



## 2024 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards Environmental Quality, Non-Industrial Installation Award

Each year since 1962, the Secretary of Defense has honored installations, teams, and individuals for outstanding achievements in Department of Defense (DoD) environmental programs. These accomplishments include outstanding conservation activities, innovative environmental practices, and partnerships that improve quality of life and promote efficiencies without compromising DoD's mission success. The 2024 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards cycle encompasses an achievement period from October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2023 (Fiscal Years [FY] 2022-2023). A diverse panel of 48 judges with relevant expertise representing Federal and state agencies, academia, and the private sector evaluated all nominees to select 1 winner for each of the 9 categories. These nine categories cover six subject areas including natural resources conservation, environmental quality, sustainability, environmental restoration, cultural resources management, and environmental excellence in weapon systems acquisition.

### About the Environmental Quality, Non-Industrial Installation Award

The Environmental Quality, Non-Industrial Installation award recognizes efforts to ensure mission accomplishment and the protection of human health and the environment in the areas of environmental planning, waste management, and compliance with environmental laws and regulations (e.g., Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Toxic Substances Control Act). Meeting or exceeding all environmental requirements not only enhances the protection of our environmental assets, but also sustains DoD's ability to effectively train and maintain readiness. Non-industrial installations are large or small installations that include ranges, test centers, contracting and policy agencies/organizations/offices, and research-and-development centers. The 2024 winner of the Environmental Quality, Non-Industrial Installation award is *Eglin Air Force Base, Florida*.

### About Eglin Air Force Base, Florida

Situated along the Emerald Coast and extending into the heart of Florida's panhandle, Eglin Air Force Base (Eglin) is home to the 96th Test Wing, responsible for the development, acquisition, testing, deployment, and sustainment of all air-delivered conventional weapons. Eglin is the Department of the Air Force's (DAF) largest installation and stretches into four counties, encompassing 464,000 acres of land ranges, 123,000 square miles of water ranges, and 153 miles of shoreline. The Eglin reservation is adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico and has more than 50 distinct test areas and over 440 tactical training areas. This unique setting and overwater airspace combine to provide a sea-to-land transition area, which is a vital resource for modern weapons system testing and an environmental challenge that Eglin continually meets. The 96th Test Wing hosts 9 wing/wing equivalents and 35 associate units that accomplish their missions while maintaining a symbiotic relationship with 306 rare and protected plant and animal species. Eglin ensures access to 250,000 acres of its reservation for public recreation while safeguarding mission availability. The workforce population is 20,506, which comprises 9,680 military personnel and 10,826 civilians and contractors. Eglin's annual economic impact on the local community is \$9.2 billion.



*Dr. Ravi Chaudhary, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Energy, Installations and Environment, snaps a photo of the Okaloosa darter during a delisting ceremony at Eglin Air Force Base on August 2, 2023.*

## Major Accomplishments in FY 2022-2023

- Eglin demonstrated a commitment to stewardship and sustainability through enhancing habitat and fostering the protection of threatened and endangered species, including the Okaloosa darter. This rare species of fish has a habitat range within the Eglin reservation. Expansive conservation efforts across 385,000 acres and 2,150 miles of range roads led to the Endangered Species Act de-listing of the Okaloosa darter. Eglin's efforts included minimizing pollutant and sediment runoff into darter streams, which impacts the health and suitability of their aquatic habitat.
- The Hazardous Waste Program expertly renewed a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Subpart X permit for open detonation of unserviceable munitions and research, development, test, and evaluation of reactive wastes. Eglin resolved complex regulatory and community interest group challenges, avoiding more than \$25 million in off-site treatment costs for the disposal of munitions and reactive materials.
- The Eglin Natural Resources Office (NRO), in conjunction with volunteers and partnering agencies, constructed 13 temporary enclosures across the reservation allowing the translocation of 6,344 gopher tortoises. To date, Eglin has supported more than 10,000 gopher tortoises being moved to the installation, and the NRO is on track to reach the goal of 18 minimum viable populations.
- Eglin led the largest multiagency spill training exercise ever undertaken at the installation. Eglin responders deployed over 6,000 feet of oil containment boom by boat as well as 2 oil skimmers once the boom was in place. The exercise successfully demonstrated Eglin's response capabilities, accomplished needed training for U.S. Coast Guard personnel, and strengthened regional interagency cooperation and preparation.
- Longleaf pines are indigenous to the Southeastern United States and once occupied as many as 60 million acres. The NRO planted 1 million longleaf pine seedlings, which established over 2,000 acres of habitat. With so many pine trees on the Eglin reservation, pine needles are an abundant resource. The NRO creatively made use of an otherwise wasted resource and established the first ever DAF commercial pine straw contract, which generated approximately \$100,000 annually. These funds were used to restore 600 acres of threatened and endangered species habitat.
- The Air Program obtained an air construction permit to increase the annual natural gas fuel limit by 26.5 million standard cubic feet per year for 3 Energy Saving Performance Contract engine-generator sets. The increase maximized annual run time, enhanced operational flexibility, and saved \$150,000 per year in additional energy costs.



*Nadia Cain, an Eglin volunteer, releases a tortoise toward its new burrow. A group of 17 volunteers dug starter burrows to encourage the 22 new gopher tortoises to settle into their new habitat within the relocation pens on the range.*



*From left to right: Captain Whitney Stine, Firefighter Christopher Smead, Lieutenant Nicholas Seghers, Captain Robert Manby, and Battalion Chief Daniel Bye pull boom across Weekly Bayou as part of the largest multiagency spill training exercise ever undertaken by Eglin Air Force Base.*