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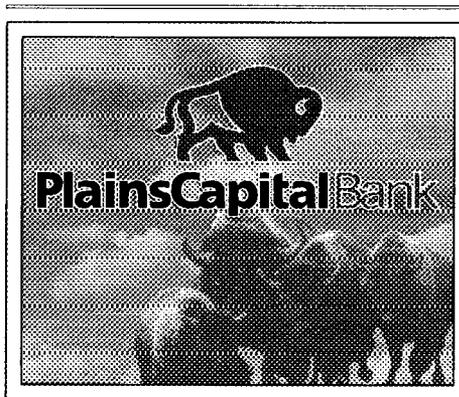
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Back to Basics Cannon turns to natural landscaping

By **GREG CUNNINGHAM**



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Arid Aircraft: An F-16 monument casts a shadow over what used to be lush grass in front of the headquarters of the 27th Fighter Wing at Cannon Air Force Base.
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The Amarillo Globe-News

CANNON AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. - The sod is coming up and the cacti are going in at Cannon Air Force Base.

In an effort to preserve water resources that can be scarce in eastern New Mexico, the base has embarked on a xeriscaping program that replaces water-gulping green

grass with plants more suited to the arid environment.

"We're trying to conserve the resource," said Lt. Col. John Bower, commander of the 27th Civil Engineer Squadron. "We actually produce all the water that we use on **Cannon** from our well system. But like anybody else, we know that water is a limited resource. Anything we can do to extend that resource is worth the effort."

The program is starting in a few select areas, but plans call for workers to pick up the pace and complete the project within three years.

When it's all said and done, **Cannon** will look like a much different place, although many places will look like they did before the Air Force arrived.

Bower said workers - mostly airmen with the help of some civilian contractors - will pull out the lush grass and thirsty bushes in most areas and replace them with more suitable ground cover.

"We're trying to replace the grass with low maintenance and low water requirement types of plants," Bower said. "We'll be using some of the stuff that grows native around here."

Most of the xeriscaping will include river stones spread across an area, dotted with low-water plants, including bushes and even some cacti. Some areas also will get grass, but it will be native grasses that need no extra water.

Bower said many people have been surprised by how attractive the native species are, especially the colorful flowering bushes.

Once the whole xeriscaping plan is put into effect, base officials hope to cut in half the 2.5 million gallons of water used each day during the summer.

Although the xeriscaping is designed to save water, its overall goal is to fit in with an environmental emphasis at **Cannon** that has been going on for years.

Don White, chief of environmental management at **Cannon**, said the Air Force has made a commitment to lessen its impact on the environment and protect resources - resources that belong to the public.

"I think people want to be good for the environment," White said. "That really comes from the Department of Air Force. They incorporated environmental education for all of their training, from commanders all the way down. It's been a big emphasis for at least the last 10 years."

That emphasis shows up in numerous programs around the base. White said base personnel have diverted 80 percent of their solid waste from the landfill through recycling. Other areas of emphasis include cutting down on hazardous waste production, replacing hazardous chemicals with environmentally friendly options and composting grass clippings.

The efforts have attracted the notice of New Mexico officials, who have singled out **Cannon** for recognition three times. **Cannon** will pick up its third Green Zia Achievement Award from the New Mexico Environmental Department this week, said Jon Goldstein, spokesman for the department.

Goldstein said his department often has difficulty eliciting environmental compliance from many federal facilities. The Air Force, and especially **Cannon**, have had a much better record.

"**Cannon** has some pretty good environmental citizens," Goldstein said. "Of the DOD (Department of Defense) facilities, the Air Force tends to be the best, and **Cannon** reflects that."

"I would say the military as a whole has turned the corner on the environment. I think this one base, **Cannon**, is an example for the whole military," he said.

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