

# Liberty County Coastal Courier ONLINE

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## First post buffer deal completed

By:Staff report

**The Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit private land conservation organization with offices in Georgia and South Carolina, announced it has completed its first transaction under a cooperative agreement with Fort Stewart to implement the Army Compatible Use Buffer through the purchase of conservation easements of land having conservation values.**

The 108-acre tract will be protected from development by an agricultural conservation easement that will preserve the conservation and agricultural values of the property including managed timber and preservation of a creek corridor flowing through the property.

TPL will assign the easement to the Georgia Land Trust.

"All of us on the team working to preserve land along the Georgia Coast are gratified that we now have the funding available to complete transactions like this," TPL Project Manager Russ Marane said. "Now that we have funding available, hopefully other landowners will participate in this unique program.

"Not only are we protecting the rural character and the many fine environmental qualities of land in the area, but we're also helping to stabilize the viability of Fort Stewart as a major training installation and economic engine for the region."

The Army Compatible Use Buffer initiative is designed to limit the effects of urban and suburban sprawl on military training. The U.S. Department of Defense developed the plan to "buffer" training lands from the effects of this encroachment, and to maintain its ability to use and access the current training ranges within the installation boundary.

The program allows for the use of federal funds to enter into partnership agreements with county, state or municipal governments as well as nonprofit organizations to purchase tracts of land or easements on lands that surround the installations.

The Army can continue to train to military standards, and surrounding communities can protect environmentally important ecosystems while increasing public access to recreational areas.

The property being protected in Liberty County is part of a wildlife habitat that supports several endangered species including the indigo snake and red cockaded woodpecker.

"We are gratified to have taken this first small, but significant step, toward protecting the environment surrounding Fort Stewart," said Tim Beaty, chief of the fish and wildlife branch at Fort Stewart. "We expect The Trust for Public Land and other local non-profit conservation organizations to accelerate this program with willing landowners to help protect all the property surrounding Fort Stewart while, at the same time, protect the installation from incompatible encroachments of development which could adversely affect its future training missions."

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The acquisition is the first by the team of non-profit land conservation organizations lead by the TPL The group also includes The Nature Conservancy and The Georgia Land Trust's coastal office.

"We expect to close as many as six transactions next year with three transactions in negotiation at the present time," Marane said.

"The program has in excess of \$2.9 million available for acquisitions of conservation easements. Additional funding is expected to be made available during 2006."

The U.S. Army's Army Compatible Use Buffer and the Joint Land Use studies were recently completed for the seven-county area surrounding Fort Stewart.

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