

Avon Park Air Force Range

Avon Park Air Force Range is the Air Force's largest primary air-to-ground training range east of the Mississippi River. The installation's large restricted airspace and operating area, including a 106,000-acre bombing and gunnery range, provide training infrastructure that is not only used extensively by the Air Force, but also by the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and state and local law enforcement. Situated in historically rural central Florida, air and ground forces are able to practice the latest combat training techniques and procedures safely, efficiently, and realistically.

Outside of the installation is the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area, a high priority area for the Department of the Interior that is known as a world-class destination for hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, birding, and outdoor educational opportunities for all ages. The landscape is characterized by its high biological diversity and supports many threatened, endangered, and at-risk species, which require innovative strategies to maintain Avon Park's training flexibility in the face of development pressures.

Private agricultural lands are interspersed among the Sentinel Landscape's protected military and Refuge lands. In an effort to conserve these properties and keep them compatible with the military's air-to-ground training exercises, the Air Force, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service are working with local, state, and private conservation partners to create a network of priority lands that will protect watersheds, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, community recreation opportunities, and Avon Park's military mission.



Lake Hatchineha in the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge & Conservation Area.
(Photo courtesy of the Everglades Headwaters NWR)

BENEFITING WORKING LANDS

Cattle ranches, citrus farms, croplands, and working forests have dominated the ecological and cultural history of the Avon Park Sentinel Landscape for over 150 years. Local producers have built a strong agricultural economy while leading stewardship efforts in the region to protect and maintain the agricultural-based "working watershed" of the Everglades Headwaters. Agriculture in central Florida is uniquely compatible with both Avon Park's military mission and the habitat needs of threatened, endangered, and at-risk species. However, population growth across Florida has led to unprecedented landscape conversion that threatens the region's agricultural sustainability, historic way of life, and training flexibility at Avon Park.

Through a suite of landowner assistance programs, Federal and state agencies such as USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services are working with willing landowners in the Sentinel Landscape to restore and conserve working lands. In turn, these efforts will help buffer Avon Park from suburban development, protect and improve water quality within the Lake Okeechobee and Everglades National Park watershed, and maintain the viability of regional agricultural production.

CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

It is no coincidence that the Avon Park Sentinel Landscape encompasses the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. The Everglades Headwaters is a highly treasured and significant landscape that provides freshwater downstream to millions of residents along the coasts of Florida and is home to diverse populations of native and endemic habitat types. Owing to the significant environmental benefits and ecological services provided by the landscape, the Everglades

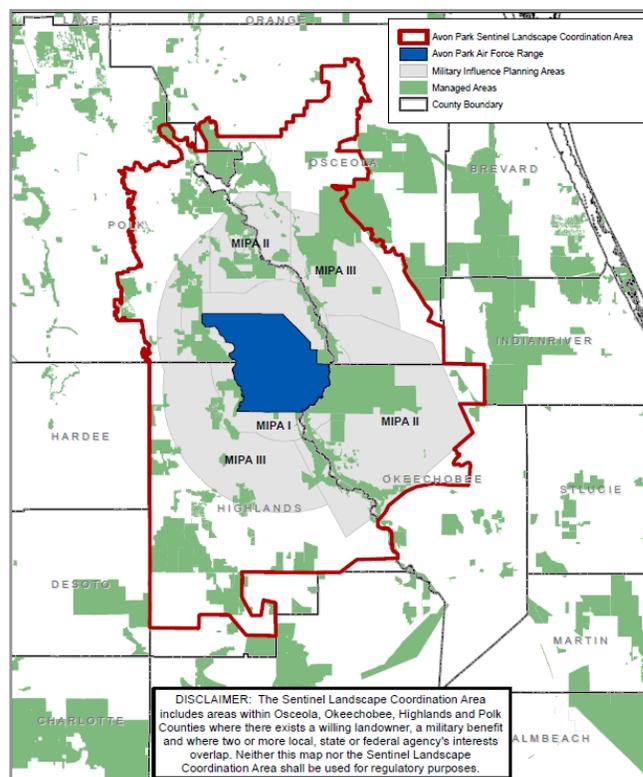
are a national conservation priority and the Everglades Headwaters have been the focus of numerous Federal and state efforts over the years. Recently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began connecting a series of conservation easements into wildlife corridors, and the Florida Forever Program and South Florida Water Management District are working to protect and restore other important conservation areas. Additional partners working throughout the Sentinel Landscape aim to build on existing efforts to protect habitats supporting migratory birds, native wildlife diversity, and rare species, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and gopher tortoise.

LOOKING FORWARD

Partners are coalescing around a shared vision at Avon Park — a vision that represents a “win-win-win” for national security, working lands, and conservation. Funding agencies, conservation groups, and landowners in the region recognize the vital national security role that installations like Avon Park AFR play in maintaining the readiness of our troops. Conserving and protecting the Avon Park Sentinel Landscape

from encroachment and incompatible development will allow active agricultural production to continue while also maintaining a strong and mission-oriented military training and testing presence in rapidly growing central Florida.

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PARTNERS

FEDERAL

- ★ U.S. Department of Agriculture
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service
 - U.S. Forest Service
- ★ U.S. Department of Defense
 - Office of Economic Adjustment Joint Land Use Study
 - Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program
- ★ U.S. Department of the Interior
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

STATE

- ★ Central Florida Regional Planning Council
- ★ Florida Defense Alliance
- ★ Florida Defense Support Task Force and Grants

- ★ Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
- ★ Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- ★ Florida Department of Transportation
- ★ Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
- ★ South Florida Water Management District
- ★ University of Florida – Center for Landscape Conservation Planning
- ★ University of Florida – Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

LOCAL

- ★ Highlands County
- ★ Okeechobee County
- ★ Osceola County
- ★ Polk County

NGOS

- ★ American Farm Bureau Federation
- ★ The Conservation Fund
- ★ Florida Audubon
- ★ Florida Wildlife Association
- ★ The Forestry Association
- ★ National Cattlemen’s Beef Association
- ★ The National Wildlife Refuge Association
- ★ The Nature Conservancy
- ★ The Trust for Public Land