

Regulations

Permitted

Wildlife Watching, Photography, Bicycling, and Hiking - Enjoy these activities in areas open to public use and along designated trails only.

Fishing - Permitted year-round in designated areas in accordance with Georgia state fishing laws. Trot lines and the use of live fish as bait are prohibited. Georgia state fishing license required and can be easily purchased online at GoOutdoorsGeorgia.com.

Hunting - Refuge-specific regulations and seasons apply.

Boating - Boat ramps available at the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, Stephen C. Foster State Park, Kingfisher Landing, and the Suwannee River Sill. All watercraft are authorized on designated trails only. Outboards are limited to 10 HP or less. Check trail conditions before going on water trails. Sign in/sign out is required at all boat launches, except the Suwannee River Sill.

Camping - Allowed with a permit at designated overnight canoe campsites and at designated areas in Stephen C. Foster State Park.

Campfires - Permitted at designated areas in Stephen C. Foster State Park and at campsites on Floyds Island, Mixons Hammock, and Canal Run. Campfires may be prohibited during dry periods. Firewood must be purchased onsite.

Pets - Not permitted on boardwalks, inside buildings, or in boats. Pets must be restrained on a ten-foot or shorter leash. Always clean up after your pet.

Prohibited

Swimming and Paddleboarding - Prohibited in refuge waters for public safety, due to the presence of alligators.

Disturbing or collecting plants and/or animals or cultural artifacts.

Feeding or harassing wildlife - Stay at least 20 feet (six meters) from alligators. Never feed or harass wild animals. Feeding animals causes them to lose their fear of humans and may make them aggressive.

Alcohol - All state, federal, and county laws regarding alcohol consumption are strictly enforced.

Recreational drone (UAS) use is prohibited.



Big Water Shelter, USFWS

Entrances

Suwannee Canal Recreation Area (Main Entrance)

The main entrance, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is located 11 miles southwest of Folkston, GA off Highway 121/23. Visitor opportunities include Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center, Swamp Island Drive, Chesser Island Homestead, boat ramp access to water trails. Boat tours, rentals, and a cafe are available at Okefenokee Adventures. Entrance fee required; daily pass (good for seven days) and annual passes available. Rental space for parties and events available by reservation.

Hours

March 1 - October 31: ½ hour before sunrise to 7:30 pm

November 1 - February 28: ½ hour before sunrise to 5:30 pm

All day-use boats must be off the water 90 minutes before refuge closes.

Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center: hours vary seasonally. Call 912/496 7836 for information.

Kingfisher Landing: located off US 1, this remote entrance has a boat launch with access to the Green and Red Trails. Overnight parking with Wilderness Camping Permit ONLY. No facilities.

Stephen C. Foster State Park (West Entrance)

Located 17 miles north of Fargo, on GA Highway 177. Boardwalks, boating trails, fishing, guided boat tours, motorboat and canoe rentals, camping and more. Entrance fee required. Refuge daily, America the Beautiful, or GA Park Pass honored. Call 912/637 5274 for information, or 1-800/864 7275 for reservations or www.gastateparks.org.

Suwannee River Sill: located off GA Highway 177 before entering Stephen C. Foster State Park. A driving road, boat ramp, and fishing opportunities located here. Day-use only, no overnight parking permitted. Visitors holding an overnight camping permit and paddling down the Suwannee River should park at Stephen C. Foster State Park and coordinate with Park staff.

Okefenokee Swamp Park (North Entrance)

This private, non-profit facility is located eight miles south of Waycross, GA off US 1. Guided boat tours, Okefenokee railroad, live animal exhibits and programs available. Admission fee required. Call 912/283 0583 or www.okeswamp.com.

Okefenokee
National Wildlife Refuge
2700 Suwannee Canal Road
Folkston, GA 31537
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee>

<https://www.facebook.com/okefenokeewildliferefuge>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
<http://www.fws.gov>

January 2022



Okefenokee

National Wildlife Refuge

credit: Debbie Dean

Overview

Covering 630 square miles in southeast Georgia, the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 90% of the world renowned Okefenokee Swamp. Alligators bask in the sun while flocks of white ibis, wood storks, and sandhill cranes forage in the shallow tea-colored water. The “Land of the Trembling Earth,” as the Native Americans called it, is an ever-changing landscape. 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. The pine islands and uplands surrounding the swamp are home to such species as the gopher tortoise, endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, and indigo snake.

