



The Northwest Florida Greenway

Protecting a corridor of open space stretching from the Apalachicola National Forest to Eglin Air Force Base, the Northwest Florida Greenway is intended to preserve environmentally sensitive areas, sustain existing military lands and airspace, maintain the economic viability of forest lands and provide recreation.

Background

Florida's Panhandle boasts one of the last wilderness spaces in the state. Federal, state and local agencies, along with environmental advocates and the military services, have long recognized the conservation value of Northwest Florida's biologically rich lands.

The Department of Defense, led by Eglin Air Force Base, is seeking opportunities to reduce encroachment from development adjacent to area bases and within existing military low-level flyways, which could restrict the mission of the region's five major military installations. At the same time, protecting a natural land corridor will preserve habitat for wildlife and open space for recreation.

Recognizing a common interest in preserving open space in the Panhandle, military installations, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, The Nature Conservancy, Okaloosa County and others are partnering to identify and protect hundreds of thousands of acres of open space.

Location of Proposed Corridor

The Northwest Florida Greenway establishes a 750,000 acre, 100-mile corridor, which follows the flight path of military aircraft on training exercises. Largely undeveloped, the land is teeming with wildlife and native flora – ideal for conservation and recreation. Ultimately, the greenway would span six counties and connect two large existing protected areas: Eglin Air Force Base and the Apalachicola National Forest.



Land Protection Strategies

Lands will be conserved through purchase from willing property owners and the acquisition of development rights using conservation easements. Conservation easements allow property owners and communities to continue to derive economic benefit from the land while protecting it from development. Land swaps and environmental mitigation may also be an effective means to preserve property.

Current and Future Land Use

More than half of the land within the proposed greenway is upland forest. Through conservation easements or purchase, and management by the Florida Department of Agriculture's Division of Forestry, much of the land will be managed for sustainable forestry.



The Department of Defense employs approximately 80,000 military and civilian personnel in Florida, with approximately 56 percent located on military installations in Northwest Florida. Military weapon systems and tactics have changed drastically in recent years, requiring more open land and airspace to securely conduct test and training missions. To ensure safety and manage noise, military installations require large buffers for airfields, ranges and operating areas.

Protected land and airspace will allow for continued military testing and training operations in the Panhandle. Conservation will also allow continued enjoyment of the land for recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, paddling and nature study.

Benefits

Preservation of lands in the greenway will benefit the environment, military operations, Florida residents, visitors and the local economy. As Northwest Florida continues to grow, military buffers will have an increasingly important role in sustaining biodiversity and protecting the region's bays, estuaries and waterways. Conserving open space protects threatened and endangered wildlife, preserves habitat and provides added outdoor, nature-based recreation.



Funding

The project will be supported by land acquisition programs in the Department of Environmental Protection, Northwest Florida Water Management District, Department of Community Affairs, Division of Forestry and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Sources of federal funding could include the Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Local funding may be generated through future county conservation programs

