

# North Florida Land Trust Adds 119 Acres in Bradford County to Protect Environment, Camp Blanding

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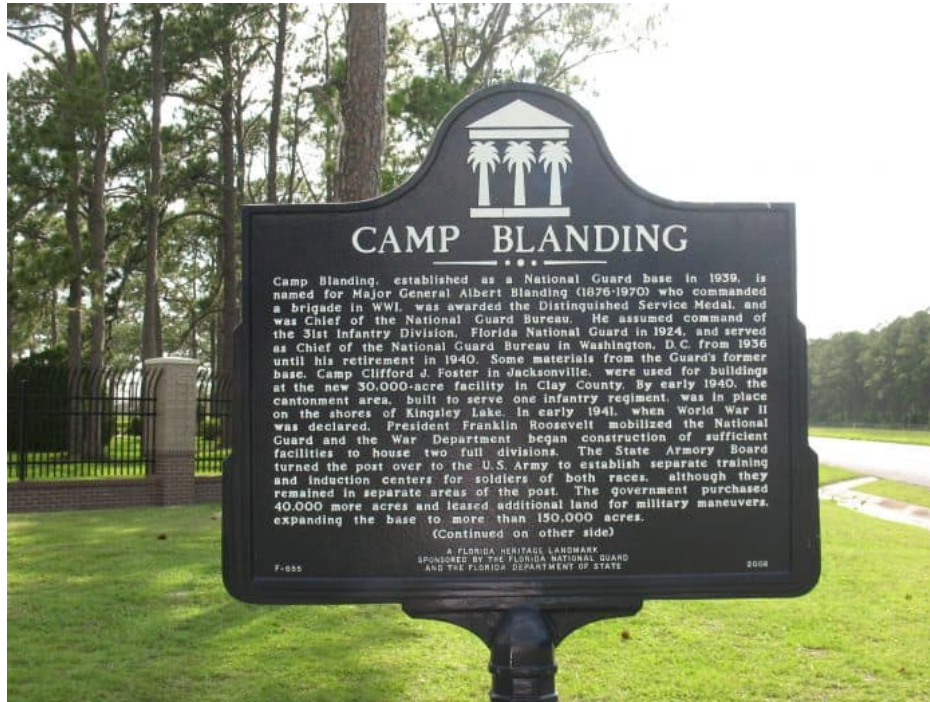
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Camp Blanding Marker ( Obverse), Starke, Fl. This marker is located on State Road 16 near Starke, in Clay County, Florida. It was erected by the The Florida National Guard and The Florida Department of State in 2008. It reads as : " Camp Blanding, established as a National Guard base in 1939, is named for Major General Albert Blanding (1876-1970) who commanded a brigade in WWI, was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, and was Chief of the National Guard Bureau. He assumed command of the 31st Infantry Division, Florida National Guard in 1924, and served as chief of the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. from 1936 until his retirement in 1940. Some materials from the Guard's former base, Camp Clifford J. Foster in Jacksonville, were used for buildings at the new 30,000-acre facility in Clay County. By early 1940, the cantonment area, built to serve one infantry regiment, was in place on the shores of Kingsley Lake. In early 1941, when World War II was declared, President Franklin Roosevelt mobilized the National Guard and the War Department began construction of sufficient facilities to house two full divisions. The State Armory Board turned the post over to the U.S. Army to establish separate training and induction centers for soldiers of both races, although they remained in separate areas of the post. The government purchased 40,000 more acres and leased additional land for military maneuvers, expanding the base to more than 150,000 acres. "

This week, the **North Florida Land Trust (NFLT)** announced has acquired a 119-acre conservation easement in Bradford County that will ensure the land remains in agriculture production forever.

The property, which is a working cattle ranch, is in Lawtey, approximately 1.5 miles west of **Camp Blanding**. NFLT worked with the landowners to facilitate the purchase of the conservation easement which is within the priority area for conservation for Camp Blanding

and the **Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB)** program designed to secure buffers around military installations.

This was the first time **USDA's National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** Agricultural Land Easement Program was used in conjunction with the **Camp Blanding Joint Training Center ACUB program**. The conservation easement was paid for through a combination of funding from the NRCS program, the ACUB program, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force through its partnership with Clay County Development Authority.

“There are significant environmental benefits to conserving this property along with a strong need to protect Camp Blanding from encroachment and allow them to train to their fence line,” said Jim McCarthy, the president of NFLT. “When population increases, lands like this can be attractive to developers, and with new homes comes the increase in water consumption, lawn fertilizers and septic tanks. The purchase of this conservation easement means it will always remain as agricultural land and will be protected forever. The easement will leave the land in private hands and allow the landowners to continue to operate their cattle ranch. This greatly benefits the landowners, Camp Blanding and the community.”

The 119-acres is comprised of improved pasture and pine flatwoods. It has been used for agriculture purposes dating back to 1939. The current owners, Amber and Justin Alexander, will continue to use the land for their cattle ranch. The sale of the conservation easement will help them to invest further into their business.

“Selling this conservation easement is a real blessing for our family,” said Justin Alexander. “We were able to pay off the 20-year mortgage 17 years early which saves us \$50,000 a year. Now, that money can go back into our cattle operation and help us expand it. While the process took some time, it was well worth the wait because now we don't have the stress of keeping up with those mortgage payments, and we can put that money back into our business.”

“This effort is a prime example of how the NRCS easement program can address multiple objectives with various partners. As a result of this collaborated effort, we can provide food for families, protect Florida's natural resources, and bolster military readiness for Camp Blanding's training operations,” said Juan Hernandez, the state conservationist for NRCS Florida.

A conservation easement allows the landowner to continue to own and use their land for passive recreation and enjoyment while ensuring it will be kept in agriculture for future generations. NFLT will hold the conservation easement and will monitor and enforce the provisions of the conservation easement agreement.

North Florida Land Trust is a not-for-profit organization that seeks to protect the natural resources, historic places and working lands (farms and ranches) throughout north Florida. Founded in 1999, NFLT has preserved tens of thousands of acres of land through donation or purchase of land as well as conservation easements. NFLT is funded largely by private and corporate contributions and works closely with willing landowners and public agencies at all levels of government, not-for-profit partners, and foundations.