

Northeast Florida Regional Council
Military Installation Readiness Review



Building a Comprehensive Resource Management Program for Attainable Housing and Natural Resource Conservation

AUGUST 2026



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CCME	Conservation/Coastal Management Element
DoD	Department of Defense
FDEP	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
FLU	Future Land Use
FLUE	Future Land Use Element
JTC	Joint Training Center
MCSF	Marine Corps Support Facility
MIRR	Military Installation Readiness Review
NAS	Naval Air Station
NERFC	Northeast Florida Regional Council
NFLT	North Florida Land Trust
NOLF	Navy Outlying Landing Field
NS	Naval Station
O2O	Ocala-to-Osceola
REPI	Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration
RRAP	Regional Resilience Action Plan
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
WMA	Wildlife Management Area



1 Introduction

Northeast Florida military installations Naval Air Station (NAS) Jacksonville and Navy Outlying Landing Field (NOLF) Whitehouse, Naval Station (NS) Mayport, Marine Corps Support Facility (MCSF) Blount Island, and Camp Blanding Joint Training Center (JTC) are vital to national defense and to the regional economy. Their missions depend not only on what happens inside the fence line but also on land use in the communities surrounding them.

These communities, Clay County and the City of Jacksonville, face competing land use demands, including population growth, new development, and exposure to natural hazards. As a result, there is growing pressure on the region's shared land use patterns, natural resources, and housing markets. Since most military and civilian defense personnel live off base, these pressures directly affect mission readiness.

This Military Installation Readiness Review (MIRR) examines those interconnected pressures in Northeast Florida. Working with installation leadership, local governments, state and federal agencies, and non-governmental partners, it identifies shared vulnerabilities and the coordinated actions that can address them.

This White Paper is organized around land use as a central concept. Decisions about how land is used and managed underpin several issues of concern for the MIRR, including natural resource conservation, shoreline protection, wildfire management, and housing. By framing these issues in a regional context while grounding them in the specific circumstances of the region's installations, this document serves as a primer for the more detailed analysis and strategic planning explored through the MIRR.



2 Purpose and Approach

2.1 Purpose

This White Paper summarizes the issues, challenges, and opportunities explored throughout the MIRR process, while also setting the stage for the technical analysis and recommendations delivered in Technical Memorandums 8, 9, and 10 of the MIRR. The aims of this White Paper are as follows:

- Discuss the interconnected challenges of land use, natural resource management, and housing.
- Explore how the vulnerabilities associated with these issues impact military installations and surrounding defense communities.
- Serve as an informational resource on the issues discussed.
- Provide a foundation for other deliverables associated with this MIRR.

2.2 Operating Assumptions

Given the breadth of issues covered under the following topics, we present the following operating assumptions that guided development of this White Paper and the discussion of the issues within:

- **Land Use and Management.** Approached as an “umbrella issue,” under which natural resource conservation and housing are addressed. Land use is the overarching structure and connection point for regional planning and coordination.
- **Natural Resources.** Approached as a component of land use and mission readiness. Shoreline erosion, wildfire, marsh migration, and habitat loss not only affect ecosystems but also threaten installation resilience, operational flexibility, and long-term sustainability.
- **Housing.** Approached as a mission-supportive land use and social infrastructure issue. The lack of affordable housing near military installations is a socioeconomic problem as well as a land use and infrastructure concern. It poses challenges to mission success and readiness via effects on military personnel, civilian personnel, and defense contractors.



3 Existing Regional Context

Northeast Florida's military presence is anchored by four installations: NAS Jacksonville (including NOLF Whitehouse), NS Mayport, MCSF Blount Island, and Camp Blanding JTC. These installations are located within the City of Jacksonville and Clay County, with regional coordination provided by the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC). As the majority of installation personnel live and work off base, the surrounding communities' land use, natural resource, and housing decisions have direct relevance to mission readiness.

When it comes to land use, the region has a strong framework on which to build. The Resilient First Coast Regional Resilience Action Plan (RRAP) has goals spanning water quality and supply, wildfire preparedness, resilient utilities, and shoreline stabilization, with named implementation partners for many actions (NEFRC 2025). At the local scale, the City of Jacksonville's Resilient Jacksonville strategy and its 2025 Annual Update translate several of these goals into active programs (City of Jacksonville 2023, 2025a). Duval and Clay counties each maintain comprehensive plan elements that carry binding policy on natural resource conservation and housing, notably, Duval County's Conservation/Coastal Management Element (CCME), Future Land Use Element (FLUE), and Housing Element and Clay County's Conservation, Future Land Use (FLU), and Housing Elements.

