoD facilities and bases over the years. The front of the poster features silhouetted soldiers saluting a majestic bald eagle, while the back includes a timeline describing the recovery made by the bald eagle and a map pinpointing the 70 military bases around the U.S. that contributed to its recovery. The poster also describes six examples of the approaches that these bases have used to assist in recovery. As mentioned in the poster, “In the military’s eyes, there are many ways to let freedom soar, and conservation of our natural heritage is just one of them!”

For copies of the poster, please contact your nearest military base or:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Rm. 420
Arlington, VA 22203.
In November 1990, Congress passed legislation establishing the DoD Legacy Resource Management Program to provide special funds to preserve those parts of our nation’s natural and cultural heritage under military control. The program assists the military in protecting and enhancing resources while supporting military readiness. Many of the products and partnerships described in this edition of the Bulletin are funded through the Legacy program. More information about the Legacy program and the process for submitting project proposals are available via the web at http://www.dodlegacy.org.

Use of conservation easements on non-DoD lands.

The habitats on DoD installations are often the last, best hope for imperiled species. Many surrounding lands are experiencing rapid development and other encroachments. It is important that the DoD work to cooperate on resource management for these species beyond installation fencelines. For example, the Army is aiding landowners in the establishment of conservation easements near Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to protect additional habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (Picoides borealis).

Development of new tools for DoD land managers.

Two new handbooks will soon be available to the DoD’s natural resources managers. The INRMP Handbook will help DoD managers develop and implement their management plans, while the Joint Stewardship Handbook will help them work with managers from the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to manage the DoD’s withdrawn and special-use lands. We have also developed new training courses oriented specifically towards the needs of military land managers, and have reviewed and endorsed additional courses developed by other federal resource management agencies.

Other changes are likely to have mixed or even negative impacts on how the DoD manages its threatened and endangered species:

Decreased spending on long-term conservation efforts.

The DoD’s annual expenditures on threatened and endangered species have increased by one-half in the past 5 years to approximately $27.6 million. The Sikes Act amendments also added substantial new funding requirements. Furthermore, the number and complexity of conservation challenges have increased notably during the past decade. Yet the total amount budgeted for the DoD’s conservation programs, as
well as for the Army’s Integrated Training Area Management program, has declined slightly in real dollar terms during this same period. This suggests that although the DoD is doing what is needed to remain in short-term compliance, it may be missing significant opportunities to improve efficiencies and reduce the potential for long-term problems.

**Loss of natural resources positions.**

All federal agencies are undergoing studies to identify downsizing and contracting-out possibilities. Unfortunately, although these actions may produce short-term savings, they also may result in a loss of institutional memory, expertise, and dedication. Long-term initiatives may be abandoned. For example, comprehensive ecosystem management efforts, including volunteer and partnership development, are likely to suffer. There may also be a temptation to make decisions based on potential short-term gains, rather than on long-term resource sustainability requirements.

Endangered species management on military lands remains a challenging and critical focus for DoD’s resource managers. The articles in this special edition provide details on some of their more recent efforts. Success ultimately depends upon their skills and expertise, aided by the proper tools, training, and resources. Continued partnerships with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service are essential elements of these efforts.

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