

Maintaining a military training route through market-based conservation

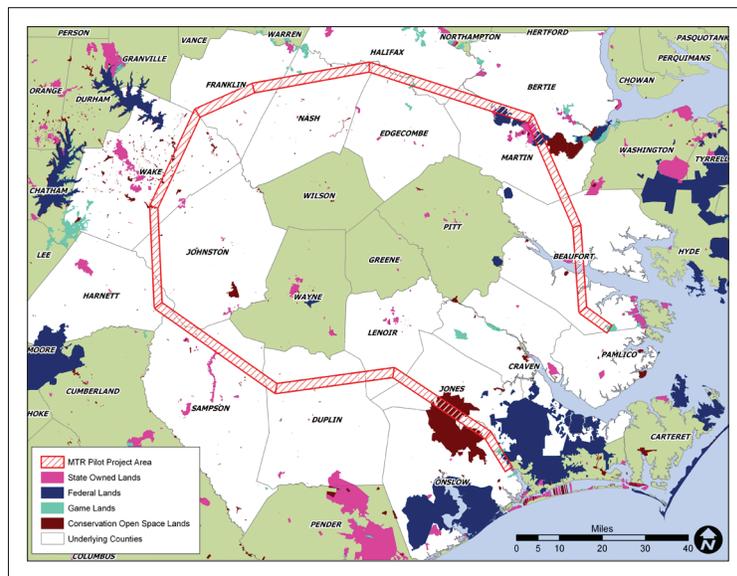
Since 1957, the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) has lost approximately 85 percent of its flight training airspace in eastern North Carolina due to encroachment from incompatible land uses—primarily urban development. Over this same period, there has been a significant loss of rural working lands (farms and forests). According to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, more than 600,000 acres of farmland have been lost since 2002. The implications for military training from the loss of these working lands are severe. Since forestry and agribusiness are compatible with the military’s training needs, the loss of forestry and agribusiness to increasingly urbanized areas and the associated encroachment issues can significantly degrade military mission sustainability.

In partnership with USMC Installations East, North Carolina Farm Bureau and other stakeholders, the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (IRNR) has developed a market-based conservation system. This voluntary system provides incentives to private landowners to maintain their land in military-mission-compatible uses and adopt sound land stewardship practices. Through a reverse auction process, landowners compete to participate in the program where they place bids that include the area of land, contract length and the amount of annual payment they expect. Using ranking criteria that prioritize USMC training and conservation interests, the most cost-competitive contracts for meeting these needs are accepted into the program.

This group has identified a military training route (MTR) in eastern North Carolina as the focus of a pilot project. This MTR is a 2-mile wide loop covering approximately 400,000 acres, from Camp Lejeune to Raleigh, crossing portions of 16 counties. Approximately 90 percent of the land underlying the MTR is privately owned.

Market-based Conservation

This pilot project creates a framework and system through which private landowners may voluntarily enter into agreements for protecting their land from conversion to uses



incompatible with military training. The program provides market-based incentives to target those lands that are of greatest interest to the military mission and of greatest value for conservation.

Using a system designed and operated with engagement from landowner organizations is more likely than other available tools to gain landowner interest and acceptance. By using performance contracts instead of conservation easements, the program is more cost-effective to the military and other sponsors and is more likely to be widely accepted by landowners in the target area.

Outcomes

These efforts will maintain rural working lands and promote conservation on agricultural and forestry lands. Through the use of market-based incentives, the military will gain future assurances for maintaining readiness through increased training flexibility. This pilot project will serve as a model for other states facing similar military land-use compatibility issues.