Moreover, compatible-use planning between the installations and local governments is active and well codified. In the City of Jacksonville, the FLUE establishes Military and Civilian Influence Zones with binding density and use restrictions, including Accident Potential Zone and noise-zone limits and mandatory disclosure of airport proximity for prospective owners near the installations (City of Jacksonville 2025b). A dedicated Lighting Regulation Zone around NOLF Whitehouse preserves dark-sky conditions for the field's carrier-landing training mission (City of Jacksonville 2025b, 2026). Buffering is also enforced through a 2022 North Florida Land Trust (NFLT) Encroachment Protection Agreement with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and the City of Jacksonville covering Navy assets. In Clay County, FLU Goal 2 directs cooperation with Camp Blanding through the Camp Blanding Overlay Impact Area Map and policies that require installation review of amendments, rezonings, and development orders in the impact area and constrain building height, tower height, and lighting near training operations (Clay County n.d.a). Additionally, Camp Blanding maintains a 3-mile buffer under the DoD Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program.



4 Land Use and Natural Resources

In Northeast Florida, shorelines, wetlands, working forests, and fire-adapted uplands buffer installations, absorb flood and storm energy, and shape where and how development can occur. When these systems are degraded or fragmented, the consequences reach past the fence line to the communities that depend on them. The following sections examine three natural resource domains that are consequential for regional installations—shorelines, conservation lands, and wildfire-prone landscapes—and the opportunities that a coordinated, regional approach to land use creates for each.

4.1 Shorelines and Coastal Resilience

The region's shorelines are both a first line of defense for its communities and installations and a threatened natural resource. State assessments identify roughly 10.4 miles of critically eroded beach and 0.7 mile of critically eroded inlet shoreline in Duval County, while Clay County's 67 miles of tidally influenced river shoreline are prone to riverbank instability and marsh-edge retreat. This erosion along the Atlantic coast and the tidal St. Johns River poses a threat to NS Mayport, MCSF Blount Island, and NAS Jacksonville (APTIM 2026).

The City of Jacksonville has taken some policy measures to protect its shorelines. The City's CCME directs that ocean-fronting beaches and dunes be kept predominantly in their natural state and generally prohibits new shore-hardening structures. Additionally, Jacksonville's Adaptation Action Area provisions require the City to weigh living shorelines and wetland restoration alongside hard structural options for capital projects (City of Jacksonville 2025c). The City's Office of Resilience is also developing a geospatial suitability model covering more than 300 miles of St. Johns River shoreline to distinguish where bulkheads versus living shorelines are appropriate (City of Jacksonville 2025a). Installation-adjacent projects are advancing as well, including National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration-supported living shoreline and beneficial reuse work at Blount Island and a Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)-integrated dune restoration tied to channel maintenance at NS Mayport (APTIM 2026).

4.2 Challenges

Despite regional efforts to boost coastal resilience, shoreline erosion and coastal flooding remain chronic management concerns along Duval County's Atlantic coast and the St. Johns River. Challenges include the following:

- Urban and installation boundaries act as dual barriers for wetlands and marshlands, locking in their landward and waterward edges and blocking inland migration as sea levels rise.
- FDEP permitting is an implementation barrier for living shorelines that exceed 500 linear feet, which often require state executive discretion rather than a clear regulatory pathway. Permitting for the living shoreline in Floridatown Park took roughly 2 years, and similar administrative delays continue to impact projects in Jacksonville.
- Installations are vulnerable to shoreline and coastal hazards. At NS Mayport, projected mid-century inundation could affect roughly a quarter of the installation, moving inland from



the canal along Perimeter Road through culverts beneath Mayport Road toward the airfield. Blount Island is at risk of interior flooding through its central canal, and NAS Jacksonville has vulnerable points at the southeastern seawall, the Bluff Road marina shoreline, and the Roosevelt Boulevard bridge.

- Ownership of the region's shorelines is fragmented. Federal ownership of installation shorelines concentrates implementation and funding responsibility within federal agencies, which can limit the participation of external funding partners. Additionally, only 4.4 of the 100 linear miles of Jacksonville's hardened shoreline are City-owned, limiting the effectiveness of public bulkhead management alone (City of Jacksonville 2023).

