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6. MILITARY LANDS: Defense report details environmental protection, cleanup activities (06/14/2007)

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Over the past 10 years, the U.S. Department of Defense and its military branches spent over \$42.4 billion for environmental programs that range from pollution prevention to cleanup of contaminated facilities. Of \$4.14 billion requested for fiscal 2008, roughly 40 percent, or \$1.7 billion, will be spent on compliance with various federal, state or local environmental laws and ordinances.

The figures come as part of DOD's annual report to Congress on environmental programs. With over 30 million acres of land at more than 3,700 locations, DOD is, in effect, the nation's biggest environmental agency, with specific mandates for sustainable use, resource protection and "achieving full and sustained compliance with all federal, state and local environmental laws," stated the report.

As part of its integrated planning process, DOD conducts resource management inventories at most of its facilities. As of the end of fiscal 2006, 80 percent of the department's biological resource inventories and 87 percent of its wetland inventories were up-to-date, said the report, and 92 percent of integrated natural resource management plans (INRMP) had been revised.

DOD spends about \$40 million per year for protection of endangered species. According to a Fish and Wildlife Service survey as of Sept. 30, 2006, there were 1,311 plant and animal species listed as endangered or threatened within the United States, with 319 of them identified on military properties. Under the 2004 Defense Authorization Act, defense facilities can use the INRMP instead of a critical habitat designation to avoid possible effects on national security.

The report also said that DOD manages 75 national historic sites, more than 125,000 archaeological sites, and 19,000 historic properties at over 200 of its installations. The agency completed about 59 percent of its historic building inventories and 52 percent of its archaeological inventories by the end of fiscal 2006.

Among the department's largest environmental commitments is for site cleanup under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, which began in 1988. In the first four rounds of BRAC from 1988 through 1995, 497 installations were slated for closure or realignment, with 206 of them requiring some level of environmental restoration.

The latest BRAC round in 2005 involved over 800 facilities, with 24 major closures or realignments. In all, the report said, there are 5,383 component sites that need some form of cleanup; 5,010 in the Installation Restoration Program and 373 in the Military Munitions Response Program. In the 2005 BRAC round, \$415 million was committed for cleanup activities, but the total BRAC legacy cost is \$6.5 billion.

Also, on June 8, DOD announced the winners of its 2006 environmental awards program to eight installations for various programs covering habitat restoration, cultural resources management, pollution reduction and energy conservation. Among the winners was Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, which won the pollution prevention award by shrinking its solid waste stream by thousands of tons annually and cutting toxic releases by 1.4 million pounds. Arnold Air Force Base in Tennessee won the natural resources conservation award for efforts to protect a rare plant species found on the base.