

Strengthening National Security Through Conservation | Natural Resources Conservation Service

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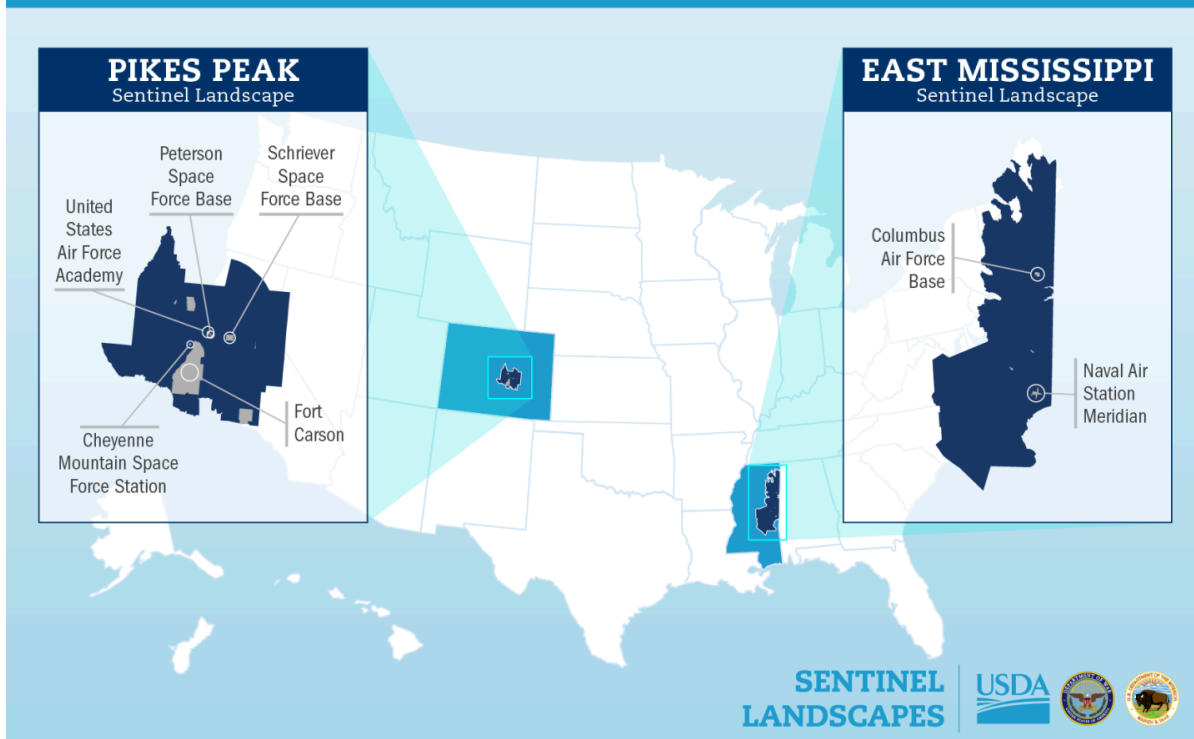
By Brooke DeCubellis, USDA

Agricultural security is national security. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is putting Farmers First by advancing conservation and working-land stewardship efforts to protect military mission-critical areas with the announcement of two new Sentinel Landscape designations for 2026 – Pikes Peak and East Mississippi.

These designations expand the [Sentinel Landscapes Partnership](#)[↗] network to 21 landscapes, building on a decade of collaboration among the USDA, U.S. Department of War (DOW) and U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) that strengthens agricultural and forest production, protects critical military training space, and preserves compatible land uses and natural resources.

“America’s farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners are on the front lines of conserving our nation’s natural resources while strengthening our national security,” said USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief, Colton L. Buckley. “The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership supports voluntary, locally led conservation that keeps working lands in production, protects agricultural viability, and helps safeguard the military installations that defend our great country. This is conservation done right – delivering benefits for producers, rural communities, and the American taxpayer.”

2026 SENTINEL LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS



CAPTION: A map of the two new 2026 Sentinel Landscape designations – Pikes Peak and East Mississippi.

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is a coalition of federal agencies, state and local governments, and private organizations that work with willing landowners and land managers to advance sustainable land use practices around military installations and ranges.

Authorized by 10 U.S.C. § 2693 and established in 2013, the partnership aligns multi-departmental priorities to support local communities, working lands and landowners, while supporting military readiness at more than 60 installations across the nation.

[Click here to read this year's interactive 2025 Accomplishments Report.](#)

Through the partnership, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) identifies natural resource needs in Sentinel Landscapes and reaches out to eligible landowners, offering voluntary technical and financial assistance to address resource concerns. Conservation tools include conservation easements and many other conservation practices.

Security Through Sustainability

Darin Sisil and his wife Nikki of Sullivan County, Indiana, currently have 530 acres enrolled in the [Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape](#) and plan to enroll 80 more acres through the [NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Agricultural Land Easement \(ACEP-ALE\)](#) option. Sisil harvests timber and maintains a corn and soybean operation.

But his passion is conserving the land – protecting the woods, preserving farmland and bringing back wildlife like turkey and bobwhite quail.

“When I was a kid, my grandfather on my dad’s side was a big quail hunter. I remember hunting with him and learning what kind of habitat that quail need to survive,” he said. “When I got this property, there was one covey of quail. I worked with NRCS on habitat restoration and now there’s five coveys. When I sit on the deck at the house in the evening, I hear them whistle all over the property, and I take a lot of pride in that.”



CAPTION: Darin Sisil on his property in the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape, Indiana. Sisil's property, a working farm and forest DOW Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration easement close to Lake Glendora Testing Facility, has become an important site for his family's hunting legacy. This tree was accidentally marked by a forester for removal, but Sisil asked him to save it because it's where he and his daughter turkey hunt together. Sisil has owned this property since 2012. Photograph by Jen Guyton/Wildpath and provided courtesy of Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape.

Sisil is a strong advocate for the ACEP-ALE program and has been reaching out to his neighbors, urging them to support the Sentinel Landscape by using ACEP-ALE or other conservation easement options to protect their farmland and natural areas around nearby military installations Naval Weapons Station Crane and Lake Glendora Test Facility. NWS Crane is the third largest naval installation in the world by geographic area and specializes in acquisition engineering, electronic warfare, and special warfare weapons.

“The program is so good that my neighbors ask – ‘what’s the catch?’ And really, there isn’t one. I think a lot of producers are concerned that the government will dictate to them what

they can and can't do with the land. But that really can't happen. It's a legal sale for the development rights of the land essentially. We enter into a binding agreement, and both parties have to abide by it."

The [NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program -Agricultural Land Easement \(ACEP-ALE\)](#) protects the agricultural viability and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses which negatively affect agricultural uses and conservation values.

More Information

NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to eligible agricultural producers through various conservation programs to address soil, water, air, and related natural resource concerns on agricultural land and nonindustrial private forestland. [Contact your local service center](#) to learn more about NRCS conservation programs that you may be eligible for.

Click here to learn more about the [Sentinel Landscapes Partnership](#) .

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