Know Before You Go

Being prepared is critical for your overnight trip into the Okefenokee. Whether you are staying one night or four, there are many things to consider as you get ready for your trip. Please remember that it is your responsibility to be prepared for a Wilderness experience, which may include temperature changes, precipitation/thunderstorms, difficult trail navigation, and other factors.

• Check the weather conditions prior to your trip – be prepared!
• Each camping group is limited to 20 people.
• Entrance fees are included in the Wilderness Camping Permit.
• Any additions or changes to permits must be completed prior to departure.

Portable toilets with disposable bags are recommended. Restroom facilities are available at overnight stops and day-use shelters.

• There will only be one group per overnight platform. However, day use visitors access a large portion of the Wilderness Trail System and day-use shelters.

• Water filters are NOT recommended for drinking water. Canoeists should bring all water they will need for their trip.

Rules and Regulations

• Canoes and kayaks only are permitted on overnight camping trips. Although boats with small motors are permitted on portions of the water trail system for day-use, absolutely no motors (electric or gas-powered) are authorized on overnight trips.

• The Wilderness Camping Permit must be carried by each boat in the party and must be printed by the permittee.

• Parties must launch before 10 am to ensure that the overnight stop is reached before dark each day. All members of the party must be present at time of departure.

• You must remain at the designated overnight area between sunset and sunrise. Each party must leave the platform by 10 am.

Each party must sign-in/out when entering and leaving the swamp. Each entrance has a sign in logbook either located at the boat ramp or the campsite.

How Difficult is Paddling in the Okefenokee?

Consider the skill level of individuals in your party before choosing a trail! The swamp terrain is flat; there is little moving water/current and dry land is scarce. Your paddle will be used every inch of the way as you wind through cypress forests or cross open prairies exposed to the sun and wind. Paddling can be slow and strenuous on shallow and/or narrow trails. You may have to get out of your canoe and push across peat blowups, shallow water, or trees.

You must plan ahead if you choose a trail that does not return to the same boat launch. Highway distance between landings:

• Suwannee Canal Recreation Area to Kingfisher Landing: 25 miles
• Suwannee Canal Recreation Area to Stephen C. Foster State Park: 75 miles
• Kingfisher Landing to Stephen C. Foster State Park: 95 miles

Note: Kingfisher Landing is an unstaffed entrance.

Water trail near cypress forest near the west side, credit USFWS.
Okfuskee National Wildlife Refuge – Wilderness Water Trails

A trip into the Okfuskee is an experience that you will remember for a lifetime. Okfuskee National Wildlife Refuge contains over 400,000 acres of open water prairies, cypress forests, interior islands, and pine-uplands. Most of the refuge is a nationally designated Wilderness Area, providing opportunities for recreating in solitude. Seven overnight platforms and two islands provide a variety of trips from one to four nights with opportunities for both shorter and longer paddling distances. There are also endless possibilities for day trips into the refuge through several different entry/exit points. Read this brochure carefully and be sure you understand the refuge regulations. Check with each entrance for on-and off-the-water times.

Day Trips into the Okfuskee

There are many different ways you can enjoy the nearly 120-miles of Wilderness trails within the Okfuskee National Wildlife Refuge. Visitors can access the Okfuskee with a personal boat (canoe, kayak, or boat with motor of less than 10 HP). Canoes, kayaks, jot boats, and guided tours are available for visitors through Okfuskee Adventures and Stephen C. Foster State Park. Call Okfuskee Adventures at 912-496-7156 or Stephen C. Foster State Park at 912-637-5274 for information about the West Entrance (entrance nearest Fargo). Refer to the Stephen C. Foster State Park brochure for additional information on mileage and day-use access for visitors through Okefenokee Adventures and Stephen C. Foster State Park.

Wilderness Camping

Entering from Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, scrub-shrub areas are typical on this side of the swamp. Scrub-shrub is also typical on this side of the swamp. Areas with relatively shallow water and low growing plants. Plant species include water lilies, pitcher plants, and bladdernots. Keep your eyes out for the Okfuskee hooded pitcher plant, which is a variety of hooded pitcher plant that is endemic to the Okefenokee Swamp.

