

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Okefenokee

*National Wildlife
Refuge*





Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge system, a network of U.S. lands and waters managed to benefit wildlife and administered by the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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This blue goose, designed by J.N. Ding Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Okefenokee Swamp

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1937 to preserve the rare and beautiful Okefenokee Swamp. The refuge includes close to 396,000 acres, (about 650 square miles) almost 90 percent of which have increased protection as a National Wilderness Area. The swamp, which extends 38 miles north to south and 25 miles east to west, remains one of the most well preserved freshwater areas in America.

Okefenokee is a vast bog inside a huge, saucer-shaped depression that was once part of the ocean floor. The word Okefenokee is a European rendition of the native American words meaning "land of the trembling earth." Peat deposits up to 15 feet thick cover much of the swamp floor. These deposits are so unstable in spots that one can cause trees and surrounding bushes to tremble by stomping the surface.

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The slow-moving waters of the Okefenokee are tea-colored due to the tannic acid released from decaying plants, which also makes swamp water about as acidic as cola. The main outlet of the swamp, the Suwannee River, begins in the heart of the Okefenokee and drains southwest into the Gulf of Mexico. The St. Marys River, which forms the boundary between Georgia and Florida, drains the southeastern portion of the refuge.

The swamp is not one continuous type of habitat - islands, lakes, cypress forests, scrub-shrub areas, and open wet "prairies" form a mosaic of habitats on which wildlife depend. Fire and water define the swamp's habitats. Lakes and prairies are created after long droughts when fire burns out vegetation and top layers of peat.

History

Tribes of the Depford Culture, the Swift Creek Culture, and the Weeden Island Culture lived in the Okefenokee Swamp as early as 2500 B.C. The last tribe to seek sanctuary in the swamp, the Seminoles, conducted raids on settlers in surrounding areas. An armed militia led by General Charles R. Floyd drove the Seminoles into Florida by 1850.



The Suwannee Canal Company purchased most of the Okefenokee Swamp from the State of Georgia in 1891. Their intent was to drain the land for logging and to grow crops.

Captain Henry Jackson and his crews spent 3 years digging the Suwannee Canal 11.5 miles into the swamp. Economic recessions led to the company's bankruptcy, and the land was sold to the Hebard Cypress Company in 1899. A railroad was built into the west edge of the swamp and logging operations began. Over 431 million board feet of timber, mainly cypress, were removed from the Okefenokee by 1927, when logging ceased.

Wildlife Management

Refuge staff and volunteers work to preserve the natural qualities of the swamp, provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, and provide recreational opportunities for visitors. They research everything from bacteria to black bears; conduct wildlife censuses, vegetative transects, and water level surveys; and administer hunts. They also conduct prescribed burns in upland areas; thin forests, create wildlife openings, and plant longleaf pines;



and monitor, manage, and improve wildlife populations and habitat. A special emphasis is placed on endangered species management, especially red-cockaded woodpeckers, indigo snakes, and other inhabitants of the longleaf pine community.

Visitor Services

National Wildlife Refuges are unique in the nation because these areas are set aside to protect wildlife and their habitat. You are welcome to visit Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge to observe and photograph wildlife, take a guided tour, fish, join in special events and programs, and learn more about the plants and animals that make up this diverse ecosystem.



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Guidelines

Help preserve the Okefenokee Swamp and make your visit safe and enjoyable by following these guidelines.

Enjoy wildlife observation, photography, and hiking throughout the year on marked trails.

Camping

Permitted only on overnight canoe trips and at designated areas in Stephen C. Foster State Park.

Fires

Permitted in designated areas only.

Canoeing and Motorboating

Permitted year round on marked trails. Outboard motors are limited to 10 horsepower or less. Each boat occupant is required to have a Coast Guard approved life preserver. Georgia law requires children 10 and under to wear life jackets in boats.

Fishing

Permitted year-round on marked trails in accordance with Georgia State fishing laws. Using live minnows or trot lines is prohibited.

Swimming

Prohibited in refuge waters.

Firearms and Other Weapons

Prohibited on the refuge except during designated hunts.

Pets

Must be kept on a 10-foot leash. Pets are not permitted in public buildings or boats.

Plants or Animals

Disturbing or collecting prohibited.

Feeding or Harassing Wildlife

Prohibited. Feeding animals causes them to lose their fear of humans and become aggressive. Aggressive animals must be relocated. Help keep animals in their natural habitat.