4.3 Opportunities

Incorporating shoreline resilience into a regional approach to land use treats shorelines as a shared regional asset rather than a set of isolated parcels. The region's governments, installations, and agencies are already actively pursuing coastal resilience projects and already share both the exposure and the responsibility of shoreline impacts. As a result, there is a strong basis for a coordinated approach rather than a series of isolated, reactive fixes. Such an approach would align the region's many shoreline owners and funders around the places that matter most for communities and mission alike. Opportunities for the region include the following:

- Prioritize nature-based and hybrid shoreline solutions, such as living shorelines, dune and marsh restoration, and beneficial reuse of dredged sediment, where conditions allow, reserving hardened structures for the highest-criticality assets.
- Use shared vulnerability data and shoreline suitability mapping to focus resources on the discrete segments, canals, and crossings that govern interior flooding.
- Reflect military shoreline vulnerability in local adaptation planning so that City and County resilience efforts and installation needs point in the same direction.
- Coordinate federal, state, and local partners around shared shoreline resources to pool funding, permitting capacity, and monitoring.
- Pursue a clearer, more predictable permitting pathway for living shorelines with FDEP and federal partners, particularly for larger projects (greater than 500 linear feet) that now hinge on case-by-case state discretion and the delays that come with it.

4.4 Conservation

Conservation in Northeast Florida is closely tied to mission readiness. Salt marsh, wetlands, working forests, and wildlife corridors buffer installations from encroachment, sustain the training environments installations rely on, and give the coast room to adapt. Northeast Florida has a strong network of conservation lands adjacent to installations. These include the 46,000-acre Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, the Ocala-to-Osceola (O2O) Wildlife Corridor, a roughly 1.6-million-acre landscape of public and private lands forming a 100-mile linkage between the Ocala and Osceola National Forests, and the 56,000-acre Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area (WMA) designated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



The NFLT is the region's primary non-profit conservation partner. It has used DoD REPI and Army Compatible Use Buffer funding to acquire land around Camp Blanding, including a 1,109-acre tract in Bradford County within the O2O corridor (WCJB 2025). In 2024, Clay County adopted an ordinance establishing its own Forests and Farms Conservation Lands Program to protect natural and agricultural lands through County-funded acquisitions and easements, a local government counterpart to NFLT's ongoing work. Additionally, state water managers already prioritize floodplain and coastal wetlands as non-structural flood- and erosion-mitigation assets (APTIM 2026).

4.4.1 Challenges

Even with this network in place, the region's conservation lands face growing pressure from development and fragmentation. As growth pushes toward installation boundaries and into the corridors that connect protected areas, individual preserves risk being cut off from one another, which erodes both their ecological function and the buffer they provide to military missions. Current challenges to the region's conservation efforts are as follows:

- Rapid growth in Clay County, particularly around Middleburg, together with the First Coast Expressway and the Keystone Heights water-line expansion, is driving development toward Camp Blanding's boundaries.
- Camp Blanding's habitat value is significant. The Camp Blanding WMA supports four federally listed and 22 state-listed species, including a population of more than 2,000 gopher tortoises. As surrounding lands develop, the installation's actively managed habitat, sustained through prescribed burning and ongoing land stewardship, becomes one of the best remaining refuges in the area and draws in additional threatened and endangered species. As those species establish on base, the installation takes on added obligations to protect them, which can constrain where and when training and testing occur.
- Where hardened development lines the shore, salt marsh and wetlands have no room to migrate inland as seas rise, greatly reducing the opportunity for adaptation.
- Land protection depends on neighboring landowners and on funding that spans multiple programs and jurisdictions, which are not always coordinated or share priorities. The REPI program is an important tool for pursuing the long-term conservation of priority buffer parcels, but acquisitions can only happen when there are willing sellers; Camp Blanding and NFLT are the only partners actively seeking these willing sellers.

4.4.2 Opportunities

A regional conservation effort would bring synergy to current efforts and allow partners to use existing resources to the greatest effect. This will enable the region to simultaneously protect the lands that matter most for mission, habitat, and coastal adaptation. Opportunities to boost conservation efforts include the following:

- Protect and connect conservation lands around installations through buffering via conservation easements and fee acquisitions that keep development from encroaching on installations.



- Protect landward migration space so marsh and wetlands can retreat as seas rise, using conservation easements, setbacks, and upland buffers along the urban and installation boundaries that would otherwise lock them in place.
- Coordinate the region's conservation actors (land trusts, counties, installations, the National Park Service, and water managers) around shared priority-parcel geographies so investments reinforce one another.
- Prioritize the conservation of lands that deliver multiple benefits such as buffering installations, conserving habitat and wildlife corridors, and supporting flood and coastal resilience.
- The Northeast Florida Sentinel Landscape effort, anchored by NAS Jacksonville, Camp Blanding, NS Mayport, and NOLF Whitehouse, would knit these buffering efforts together across roughly 120 square miles of salt marsh; however, the region's application to the Sentinel Landscape program has been passed over twice.