Entering from Stephen C. Foster State Park, cypress forests are the dominant environment. Billys Lake is an open area good for fishing, observing both hooded and trumpet pitcher plants, and looking for wildlife. Family groups of alligators are often seen along these trails and the spatterdock has beautiful yellow flowers when blooming. The trails from Kingfisher Landing are the most remote trails for visitors wanting a Wilderness experience. The entrance itself is also remote and simply offers a parking lot, a boat ramp, and a kiosk.

How Do I Make a Reservation for a Wilderness Camping Permit?

Camping overnight in the refuge is only authorized with a Wilderness Camping Permit (including camping areas within Stephen C. Foster State Park).

Permits must be made in advance (no walk-in reservations authorized). Reservations are made by calling the Permit Reservation Line at 912-496-3331 between 7-10 am ET, Tuesday-Thursday, excluding federal holidays. Reservations can be made up to two months in advance of your trip. Things to know before calling to make a reservation:

• You need to have a profile in Recreation.gov and make your permit reservation.
• You do not need to have a profile in Recreation.gov to make your permit reservation.

There is a $10 non-refundable reservation fee in addition to the $10/person per night use fees. Be prepared to make payment at time of reservation. If fees will be paid through Recreation.gov, only credit cards will be accepted. No discounts are offered for America the Beautiful passholders. The permit fees cover the reserve fees and insurance fees.

The cancellation policy is as follows:

• If you cancel your reservation at least 14 days prior to your entry date, use fees will be refunded minus one person per night reservation fee ($15). The $10 reservation fee is non-refundable for all reservations.
• If you cancel your reservation 13 days or less prior to the entry date, no fees will be refunded.
• If the refuge must cancel your reservation due to closure of the refuge, platforms, or trails (Extreme weather conditions; water levels, etc.); you will be notified and a full refund of fees will be issued. If you do not cancel and decide to not use your reservation, none of the fees will be refunded. Please cancel your reservation if you are unable to use it as this opens space for others.

• Changing the number of people with same dates and trip itinerary: log onto Recreation.gov to make changes up to 24 hours prior to trip and before your permit is printed.

• Changing the date of entry, the number of days or the trip itinerary: cancel your current permit and reserve a new permit. Based on when you make this cancellation, a refund may be issued (see above). A $10 reservation fee and all use fees will apply to the new permit reservation.

• All permits will be required to print their own permits and parking placards. You may print your permit up to 7 days in advance of your trip. Once your permit is printed, no changes will be authorized.
What must I bring? What should I bring?

You must carry the following items for your safety:

- Coast Guard approved flotation device (PFD) for each person (children under 13 years of age must wear at all times)
- Compass and map of refuge and trails
- flashlight
- Cook stove and fuel (if you choose to cook on your trip)
- Drinking water (6-8 quarts per person each day, depending on weather). Drinking/boiling water is not recommended.
- Insect repellent and/or mosquito netting
- Trash bags. The refuge asks its visitors to practice Leave No Trace principles (pack it in, pack it out).
- Toiletpaper. Each overnight campsite has a pit toilet, but bring TP in case supplies are low.

You should carry the following items:

- Extra flashlights and batteries
- Portable toilet with disposables bags
- Rope for pulling canoe
- First aid kit
- Rain gear
- Sleeping bag/free-standing tent or hammock for sleeping
- Insect repellent
- Duct tape for emergency repairs
- Spare paddle
- Waterproof bags/containers
- Cord to tie down tent
- Sun protection (sunscreen, wide brim hat, light-colored long sleeve shirt, and pants)

What if I am a guide or outfitter?

If you charge any fees for trips into the Okefenokee, you are required to have a Commercial Guide Special Use Permit. Permits are only issued once annually, in the fall. For more information, call 912-496-1331.

Do I need a special permit to cross the Suwannee River Sill?

You no longer need a permit to cross the Suwannee River Sill. Contact Stephen C. Foster State Park at 912-637-5274 if leaving a vehicle parked in their parking lot overnight. All overnight trips must park at the Stephen C. Foster State Park, not at the Sill parking area (day-use only).

