

SOUTHERN INDIANA SENTINEL LANDSCAPE



Questions and Answers:

Q1: Why did the USDA, DoD, and DOI establish the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership?

The USDA, DoD, and DOI established the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership in 2013 to streamline federal assistance to landowners in areas where they have shared interests. Voluntary landowner assistance programs across the three federal agencies typically provide funding to permanently protect a property through a conservation easement or help to offset costs associated with preserving natural resources. However, despite using similar funding mechanisms, USDA, DoD, and DOI programs vary significantly with respect to scope and mission. By aligning federal assistance programs around military installations and ranges, sentinel landscapes allow USDA, DoD, and DOI to mitigate internal resource constraints and advance their collective objectives.

In 2018, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) introduced language that formally recognized the Partnership in statute. Under Section 317 of the NDAA, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior are encouraged to give any eligible landowner or agricultural producer within a designated sentinel landscape, "priority consideration for participation in any easement, grant, or assistance programs administered by that Secretary's department."

Q2: How do sentinel landscapes work?

Representatives from the USDA, DoD, and DOI coordinate the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership at the national level through the Federal Coordinating Committee (FCC). The FCC defines sentinel landscapes as areas in which natural and working lands are well suited to protect defense facilities from land use that is incompatible with the military's mission. The FCC designates locations as sentinel landscapes and then works to deliver voluntary federal assistance to landowners who sustainably manage their properties as farms, ranches, timberlands, or open space.

While the three founding agencies maintain oversight of the Partnership, sentinel landscapes are predominantly local enterprises. Each sentinel landscape relies on a network of local partners to carry out conservation projects on the ground. In addition to federal assistance, participating states, local governments, and NGOs provide funding and program-specific support to interested landowners within sentinel landscapes. Working throughout all tiers of government and within the private sector enables sentinel landscapes to address the needs of local communities while also fulfilling the mission of the USDA, DoD, and DOI.

Q3: How do sentinel landscapes help the military?

Sentinel landscapes promote land use around defense facilities that is compatible with the military's mission. The DoD's ability to conduct realistic live-fire training and weapon system testing is vital in preparing the warfighter and their equipment for real-world combat. However, heightened development, loss of habitat, and other encroachment concerns outside an installation's fence line can constrain the military's ability to carry out its training and testing activities.