4.5 Wildfire Management

Responsibility for wildfire management in the region is shared, with the Florida Forest Service, Florida National Guard, and county and local fire agencies carrying much of the load. Historically, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has been a major player in prescribed burning in Florida as well, but in 2025, Florida's USFS prescribed fire acreage was reduced 68 percent, from approximately 385,000 acres to 124,000 acres, with early 2026 data tracking similarly less than the historical average (Center for Western Priorities 2026).

Camp Blanding, whose training mission depends on fire-adapted land, manages fire within its own boundaries. It handles all on-base wildfire and prescribed fire and receives roughly 160 to 180 fire calls per year (approximately 97 are training related). To encourage prescribed burning along its boundary, Camp Blanding is also developing a REPI pilot to reimburse private landowners for prescribed burns in buffer areas. Outside Camp Blanding's boundary, Clay County's Comprehensive Plan directs the County to seek ways to encourage development patterns and practices compatible with wildfire mitigation and prescribed fire management on public conservation lands; it also authorizes the use of timber management and wildfire mitigation techniques as part of overall land management programs in County-owned parks, conservation areas, and preserves (Clay County n.d.c). Additionally, the City of Jacksonville's Office of Resilience recently launched the development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, with completion slated for mid-2027. Wildfire management at the regional level has been discussed in Resilient First Coast's RRAP, which directs the Collaborative to investigate interagency agreements between firefighting entities and identify gaps; to disseminate fire-resistant building practices and Firewise landscaping guidance; and to support consistent land management to reduce fuel loads through prescribed burns and mechanical clearing (NEFRC 2025).

4.5.1 Challenges

Fire is a natural and necessary part of Northeast Florida's landscapes and of the training mission at Camp Blanding, but growth into the wildland-urban interface raises risk on both sides of the fence line and complicates the prescribed fire these systems depend on. Current wildfire management challenges in the region include the following:



- Development along Camp Blanding’s forested western boundaries increases wildland-urban interface risk and the chance that off-base fire disrupts operations.
- Landscape-scale fuels management cannot be expected from federal programs at the scale necessary given the region’s fire ecology because of the decline in federal capacity for fuel treatment and prescribed fire on National Forest lands.
- Prescribed fire, the region’s primary tool for reducing fuel loads, is constrained by smoke management and community perception, a challenge flagged at the regional level and reflected in local complaints near installations (NEFRC 2025).
- The region currently lacks a structured, coordinated wildfire fuels management initiative. Although informal partnerships assist with wildfire response and localized fuels treatments, no formal regional framework exists to guide cross-jurisdictional coordination.

4.5.2 Opportunities

A land use approach to wildfire aligns the many parties that share these fire-adapted landscapes so that fuel management, prescribed fire, and compatible development work together rather than at cross purposes. Opportunities include the following:

- Strengthen interagency coordination on fuels management and prescribed fire across ownership boundaries, linking installations, forestry agencies, counties, and park managers.
- Build installation operations into local wildfire planning so community protection plans account for training-related fire and smoke and installation needs.
- Reduce wildland-urban interface risk through compatible development patterns, fuel-load reduction on public lands, and Firewise practices in growing communities.
- Invest in public understanding of prescribed fire so that smoke-tolerant, fire-adapted land management remains viable as the region grows.



5 Land Use and Attainable Housing

Affordable housing is a land use and infrastructure issue with direct consequences for military readiness. When personnel, civilian employees, and defense contractors cannot find affordable housing near installations, longer commutes strain infrastructure, and recruitment and retention become harder, placing institutional knowledge and mission continuity at risk.

Both the City of Jacksonville and Clay County have local policy efforts and goals aimed at alleviating housing pressures. The City of Jacksonville's Comprehensive Plan Housing Element seeks to boost housing supply by targeting more than 100,000 new units between 2020 and 2045; the City's Housing Element also maintains density incentives, expedited permitting, and fee relief for affordable projects (City of Jacksonville 2025d). Clay County also offers density bonuses of up to 20 dwelling units per acre for qualifying low- and moderate-income housing that meets locational criteria (Clay County n.d.b).

Additionally, NEFRC's 2022 Affordable Housing Strategy serves as precedent for regional convening of partners to address housing constraints. The strategy documented housing needs across the region while also developing a toolkit of local policy options that jurisdictions can employ (NEFRC 2022).

