

## Recycling Trees for Troops

People often ask us, “What happens to the trees at the bases after Christmas?” The holidays have always been the season for giving, but for those aboard Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek – Fort Story (JEBLCFS) with live Christmas trees, that spirit doesn’t have to stop when the new year begins.

As a plant, Christmas trees, of course, are 100% biodegradable and can be used for all kinds of purposes post-harvest. At JEBLCFS, home to a major U.S. Navy base for the Amphibious Forces in the Atlantic Fleet and the Army Post of Fort Story, the base Natural Resources Office has been leading the way in repurposing Trees for Troops trees for over a decade.

The Natural Resources Office has learned more about how to recycle trees after Soldiers and Sailors enjoy them for Christmas. JEBLCFS conducts an annual Christmas tree recycling program, organized by Mary Edmonson, the installation’s Natural Resources Specialist. Along with minimizing the number of trees being sent to local landfills, the program benefits shoreline restoration and improves dune stabilization on the installation. Stabilized dunes provide protection from storm surges to portions of the installation and its infrastructure immediately behind the dunes. Dunes also protect critical training areas and create wildlife habitat.



The effort relies on 20-30 volunteers from JEBLCFS to gather, load and place the trees in this way. A total of 501 trees were recycled on the joint base in 2022, but the number varies from year to year. While the program is not mandatory, it helps meet the overall goal of restoration activities to create a more extensive and stabilized dune system, which is a primary focus of the natural resources management program. Currently, this volunteer program is limited to the JEBLCFS community; however, many of the trees donated come from local Christmas tree businesses.

**Go Green! 2022**  
**Christmas Tree Recycling**

Joint Expeditionary Base  
Little Creek-Fort Story  
*(for all personnel base personnel only)*

**WHAT:** Drop off your discarded LIVE trees for recycling.  
Trees will be used to stabilize dunes on the installation.

**WHEN:** 27 Dec 2021 - 10 Jan 2022

**WHERE:** JEB Fort Story: **Inside** of Training Center - Fernald Area  
(across from 4402 Ops area parking lot)  
JEB Little Creek: 577 Fresh Parking Lot

- Remove tinsel lights and ornaments.
- Trees must be completely bare and not encased in plastic bags, sheets or tarps.
- Remove trees from disposal bag prior to drop off.
- NO yard debris, PLEASE!

**Thank you for your support!**



For more information, contact:  
Mary Edmonson, Natural Resources Specialist ☎ 462-5501

Efforts to protect and stabilize the beaches and primary dune system have produced visible improvements over the years with evidence of dune restoration in certain areas. "This is periodically measured and assessed through dune assessments and surveys," said Edmonson. "Along the shoreline, trees are placed behind sand fencing where their needles collect sand and rebuild the dune system."



In addition to the dune stabilization, trees are placed in Lake Bradford every three years to help improve habitat quality. This process involves submerging discarded live Christmas trees to create and improve fisheries habitat and create harborage for a variety of plant life near the shoreline. When woody plant tissue decomposes in water it releases nutrients that spur a bloom of new aquatic vegetation known as phytoplankton, along with filamentous algae (moss) and rooted plants. This vegetation forms the bottom of the food chain.



The Trees for Troops recycling effort has expanded over the years.

"The project launched when Ft. Story was an Army Base," said Karen Williams, Ft. Story MWR office Trees for Troops program coordinator. "Placement was done only on Ft. Story shoreline. When Little Creek and Ft. Story joint based, the placement of trees also included Little Creek Shoreline and lakes."

The concept is spreading with Naval Air Station Oceans having a similar program. "Ft. Story, I believe, was the first base in the region to do this," said Williams. "Glad to see the idea spread to other bases in the region. I'm a lover of nature and a very GREEN person. Our first year with Trees for Troops was 2007. In 2008-09, after witnessing some things, I pitched the (tree recycling) idea to our Base, who liked it. Ever since then, the T4T event and Tree Recycling have been like a Part A and Part B event."



Edmonson added, "We are grateful for the Trees for Troops program and want the growers to know that even after use, the trees still live on with the special purpose of continuing support of the military community."

That's an inspirational thought. We know the free, fresh Christmas trees improve the Christmas Spirit of the soldiers, sailors and families who receive one, and now we know they also help the natural resources and ecosystems at bases. As Williams put it, "it kind of puts a nice spin on the GREEN circle of life of Christmas Trees."

Indeed, it does.