Wilderness Canoe Trails

Trails within the refuge are color-coded (blue, brown, green, orange, pink, purple, red, yellow). Numbered mile markers line each trail, while wooden posts painted white on top serve as trail markers to help you find your way. At main intersections wooden signs indicate the direction of several different trails or sites.

Blue Trail

Description: This trail connects the Orange Trail with the Green Trail and skirts the edge of Chase Prairie. The deeper holes you come across are good fishing areas. It is used mainly as a route from the Orange Trail to Floyds Island or Bluff Lake.

Difficulty: moderate - difficult

Overnight Sites: Bluff Lake (Platform) - This site is located on the Green Trail (accessible from Kingfisher Landing). Paddle across Bluff Lake to get to the overnight shelter. Stars are beautiful on a dark night.

Floyds Island (Island) - This site is located on Floyds Island along the Green Trail. A ¼ mile trail traverses across the island, offering access from the east to the west side of the island. If you are camping on Floyds Island and a high tide, you must portage across the island. An old hunting cabin sits partway down the trail across from the campsite. The campsite also contains a fire ring.

Orange Trail

Description: This trail extends off the Suwannee Canal Trail to Canoe Run, difficult (Canoe Run to Stephen C. Foster State Park)

Difficulty: easy

Overnight Sites: Cedar Hammock (Platform) - This platform is located three miles from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, making it a great platform for less experienced paddlers and/or families with children. The platform sits in Mixc Prarie offering open views of the surrounding area.

Purple Trail

Description: This trail starts off of the Orange Trail (Chase Prairie and Blue Trail). The trail ends from Canoe Run (Orange Trail) to Minnies Run and Billys Lake. The slow current is with some rapids.

Red Trail

Description: Kingfisher Landing to Mud Hammock is a long day of paddling 12 miles through scrub-shrub, marsh, and small lakes. The nine-mile stretch between Mud Hammock and Big Water goes through marsh, a narrow, closed channel, and into a wider river channel surrounded by cypress. The Big Water shelter is at the north end of Big Water Lake. The next 1½ miles to Stephen C. Foster State Park go through marsh and peat blow-ups. The current is slow and current is as you travel towards the State Park.

Difficulty: difficult

Overnight Sites: Mud Hammock (Platform) - This platform is located on the left edge of Mud Hammock Lake, so be sure to look behind you to find your overnight stop as you enter Mud Hammock. The lake, and the other lakes along the Red Trail, provide good fishing opportunities. This site is one of the most remote locations along the overnight camping trails. Enjoy beautiful night sky viewing from this location.

Big Water (Platform) - This platform is at the north end of Big Water Lake. The area provides great fishing opportunities (seasonally). There are fantastic night sky and sunrise/sunset viewing opportunities at this platform.

Yellow Trail

Description: This trail extends north of the Suwannee Canal into Mixc Prarie. Cedar Hammock platform lies about a mile into this trail. This area is typical Okefenokee prairie, with low growing plants and scrub-shrub habitat.

Difficulty: easy

Overnight Sites: Sill (Platform) - This site is located on the Sill between Mud Hammock and Billys Lake. The platform is adjacent to a small hammock, where the trail is surrounded by pines, cypress, and loblolly bays, snaking with Spanish moss. The platform is adjacent to a small hammock, where a campfire ring is available for use. It is located 10 miles from Suwannee Canal Recreation Area and seven miles from Stephen C. Foster State Park.

Pink Trail

Description: This trail starts off the Suwannee Canal or Orange Trail, heading south into Chase Prairie, then Mud Hammock, and ending at Monkey Lake. This trail goes through some of the most iconic open prairie, where you may see alligators, wading birds, and plants such as water lilies and golden club.

Difficulty: moderate

Overnight Sites: I is located in Grand Lake with the bat habitat. Be sure to wear a headlamp! Excellent wildlife.

Purple Trail

Description: This trail starts from the Orange Trail (Chase Prairie and Blue Trail).

Difficulty: moderate

Overnight Sites: J (Platform) - This platform is located on the Orange Trail, offering a 360-deg view of the swamp. Round Top is a great place for stargazing. The beautiful summer drives some of the most spectacular sky viewing opportunities.

Red Trail

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Difficulty: difficult

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