Wilderness Canoeing

Permits are available for 2- to 5-day trips through the Okefenokee. Make reservations no more than 2 months in advance by calling 912/496-3331 between 7 am and 10 am weekdays.



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Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

-  Refuge boundary
 -  Overnight stops
 -  Red trail*
 -  Green trail*
 -  Brown trail*
 -  Blue trail*
 -  Orange trail*
 -  Purple trail*
 -  Day use trail
 -  Day use shelter
- *Overnight trails, permit required





Wildlife Notes

January

Waterfowl: mallards, ring necked ducks, wood ducks, coots, green-winged teal, and hooded mergansers are seen in the prairies along with large numbers of greater sandhill cranes.

February

Ospreys begin nesting. Watch for aerial courtship displays of red-tailed hawks. Brown-headed nuthatches becoming active. Wild turkey seek mates during the latter part of the month.

March

Overwintering ducks, tree swallows, robins, phoebes, cedar waxwings, and greater sandhill cranes depart for northern nesting areas. Purple martins, parula warblers, and eastern kingbirds arrive. Watch for the courtship dances of resident Florida sandhill cranes. Wildflowers begin to bloom as the prairies fill with golden club and bladderworts. Alligators are seen sunning on the banks of the water trails.

April

Wading bird rookeries are active. Prothonotary warblers are common along the cypress-lined waterways. Sandhill crane chicks are hatching and ospreys are seen feeding their young in their high, bulky nests. Alligators begin territorial warnings as mating begins. Many orchids and the unusual insect-eating pitcher plants are blooming.

May

Endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers are active around their nesting colonies. Florida soft-shell turtles are laying eggs, and raccoons are just as rapidly digging up and eating the eggs. Turkey poults are seen walking in loose procession behind their hen. Warmouth perch fishing is improving. Newborn fawns appear.

- June* Chorus, green tree, pig, carpenter, and over a dozen other species of frogs are heard during the evenings. White water lilies and sweet-bay flowers bloom. Good bream fishing.
- July* Young herons, egrets, and ibis, now fully fledged, leave the rookeries. Wood storks are observed feeding in the prairies. Red-headed woodpeckers and pine warblers are seen in pine forest uplands. Deer are best viewed in the early morning; the bucks are showing their new sets of velvet-covered antlers.
- August* Small flocks of blue-winged teal arrive. Alligator nests hatch and the young alligators may be heard “clucking” to their mother. Nighthawks and chuck-will’s widows frequent the evening sky, scooping insects from the air.
- September* Fall migration begins as many different warblers move through the area. Fall fishing improves as daytime temperatures lower.
- October* Black bears are active, feeding on acorns, nuts, and berries. Marsh hawks are seen gliding low over the prairies.
- November* Robins and migrating greater sandhill cranes arrive with the cool weather. Watch for the occasional bald eagle, migrating through the swamp to Florida wintering sites. With cool weather comes the traditional fall color change. Cypress needles turn a golden brown and sweetgum leaves glow a reddish hue before tumbling to the ground.
- December* Otters are seen swimming in the lakes and boat trails as alligators become less active and cease feeding. Many white ibis, egrets, and herons feed in shallow lakes and prairies.



Three Facets of Okefenokee

There are three major entrances to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, each with its own facilities and special character. From the open, wet “prairies” of the east side to the forested cypress swamps on the west, Okefenokee is a mosaic of habitats, plants, and wildlife. Entrance fees are required at each entrance, inquire at the phone numbers below for more specific formation and regulations. Discover Okefenokee — one of your national wildlife refuges.

East Entrance

Main U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entrance, located 11 miles southwest of Folkston, Georgia off Highway 121/23. Stop in the Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center to plan your day. Walking trails, boardwalk and tower, boating trails, guided boat tours, motorboat and canoe rentals, and restored homestead. Call 912/496 7836 for visitor information, 912/496 7156 for concession information.

West Entrance

Stephen C. Foster State Park, located 17 miles east of Fargo, GA off Highway Spur 177. Boardwalk, boating trails, fishing, guided boat tours, motorboat and canoe rentals, camping, cabins, interpretive programs, and museum. Call 912/637 5274 for information, 1/800 864 7275 for cabin reservations.

North Entrance

Okefenokee Swamp Park, located eight miles south of Waycross, GA off U.S. 1. Interpretive displays, boardwalk and tower, boat tours, animal habitats, and lectures. 912/283 0583

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Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
Route 2, Box 3330
Folkston, GA 31537
Voice/TTY 912/496 7836

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CELEBRATING A
CENTURY
of CONSERVATION