



NEWS RELEASE

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Cannon part of historic land protection effort

CANNON AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. – In partnership with The Conservation Fund, Cannon announced May 6 the protection of 30,653 acres of land adjacent to Melrose Air Force Range.

A conservation easement had been placed on the acreage around MAFR that restricts development, encroachment, and changes to the land that could negatively affect the operations of MAFR and the 27th Special Operations Wing.

The easement is a result of coordination between Cannon and The Conservation Fund, with funding from the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program and the State of New Mexico Economic Development Department. This accomplishment is the largest single transaction in history of the REPI program.

The Conservation Fund worked with landowners, Tom and Sharon Davis, to facilitate the purchase of a restrictive-use conservation easement on a privately owned ranch that is adjacent to MAFR that will be overseen and managed by the New Mexico Land Conservancy.

"This major success is the culmination of three years of effort and bridges the gap between military training and graduate-level conservation practices," said Steven Coffin, Range Management Office Director with the Melrose Air Force Range. "This union between the Department of Defense, State of New Mexico, The Conservation Fund, and private landowners demonstrates that uncommon partners can join for a common goal and protect both military training space and landowner interests. The 27th SOW greatly appreciates the contributions of our State and DOD partners, the ceaseless efforts of The Conservation Fund, and the unwavering support of the landowners."

MAFR has been operating since 1952 and is the primary training range for the 27th SOW, providing more than 4,500 hours of training for U.S. and coalition Special Operations Forces each year. The conservation easement will eliminate concerns about vertical hazards and light pollution, which could negatively impact flight paths and threaten training operations at MAFR.

Additionally, the easement will provide benefit for the lesser prairie-chicken, a vulnerable species threatened by vertical development and habitat alteration.

"On behalf of the U.S. Air Force and Air Force Special Operations Command, I want to express our gratitude to the state and federal lawmakers who provided early support, The Conservation Fund for providing strong leadership, and Tom and Sharon Davis for sticking with us through this challenging process," said Col. Stewart Hammons, 27th SOW commander. Continued Hammons, "The 27th SOW looks forward to continuing this program to further protect our sensitive environment and protect national interests while preserving a historic way of life."

-Air Commandos-