

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Okefenokee

National Wildlife Refuge

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge  
2700 Suwannee Canal Road  
Folkston, GA 31537  
Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center: 912/496 7836  
[www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee)  
[www.facebook.com/okefenokeewildliferefuge](https://www.facebook.com/okefenokeewildliferefuge)

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)

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## Regulations

All federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply

*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. Only pole and line or rod and reel methods are authorized for fishing. Georgia state fishing license required and can be easily purchased online at [GoOutdoorsGeorgia.com](http://GoOutdoorsGeorgia.com).

*Hunting:* Refuge-specific regulations and seasons apply. For more information, refer to the refuge hunt brochure.

*Boating:* Boat ramps are available at the following locations; Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, Stephen C. Foster State Park, Kingfisher Landing, and Suwannee River Sill. All watercraft must stay on designated trails. Outboards, including electric motors, 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:* Permitted at designated overnight camping platforms and at designated areas in Stephen C. Foster State Park. Camping platforms are located on water trails and only accessible by canoe or kayak.

*Campfires:* Permitted at designated areas in Stephen C. Foster State Park and only in fire pits located at campsites on Floyds Island, Mixons Hammock, and Canal Run. Campfires may be prohibited during dry periods. Tree-killing insects and diseases can hide in firewood. Use firewood from onsite or buy certified heat-treated wood.

*Pets:* Must be restrained on a ten-foot leash and are not authorized on boardwalks, inside buildings, or in boats. Always clean up after your pet.

*Alcohol:* All federal and state laws regarding alcohol consumption are strictly enforced.

### Prohibited:

The use of trot lines or live bait for fishing.

Swimming and paddleboarding due alligators present.

Disturbing/collecting plants, animals, or cultural artifacts.

Golf carts, ATVs, and UTVs.

Feeding or harassing wildlife. Stay at least 20 feet from alligators.

Launching or landing aircraft (including drones).

### Entrance Fees

Required at Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, Stephen C. Foster State Park, and Suwannee River Sill. Daily and Annual Passes, Federal Duck Stamp, and Interagency Passes are available for sale at Okefenokee Adventures (Suwannee Canal Recreation Area) or at Stephen C. Foster State Park. The GA Park Pass is valid for entry at Stephen C. Foster State Park.

### 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.

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

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

Unless you have an overnight camping permit, boats must be off the water 90 minutes before the refuge closes.

**Kingfisher Landing:** located off US 1, this remote entrance has a boat launch with access to the Green and Red Trails. Overnight parking is only authorized with a Wilderness Camping Permit. Portable restroom available seasonally.

#### 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. Call 912/637 5274 for information, or 1-800/864 7275 for reservations or [www.gastateparks.org](http://www.gastateparks.org).

**Suwannee River Sill:** located off GA Highway 177 before Stephen C. Foster State Park with driving road, boat ramp, and fishing opportunities. Overnight parking prohibited. Watercraft prohibited from entering the refuge from the Suwannee River. Visitors paddling down the Suwannee River are required to park at Stephen C. Foster State Park and coordinate with park staff.

#### Okefenokee Swamp Park (North Entrance)

This 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](http://www.okeswamp.com).

Overview

Covering over 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” 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, threatened 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. 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.

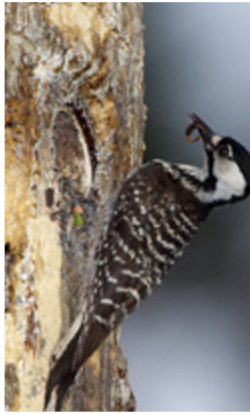
Wildlife and Habitat

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 ecosystem. The longleaf pine is a slow growing tree that once covered more than 90 million acres in the southeastern United



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

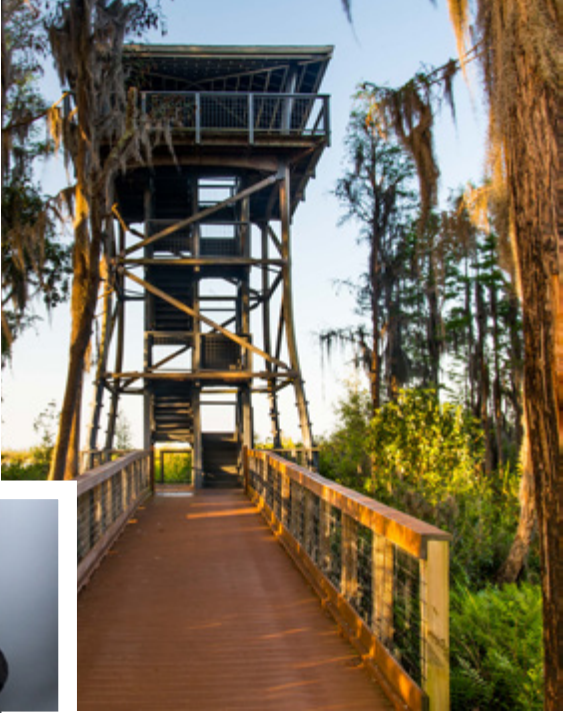


States. Only three percent of these pine forests remain and they are some of the most diverse and ecologically important habitats for several endangered species. You can observe longleaf pine communities and on-going longleaf pine restoration projects along the Swamp Island Drive and along Highway 177 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



Chesser Island Homestead

The Chesser Island Homestead offers a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the Chesser family, who made their home on this 592-acre island in the 1850s. The preserved buildings and artifacts reflect the lifestyle of an early swamper family, showcasing traditional tools, furnishings, and structures. It’s a must-see for history enthusiasts interested in experiencing the way of life of early families in the Okefenokee Swamp.

Chesser Island Boardwalk

Take a walk on the Chesser Island Boardwalk, a 1.3 mile round trip through the scenic wetlands of Okefenokee. At the end, the Owls Roost Tower offers a birds-eye-view of the swamp’s vast and unique ecosystem. It’s a peaceful spot for photography, birdwatching, or enjoying nature.

**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

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. Camping platforms are located on water trails and are only accessible by canoe or kayak (no motorized boats including electric motors).

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 operate a nature store where all proceeds go to assist refuge projects. Hours vary seasonally. Call 912/496 7836 for more information.

Swamp Island Wildlife

**Drive (Main Entrance)** is a 7.2-mile self-guided auto tour, perfect for exploring by car or bike. Along the paved route, stop at trailheads for easy hikes through longleaf pine forests, wildlife viewing, and visits to the Chesser Island Homestead and Boardwalk. Brochures are available at the Visitor Center that explain numbered markers highlighting points of interest.

# Okefenokee

## National Wildlife Refuge

- Refuge Boundary

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
- Swamp Island Drive (7.2 miles)

Hiking Trail

Boardwalk

**Color Designated Trails**

Motorboats/Canoes Allowed

Canoe Only (Permit Required)

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: 0.75 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: 0.5 miles, 0.75 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: 0.16 miles, 0.3 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: 0.25 miles, 0.5 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.

