



2005 Market Street, Suite 2800 F 215.575.9050
Philadelphia, PA 19103-7077 F 215.575.4939

901 E Street NW, 10th Floor P 202.552.2000
Washington, DC 20004 F 202.552.2299
pewtrusts.org

May 5, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Department of Defense
Office of the Secretary
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Re: Establishment of the Department of Defense Climate Working Group

Dear Secretary Austin,

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew), we'd like to offer the following comments in response to the establishment of the Department of Defense (DoD) Climate Working Group. Pew is a research and public policy organization that applies evidence-based, nonpartisan analysis to solve today's challenges. Pew has engaged cooperatively with DoD on a number of issues, including the establishment of marine protected areas, illegal fishing, and clean energy, and we recognize the military must continue to play a critical leadership role in reducing emissions and making the transition to a clean energy economy for its national security, economic, and environmental benefits. This letter will focus on a different area of transformative change, where the military can advance nature-based solutions and collaborative landscape scale conservation to improve both security and resiliency at military installations.

We appreciate DoD's earnest and rapid response to Executive Order 14008 and want to commend efforts taken by DoD in recent years to better understand and address the effects that a changing climate has on national security, operational readiness, and installation resiliency. The DoD has the technical expertise and resources to address climate change effects and vulnerabilities at-scale, making DoD a strategic catalyst in the government response to the climate crisis. Given DoD's commitment to increase climate resilience to improve national security, we offer the following recommendations for the Climate Working Group.

Recommendation 1: Expand efforts to use nature and nature-based systems to improve resiliency to the impacts of climate change. By expanding efforts in partnership with others to conserve and restore natural systems, DoD can both boost resiliency and advance efforts to address climate driven encroachment. The efforts of Pew and other conservation non-governmental organizations, both in the U.S. and abroad, help to preserve ecological processes, secure ecosystem services, and provide proven and science-based approaches to preserving and enhancing ecological security in a changing climate. For example, through Pew's goals of protecting and restoring coastal habitats, we have worked with coastal military installations NWS Earle¹ and NWS Yorktown² to support efforts to leverage nature-based solutions to improve both security and resiliency using oyster reefs and other structures. At MCAS Cherry Point, we are helping to create a new "living shoreline" that will stabilize a rapidly eroding shoreline. These restoration methods can provide a natural defense against storm surge, erosion, and water quality degradation.

¹ U.S. Navy Recruits Oysters to Help Meet Its Mission, The Pew Charitable Trusts, November 8, 2019, <https://pew.org/2Nqztf3>.

² Pew Joins Projects to Boost U.S. Military Base Resiliency Through Conservation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, November 18, 2020, <https://pew.org/38DDh7W>.

With its expanded authority via the FY 2019 and FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Acts, DoD's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program is expanding its efforts in partnership with others to address military installation resilience by restoring and preserving off-base habitat. We commend the REPI program staff for their leadership and efforts in these ongoing efforts. The ability of REPI partners to use funds from the REPI program to match or to fulfill cost-sharing requirements for any conservation or resilience program of any federal agency, will greatly accelerate the pace and scale of using nature and nature-based systems to preserve and enhance the resilience of military installations and of key supporting civilian infrastructure.

Recommendation 2: Promote resiliency through partnerships and planning at scale. The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership (SLP) is leveraging crosscutting collaboration involving DoD, other public entities, and private landowners to strengthen military readiness while advancing conservation and other values. Building off America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative, Pew is working with the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS³), which represents several SLPs, to develop a regional conservation plan to protect salt marsh habitat in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and northeastern Florida. This new initiative is designed to preserve and enhance the resilience of coastal military installations and communities by protecting salt marsh and the various benefits that healthy salt marsh systems provide, such as protection from storm surge, flooding, and erosion.

Recommendation 3: Expand REPI and SLP even further by increasing the ability to pool REPI funding with other private, state, and federal sources of funds. We recommend consideration of such approaches as the development of a new DoD conservation finance mechanism or by pre-positioning regional agreements to better inform and maximize conservation outcomes between DoD and federal partners such as the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Commerce, or National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

In closing, we again offer our appreciation of the leadership DoD has shown in recognizing and responding to the climate crisis. And we wish to congratulate those leading the REPI, SLP, and SERPPAS programs for their innovation and close collaboration with partners like Pew in our collective efforts to preserve and enhance military installation resilience through the power of nature and nature-based systems. We believe that DoD can further realize the resilience and other benefits of natural resource conservation, including the capacity of DoD's immense real estate holdings to sequester carbon, by providing additional guidance on how to both promote resilience and address second and third order impacts of climate change through increased partnerships and planning. DoD has the unique capability to drive innovation, improve resiliency and create systemic change. Pew looks forward to further discussions on how we can expand our assistance to DoD in meeting the climate challenge we all face.

Sincerely,



Zachary Greenberg
Officer, Conserving Marine Life in the U.S.
The Pew Charitable Trusts

Cc: Joe Bryan, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense; Richard Kidd, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Environment & Energy Resilience

³ Military and Government Leaders Recruit Nature to Protect Shoreline, The Pew Charitable Trusts, May 4, 2021, <https://pew.org/2RINBe8>.