The Okefenokee has the distinction of birthing two rivers – the St. Marys River flows east to the Atlantic Ocean forming the Georgia-Florida border; while the Suwannee River flows southwest through Florida into the Gulf of Mexico. The swamp’s thick peat layer is covered by slow moving, mirror-like black water. Floating peat “batteries” allow for grasses and flowers to grow, and if left long enough eventually form tree islands, known as “houses.”

Whether you have only a few hours or have several days to visit the refuge’s three entrances, you will find mystery and beauty that is only found in the Okefenokee.

National Wilderness Area

The Okefenokee Swamp is a mystical and primeval place. Nearly 354,000 acres of the refuge are designated as a National Wilderness Area. It provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and undisturbed recreation. Okefenokee is one of the rare and wild places where one can retreat from civilization and reconnect with the earth.

Wildlife and Habitat

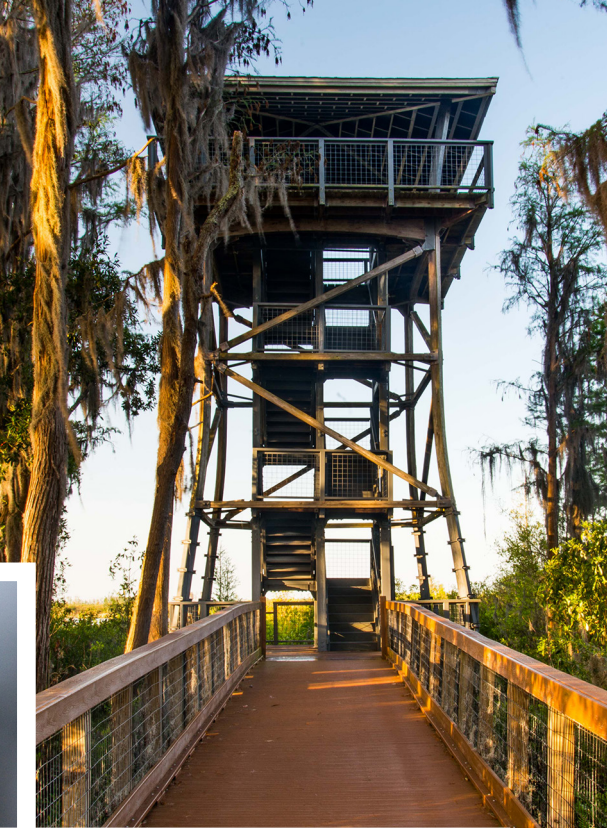
Okefenokee is a vast bog inside a huge saucer-shaped depression that was once part of the ocean floor. The swamp, which extends 38 miles north to south and 25 miles east to west, remains one of the most well preserved and intact freshwater ecosystems in the world. The refuge carries the designation of a Wetland of International Importance and is on the U.S. tentative list for World Heritage sites.

Fire has shaped the Okefenokee landscape for thousands of years. Naturally occurring wildfires maintain the swamp’s diversity of habitats, while the refuge uses prescribed burning to reduce hazardous fuels and to restore and maintain the surrounding longleaf pine



Left to right, top to bottom: kayaking, Mike Sepelak; Owls Roost Tower, Mike Sepelak; red-cockaded woodpecker, USFWS; prescribed fire, USFWS; American alligator, USFWS.

ecosystem. The longleaf pine is a slow growing tree that once covered more than 90 million acres in the southeastern United States. Only three percent of these pine forests remain and they are some of the most diverse and ecologically important habitats for several endangered species. You can observe longleaf pine communities and on-going longleaf pine restoration projects along the Swamp Island Drive and along Highway 177 to Stephen C. Foster State Park.



Visitor Opportunities Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center (Main Entrance)

The Visitor Center is a great place to begin your visit. Learn about the Okefenokee culture by exploring the exhibits and watching the film in the auditorium. Maps and information are available for the hiking trails, Swamp Island Drive, and upcoming events. The Friends of the Okefenokee operate a nature store where all proceeds go to assist refuge projects.

