

Permitted (continued)
Camping
Allowed on the refuge 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, Cravens Hammock, Mixons Hammock, and Canal Run. Campfires may be prohibited during dry periods.

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

Prohibited
Swimming
Prohibited in refuge waters for public safety.

Disturbing or collecting plants and/or animals or cultural artifacts
Leave areas as you found them for others to enjoy.

Feeding or harassing wildlife
Stay at least 20 feet (6 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.

Organized games such as football, baseball, horseshoes, and geocaching (except for the refuge’s virtual geocache opportunity) are prohibited.

Entrances
Suwannee Canal Recreation Area (East Entrance)
The main entrance, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is located 11 miles southwest of Folkston, Georgia off Highway 121/23. Refuge Visitor Center, Swamp Island Drive, Chesser Island Homestead, boat ramp, boat tours and rentals (canoes and motorboats) are available.



Longleaf Pine Forest, Art Webster/USFWS

Entrance fee required; daily pass (good for 7 days) and annual passes available.

For canoeing reservations on the Wilderness Canoe Trail System, call 912/496 3331 from 7-10 am Monday – Friday.

Visit www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee or call 912/496 7836 for more information.

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.

Swamp Island Drive – closes 30 minutes before refuge closes. Gate closes 90 minutes before refuge closes.

Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center – Hours vary seasonally. Please call the refuge for current hours and information.

Stephen C. Foster State Park (West Entrance)
Located 17 miles east of Fargo, on GA 177, Stephen C. Foster State Park manages this entrance with boardwalks, boating trails, fishing, guided boat tours, motorboat and canoe rentals, camping and more. Entrance fee required.

Call 912/637 5274 for information, or 1-800/864 7275 for reservations. www.gastateparks.org

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 animals exhibits and programs available. Admission fee required.

912/283 0583 or www.okeswamp.com

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Okefenokee *National Wildlife Refuge*

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



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

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Overview

Covering 630 square miles in southeast Georgia, the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge encompasses nearly all 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, and the Suwannee River flows south 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 or “houses.”

Whether you have only a few hours or have several days to visit the refuge’s three main 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. Its “wildness” is preserved by the National Wilderness Act. 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 these 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. Refuge staff work to preserve the natural qualities of the swamp, researching everything from black bears to bacteria, conducting wildlife surveys, vegetative transects, and water level monitoring.



Photos, left to right, top to bottom: canoeing in the Okefenokee, Art Webster/USFWS; twin rainbows over Chesser Island Boardwalk, Cindy McIntyre/USFWS; prescribed fires help manage refuge habitats, USFWS; Red-cockaded woodpecker; USFWS; Chesser Island Homestead, USFWS; American alligator; Art Webster/USFWS

Fire, both intentional through prescribed burning, and unintentional through wildfires, has shaped the Okefenokee for generations. Today, the refuge uses prescribed burning to reduce hazardous fuels and maintain the longleaf pine 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 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 (East Entrance)

Offering exhibits about the unique Okefenokee Swamp and a bookstore operated by the Friends group (Okefenokee Wildlife League), the Visitor Center is a great place to begin your visit. Get trail information and recent wildlife sightings, watch a video, and stay for one of the many diverse educational programs offered seasonally. Maps and information are available for the hiking trails, Swamp Island Drive, and upcoming events.

Chesser Island Homestead/Boardwalk (East Entrance)

Named for the family who first settled it, Chesser Island is a 592-acre island in the swamp. The Chesser 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 (East Entrance)

Provides guided boat tours, boat rentals, food, and gifts for purchase. You can also rent camping and fishing 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 has been 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.

Wilderness Canoeing

Permits are available for two to five day trips through the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. You may make reservations no more than two months in advance.

For more information and to make a reservation, call 912/496 3331 between 7 – 10 am, Monday – Friday, excluding federal holidays.

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.

Hunting

Refuge-specific regulations and seasons apply.

Canoeing/Kayaking

Allowed on designated trails, including Wilderness Canoe (overnight) trips for two to five days.

Motorboats

Permitted year round on marked trails. Outboards are limited to 10 HP or less.