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BRAC Commission

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Received

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi, Chairman
2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
2521 South Clark, Suite 600
Arlington, Virginia 22202

Dear Chairman Principi:

The Florida Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has a long and positive relationship with the State of Florida, Department of Defense (DoD) and military bases in Florida. Since the early 1980's, TNC has joined forces with bases to assess natural habitats as well as design and implement land and stream management plans. We work cooperatively to buffer military bases with land acquisition projects that will also protect the biodiversity of the region.

The State of Florida has invested more than \$755 million to preserve 512,000 acres around military bases. The bases are critically important reserves for biodiversity. Booming residential development threatens to either isolate the natural communities or draw down the diversity in the region. By conserving the land adjacent to the bases, both the natural habitats and the military operations are buffered from incompatible development.

On first glance, the partnership may seem odd, but there are many outstanding accomplishments and innovative projects underway to advance the complimentary missions of TNC, the State of Florida and DoD. For example:

- Florida partnered with the Department of Defense for the dual purpose of environmental protection and national defense. Under the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative, Florida joined with the Army National Guard at Camp Blanding to acquire almost 9,000 acres of conservation lands in Camp Blanding's buffer area.
- In Clay, Duval and Nassau counties, the Northeast Florida Timberlands project aims to protect the vast flatwoods and floodplain forests. The goal is to connect seven large publicly owned areas - Cary State Forest, OLF Whitehouse, Cecil Field, Jennings State Forest, Camp Blanding Military Reservation, Etoniah Creek State Forest, and the western boundary of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve - to form an unbroken wildlife corridor and improve public access for outdoor recreation. More than 43,330 acres of this 139,847-acre project are already in public ownership.
- Working with Eglin Air Force Base and the State of Florida in the Northwest Florida Greenway Project, TNC is partnering with DoD and other federal, state and local partners, to protect a 100-mile long corridor of open space that will serve

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- both species and the military. The Northwest Florida Greenway is a model project for military and conservation partnerships. This protected corridor will span across the Florida Panhandle from the eastern border of Eglin to the western border of the Apalachicola National Forest. This year the DoD joined with the State of Florida to purchase a 17,000-acre conservation easement in the Northwest Florida Greenway corridor just east of Eglin.
- North of Eglin, the pristine upland and riparian corridor of the Yellow River has the potential to provide the missing link that will connect a pathway from the Gulf of Mexico to Conecuh National Forest in southern Alabama - an important area biologically and, coincidentally, a flyway for military training operations.
- At Naval Air Station Whiting Field, TNC is working to protect the freshwater diversity of neighboring Coldwater Creek and Clear Creek. This project will eventually encircle Whiting Field, buffering the base from development and providing area for a public recreational trail.

At these places mentioned above and at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Avon Park Air Force Range, the Florida Keys and other bases throughout Florida, TNC, DoD and the State of Florida are finding common ground. Protection of lands around the installations will allow for the future of our national security -- and our natural security.

We are delighted to have both the Florida Forever land acquisition program and the partnership with the DoD to help TNC and others save the abundant diversity of life in the State of Florida. As such, we support the protection of conservation lands around Cecil Field and OLF Whitehouse to further our environmental goals while protecting military installations from encroachment.

Sincerely,


Victoria J. Tschinkel
State Director

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