

NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AWARDS PROTECT LAND AND WATER RESOURCES IN GEORGIA, ARIZONA 8,201 acres conserved to help ensure compatible land uses for military testing and training

U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Greenville, SC
For IMMEDIATE RELEASE (July 9, 2018)

Ft. Benning, Georgia, hosts the Army's Maneuver School of Excellence, home to five types of infantry: mechanized, light, airborne, air assault, and ranger. Ensuring the ability of these elite troops to train is a top priority for the Army. A \$3,675,000 award from the 2018 Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Initiative Challenge (REPI) Challenge Program will help do just that. The Nature Conservancy and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources will use the funds to acquire a conservation easement on a 7,051 acre parcel adjacent to the post, permanently protecting the land from potential incompatible development that might one day impede the Department of Defense mission there.

As part of the award, Ft. Benning and its partners will implement a species-crediting system that may help preclude listing of the eastern population of the gopher tortoise under the Endangered Species Act. The project will also advance a similar compensatory mitigation strategy for the red-cockaded woodpecker currently under development with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The ability to calculate and apply credits for imperiled species like the gopher tortoise and red-cockaded woodpecker will be important to providing specific regulatory relief and predictability for the installation related to Endangered Species Act compliance and increasing flexibility for mission requirements. A host of other at-risk species, such as the gopher frog, will also benefit.

Further west, at Arizona's Fort Huachuca, a \$1,112,250 REPI Challenge Program award will enable partners including the Arizona Land and Water Trust and potentially the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to place a conservation easement on an 1,150 acre parcel. Protecting this land will reduce competition for scarce water resources in the San Pedro River Watershed by curtailing plans to drill more than 200 new wells for proposed housing developments. Conserving this land will also allow continued military testing and training at Fort Huachuca. A water supply and use assessment will be conducted to identify water conservation activities on the property that complement natural and working lands in the region.

"These two projects highlight the critical role that the REPI Challenge Program plays for both the Department of Defense and natural resource conservation," said Peter Stangel, Chief Operating Office at the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment), which administers the Program as a service to the Department of Defense. "The REPI Challenge Program mobilizes significant federal funding that can be leveraged by partners to protect critical training areas and benefit working lands, such as forests and ranches, that fuel rural economies and quality of life."

Fort Benning and Fort Huachuca are both [Sentinel Landscapes](#), places where working and natural lands are important to the Nation's defense mission. At Sentinel Landscapes the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Defense, and Interior, and their partners, collaborate to protect the rural and working character of key landscapes to strengthen the economies of farms, ranches, and forests, conserve habitat and natural resources, and protect the military testing and training mission.

#

For more information contact:

Peter Stangel, 404-915-2763; peter@usendowment.org

The **U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities** (the Endowment) is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation's working forests and forest-reliant communities – www.usendowment.org

For more information about REPI and the REPI Challenge, please visit www.REPI.mil.