Marine Corps Support Facility-Blount Island: Integrated Natural Resources Program Successes

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Location

MCSF - Blount Island
The mission of Marine Corps Support Facility – Blount Island (MCSF-BI) is to plan, coordinate, and execute logistics efforts in support of the Maritime Prepositioning Ships Program and the Marine Corps Prepositioning Program, Norway.
Blount Island History

- Created as a spoil island for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging in St. John’s River in the 1960’s
- Property turned over to the Jacksonville Port Authority (JAXPORT) to develop
- Eastern half of Blount Island sold to Gate Maritime, then acquired by the Marine Corps in 2005
Marine Corps Support Facility – BI
MCSF-BI Area

• MCSF-BI consists of
  – 902 acres located on the eastern half of Blount Island
  – 334-acre dredge disposal area (DDA) is part of located on the east bank of the St. Johns River
• Developed property consists of 686 acres of military facilities and associated infrastructure (e.g. stormwater ponds)

• Undeveloped areas include:
  – 216 acres on Blount Island
  – 334 acres at the DDA
Land Use

Legend:
- **Industrial**
- **Undeveloped**
- **Dredge Spoil**
- **Water**

- MCSF Blount Island
- Dayson Dredge Disposal Area
Natural Resources Significance

- Located along Atlantic flyway for migratory birds
- Contains freshwater and estuarine wetlands
- Habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species including manatee, birds, American alligator and gopher tortoise
INRMP History

• Initial INRMP for MCSF-BI signed in 2007

• Participants
  – Federal Agencies
    • USACE, USEPA, USFWS, NMFS, NPS
  – State and Local Agencies
    • FDEP, FFWC, OCHP, St. John’s Water Management District
    • City of Jacksonville, JAXPORT
  – Public
• **INRMP Focus:**
  
  • Inventory natural resources
  • Protect and enhance wetlands and riparian areas
  • Survey migratory birds and wildlife
  • Control invasive plant and pests
  • Protect and enhance sensitive species
  • Develop GIS and integrate environmental planning
  • Integrate INRMP with grounds maintenance
  • Evaluate recreation and education opportunities
• Initial accomplishments focused on documenting resources present:
  – Protected species/habitats survey in 2005
  – Wetland delineation in 2008
  – Gopher tortoise surveys in 2008, 09, 10 and 11
  – Eastern indigo snake survey in 2009
  – Alligator surveys in 2009, 2010
• Wetland and riparian resources include:
  – 91.7 acres of wetlands on Blount Island and 191 acres at DDA
  – Stormwater ponds and ditches on Blount Island
  – St. John’s River shoreline

• Actions implemented focused on improving quality:
  – invasive species removal
  – protection from potential impacts
Wetlands and Riparian Areas
• 105 species of birds, including 29 breeding species, have been identified at MCSF-BI.
• Actions implemented:
  • Improve existing habitat
  • Avoid of activities that would disrupt reproduction
  • Coordinate maintenance and construction to avoid disturbance in or adjacent to active nesting areas
  • Accommodate the habitat needs of migratory birds in the designs of future facilities.
  • Increase roosting and nesting habitat in stormwater ponds and the dredged material disposal site.
Wildlife Management

• Alligators
  – 67 found in 2009 survey
  – 32 found in 2010
  – Warning signs posted in alligator habitat
  – Annual training on alligator procedures

• Snakes
  – Relocated from high traffic areas
  – May be killed if they would cause an unsafe work environment
  - Species include chinaberry, Chinese tallow, salt cedar, and cogon grass
- 70 acres of salt cedar killed at DDA to limit the potential to spread to adjacent areas
- Chinaberry trees removed from areas adjacent to the gopher tortoise burrows
Invasive Plants

CJ Chinaberry codominant
Olmice Tallow scattered
Chinese Tallow scattered

Invasive Plant Species
- Chinaberry codominant with native species
- Chinaberry codominant: Chinese Tallow codominant
- Chinaberry codominant: Chinese Tallow scattered
- Chinaberry dominant
- Chinaberry scattered
- Chinese Tallow scattered
- Cogon Grass
- Salt Cedar scattered
• Surveys identified 15 federal or state-listed protected species
  – West Indian Manatee (FE)
  – Wood Stork (FE)
  – Other birds (primarily wading and shore)
  – American alligator (SAT)
  – Gopher tortoise (ST)
Sensitive Habitats

MCSF Blount Island

Dayson Dredge Disposal Area

Legend:
- Manatee Habitat
- Gopher Tortoise Habitat
- Wading Bird Habitat
Sensitive Species Management

- Actions implemented:
  - Avoidance and minimization of potential impacts
  - Habitat maintenance and enhancement
  - Monitoring and surveying to identify status, quality, trends and distribution
  - GIS-based tracking system of observances
Manatees have been documented in the slipway at MCSF-BI
• Actions implemented include:
  – Install signage
  – Work instructions and training
  – Watch posted whenever activity will occur in slipway
  – Coordinate with FWC during ship movements
Active gopher tortoise burrows have been identified in undeveloped areas (e.g. 5 acre area of small original island)
• Actions implemented include:
  – Signage posted to prevent vehicle traffic
  – Enhancement of desired vegetation
  – Removal of invasive vegetation
- Prepared EA
- Kickoff meeting
- 5 day survey the facility
  - 120 burrows found
  - 92 potentially occupied
- Submit dig permit
- 10 day relocation of all gopher tortoise to Appalachee national forest Tallahassee, FL
Rare Birds

- Rare birds observed primarily in stormwater ponds, ditches, and wetlands
- Wood storks have been observed in stormwater ponds and in DDA
- Protection and enhancement actions, including monitoring and surveys, are conducted as part of overall bird program
• Installation environmental staff works with base planners to accommodate the habitat needs of birds and sensitive species in the designs of future facilities.
• Developed new GIS data layers to aid in integration of natural resources program
• Accomplishments include development of natural resources information for grounds maintenance and landscaping staff
  – GIS layers identify off-limits areas
  – Signs mark boundaries and provide contact numbers
  – A map identifying jurisdictional and non-jurisdictional waters and the typical maintenance activities allowed within them
Annual debris removal program along the St. Johns River shoreline initiated in 2008

- 60 tires, 7 pounds of aluminum cans, approximately 20 tons of treated lumber, and 20 cubic yards of miscellaneous trash in 2008 and 2009
- Boy Scouts helped in 2010
Recreation

• Limited recreation potential at MCSF-BI

• Recreational fishing
  – Designated areas approved for fishing by facility staff and dependents in 2007.
  – Authorized fishing areas are identified by signs

• Potential future use for bird watching