5.1 Challenges

Housing costs across the Jacksonville area have outpaced incomes, and the squeeze reaches the workforce on which installations depend. In the Jacksonville metro area, the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom unit is \$1,730 per month, and affording it without cost burden requires an income of approximately \$69,200 per year (NLIHC 2025). Key housing challenges include the following:

- The median renter household in the City of Jacksonville earns \$51,895, well below the roughly \$69,200 needed to afford the metro area's two-bedroom Fair Market Rent without cost burden, and Duval County has the greatest renter share in the metro area at approximately 42 percent (NLIHC 2025).
- Between 2019 and 2023, Florida added more than a million households while median rent rose nearly \$500 per month, from \$1,238 to \$1,719 (UF Shimberg Center 2025).
- A junior enlisted sailor at NS Mayport receiving Basic Allowance for Housing at the Jacksonville rate (roughly \$2,067 per month for an E-4 with dependents in Fiscal Year 2026) is priced into the high end of Fair Market Rent with little margin, and a Camp Blanding civilian earning Clay County's median renter income of \$59,757 falls below the income needed to afford the metro area two-bedroom without cost burden (Defense Travel Management Office n.d.; NLIHC 2025).

5.2 Opportunities

Housing sits at the intersection of land use, infrastructure, and mission. A coordinated regional approach with a military-oriented lens can make progress even where any single local



government sees limited room to act. Opportunities for the region to engage on housing include the following:

- Coordinate housing planning across installations, counties, municipalities, and non-governmental partners so that military housing needs are visible in regional decisions.
- Expand supply near installations through zoning and density flexibility and streamlined permitting while ensuring compatibility with mission constraints and buffer zones.
- Draw on public-private and community-based delivery models to build and sustain attainable, well-located housing for the defense workforce.
- Learn from peer defense communities through targeted case studies.



6 Integrated Land Use and Management to Benefit Military Mission Readiness

Since shoreline resilience, conservation, wildfire management, and housing are cross-cutting issues, a coordinated, regional approach to land management may be useful to align efforts in the following ways:

- Across sectors. Military and civilian planning inform one another at the earliest phases so that installation needs and community growth are reconciled before conflicts harden into constraints.
- Across entities. Plans, programs, and policies are aligned among installations, the City of Jacksonville, Clay County, NEFRC, and non-governmental partners so that efforts are mutually supportive and not duplicative.
- Across issue areas. The linkages among various land use issues are accounted for so that a decision in one domain strengthens, rather than undercuts, the others.
- Across geographies. Northeast Florida is treated as a planning region whose infrastructure systems, residents, and natural resources cross municipal and county lines.

6.1 Potential Strategies

Building on that framework, the following strategies help move the region from shared awareness toward coordinated action. Each is developed in more specific terms in the MIRR's subsequent deliverables.

- Strengthen and, where useful, formalize military-community coordination through compatible-use planning and mutual-support arrangements that give the relationships a durable structure.
- Accelerate land protection, notably buffers, through conservation easement and fee acquisitions that serve mission assurance, habitat conservation, and coastal adaptation.
- Align investment and funding pursuits across purposes and partners so investments support shared priorities.
- Build the region's shared data and planning foundation, including vulnerability data, suitability mapping, and coordinated priority-parcel geographies, so that decisions across jurisdictions rest on common evidence.

These themes are carried forward into the MIRR's technical deliverables, which relate them to specific policy recommendations, an adaptation project portfolio, and a financial strategy for implementation.



7 Conclusion

Northeast Florida faces an interconnected set of land use challenges with direct implications for military readiness, coastal and wildfire resilience, and the wellbeing of the communities that surround its installations. Shoreline erosion and flooding, pressure on conservation lands and wildlife corridors, wildfire risk in a growing wildland-urban interface, and a shortage of attainable housing all intersect with the missions at NS Mayport, NAS Jacksonville, MCSF Blount Island, and Camp Blanding.

Through this MIRR, stakeholders have identified both the risks these challenges pose and the opportunities to address them together. By framing land use as an organizing principle, this White Paper shows how compatible-use planning, shoreline and conservation investment, wildfire mitigation, and housing strategy reinforce one another when they are coordinated across sectors, entities, issue areas, and geographies. A cross-jurisdictional approach positions the region to protect mission-critical installations while supporting responsible growth and long-term stewardship of the natural systems on which the region and its installations depend.

This White Paper is intended as a primer for that effort. The recommendations, adaptation projects, and funding strategies developed in the accompanying deliverables carry these concepts into the specific, actionable steps that will determine how effectively Northeast Florida can remain a strong, resilient, and mission-ready region for both its military and civilian communities.



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