

# Camp Blanding Conservation Partnership

Florida has a diversity of habitat types. The state is most often recognized for its wetlands sustaining an abundance of wading birds and neotropical migrants. However, more than 20% of Florida's total area was covered with uplands consisting of pine flatwoods, dry prairies, scrub pine and long-leaf pine habitat. These habitats support a variety of species including the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, indigo snake, scrub jay and Florida panther.

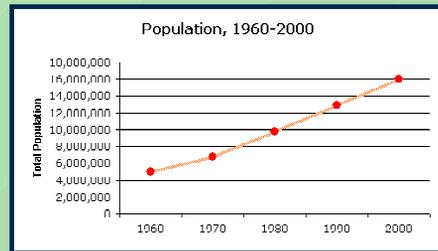
**Once the most biologically diverse state east of the Mississippi, Florida now suffers from extensive habitat destruction due to over development**



Uplands now cover less than 3% of Florida and 50% of the original wetlands no longer exist. Most of these areas now exist as residential developments and agriculture. Although much of Florida is humanly uninhabitable in its natural state, it now leads the nation in housing starts with 900 new residents every day. Subsequently, although Florida receives more than 50 inches of rainfall a year, it suffers from water shortages and a 90% decrease in wading birds.



## Florida population growth



In light of the water shortage problem Florida faces, much of the conservation focus is now geared towards water management districts delineated by the state. One of these important areas is the St. Johns River Water Management District. This district includes two national forests, Camp Blanding National Guard training area and private land.

Much of the private land surrounding Camp Blanding and other areas within the water district are being developed as highly concentrated residential areas. Amidst this rapid development, Camp Blanding has become a refuge for 60 rare species. This includes the federally listed, Florida scrub jay, Eastern indigo snake, bald eagle, wood stork, Chapman's rhododendron and the high profile red-cockaded woodpecker. In addition to increased pressure on the installation to manage for endangered species, this increase in "neighbors" has also impacted the ability of the guard to train realistically due to complaints from training related activities such as noise.

# Proposed Action

Protection of 80,000 acres of land within 3 miles of installation boundary through the Florida Army



National Guard (FLARNG) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FLDEP).

Florida's natural resources and the mission of Camp Blanding are simultaneously protected through the purchase of conservation easements and titles from willing land owners within the designated buffer area surrounding the training site. Therefore, the seemingly diverse objectives of the Army National Guard and the Department of Environmental Protection are met. In addition to the preservation of Camp Blanding, this initiative aims to create a "greenway" corridor between Osceola National Forest and Ocala National Forest encompassing Camp Blanding Joint Training Center.



Florida National Guard's primary readiness area is Camp Blanding Training Site (CBTS).

These 73,000 acres are used to train 53rd SIB, 1-111th Atk AVN., 1/75<sup>th</sup> and 3/75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalions, 3/20<sup>th</sup> special forces group, SEAL teams, 26<sup>th</sup> marine expeditionary unit, 1<sup>st</sup> special operations wing USAF, 160<sup>th</sup> special operations aviation regiment, and Air Force Special Tactics Squadrons. Additionally, foreign military units, coast guard and civilian law enforcement agencies use the facilities. This is done while protecting Camp Blanding's natural diversity. The proposed action will provide a buffer allowing CBTS to continue its mission of military readiness and environmental stewardship.



The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FLDEP)

seeks to provide a high quality of life for Florida residents through the protection and enhancement of a healthy environment. This includes safeguarding Florida's clean water, air and open space. FLDEP's most recent conservation effort, The Florida Forever program, has protected, more than 1.25 million acres in the state through land/conservation easement acquisitions, restoration, water resource development, and increased public access to open space lands.

**Florida Forever** is a 10-year, \$3 billion program established by Governor Bush that conserves environmentally sensitive, undeveloped land, restores water resources and preserves important cultural and historical resources.