Hours vary seasonally. Rental spaces nearby for parties and events available by reservation.

Chesser Island Homestead/ Boardwalk (Main Entrance)

Named for the family who first settled it, Chesser Island is a 592-acre island in the swamp. The Chesser Island Homestead located there shows how the early settlers lived. Take a walk on the Chesser Island Boardwalk to the Owls Roost Tower for an expansive view of the Okefenokee Swamp.

Okefenokee Adventures

(Main Entrance) The refuge concession provides guided boat tours, boat rentals, food, and gifts for purchase. You can also rent camping supplies for a trip into the swamp. Call 912/496 7156 for more information.

Billys Island (West Entrance)

Accessed through the Stephen C. Foster State Park, this historic island in the Okefenokee was inhabited for generations. Most recently, the Hebard Cypress Company had a lumber camp on the island in 1918, eventually supporting approximately 600 people. This island is the second largest in the swamp and is only accessible by boat. A short hiking trail takes visitors through the site of the former community.

Wilderness Camping Permits

Permits are available for one to four nights through the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. You may make reservations no more than two months in advance. Permits are available year-round; during peak season (March/April), trips are limited to one and two nights. Canoes/kayaks only on overnight trips (no motorized boats).

For more information and to make a reservation, call 912/496 3331 between 7 am - 10 am, Tuesday - Thursday, excluding federal holidays. Please make a profile in Recreation.gov before calling to make a reservation.

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

- Refuge Boundary
- Swamp Island Drive (7.2 miles)
- Visitor Center
- Information
- Cafe
- Hiking Trail
- Picnic Area
- Boat Launch
- Historic Site
- Observation Tower
- Cabins
- Campground
- Trailer Sites
- Restrooms
- Day Use Shelter
- Overnight Shelter/Site
- Hiking Trail
- Boardwalk
- Color Designated Trails**
- Motorboats/Canoes Allowed
- Canoe Only (Permit Required)
- Unmaintained Trail**
- Canoe Only (No Permit Required)
- Mile Markers
- Non-Wilderness Uplands
- Wilderness Uplands
- Non-Wilderness Marsh
- Wilderness Marsh
- Wilderness Wetlands
- Other Refuge Wetlands

Upland Trails

Canal Diggers Trail

Length: 0.7 miles, 1 km

Loop

This trail begins from the main parking lot behind the picnic area/Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center or from a parking area on the Swamp Island Drive. Follow the remnants of the Suwannee Canal built in 1891 through pine uplands and cypress wetlands to look for signs of gopher tortoises and woodpeckers.

Cane Pole Trail

Length: 0.35 miles, 0.5 km

One way

Beginning just west of the boat ramp, this trail parallels the Suwannee Canal into Okefenokee's wetland prairie, offering fishing platforms and benches on this fully accessible trail. This trail offers great birdwatching opportunities during spring and fall migration.

Chesser Homestead Trail

Length: 0.7 miles, 1 km

Loop

This trail loops through a forest of oak, palmetto, and Spanish moss in the woods adjacent to the Historic Chesser Island Homestead.

Chesser Island Boardwalk

Length: .75 miles, 1 km

One way

Stroll the fully accessible boardwalk to the 40-foot Owls Roost Tower for a vast view of Seagrove Lake, prairies, and the Okefenokee Wilderness. Due to the presence of alligators, pets are not permitted on this trail.

Deerstand Trail

Length: .5 miles, .75 km

One way

For visitors wanting to get some extra hiking in, you can park at either the boardwalk or the homestead and walk from one to the other on this short trail that parallels the Swamp

Island Drive. Be on the lookout for white-tailed deer, pileated woodpeckers, and red-shouldered hawks.

Ridleys Island Boardwalk

Length: .16 miles, .3 km

One way

This spur off of the Chesser Homestead Trail takes visitors on a short boardwalk out to Ridleys Island.

Upland Discovery Trail

Length: .25 miles, .5 km

Loop

Walk through the pines and palmettos to look for woodpeckers and warblers. Trees marked with a white band indicate cavity trees for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

