

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
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News Release



For Immediate Release

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Supervisory Refuge Ranger

New Partnership Announced for Concession Operation at Banks Lake NWR

Folkston, GA... Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is proud to announce the ground-breaking partnership that will aid in the operation and visitor services of the Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Lakeland, GA. An unstaffed refuge, Banks Lake is administered by Okefenokee, nearly 120 miles away, making work at this remote refuge often difficult. Refuge staff will now be working with Lanier County to aid in the concession operation and visitor services offered at Banks Lake. "I am excited Lanier County has the opportunity for this partnership with the Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the Lakeland-Lanier Chamber" said Alex Lee, Lanier County Board of Commissioners Chairman. "Our board is ready to make this happen."

After several unsuccessful ventures attempting to run the concession operation, Lanier County was eager and ready to help this valuable local resource to shine. "Banks Lake is such an important place naturally and historically here in Lanier County" says Lakeland-Lanier County Chamber of Commerce President J.H. "Sandy" Sanders. Banks Lake is a popular place for locals and visitors alike to go fishing, kayaking/canoeing, and just experience the beauty of this shallow, freshwater lake. With Lanier County working with the refuge, there are sure to be many new educational opportunities and a brand new face to the concession operation. "We are certain that a partnership with Lanier County will be a step in the right direction for this refuge and of great benefit to refuge visitors" states Refuge Manager Michael Lusk. "We are always looking for creative partnerships to offer the very best customer service".

"Allen Sirmans and Sirmans Hardware and Outdoors is partnering with the Chamber in the daily operation of Banks Lake Outdoors Experience" said Sanders. More information will be announced on the hours of operation of the Banks Lake Outdoors after their planned opening on March 1, 2015. Information on special events, tours/programs, and rental information will be forthcoming as well. The refuge and the Chamber of Commerce are planning for a ribbon cutting and grand opening celebration in the coming months. For immediate questions about the operation, please contact the Lakeland-Lanier Chamber of Commerce at 229-482-9755 or Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge at 912-496-7366.

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The Suwannee Canal Recreation Area (East Entrance) to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is the primary entrance managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is located 11 miles southwest of Folkston, GA off Hwy 121/23. The refuge is open daily and offers a variety of opportunities for the visiting public. Call 912-496-7836 or visit the refuge website at www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee for hours of operation, upcoming events, and entrance fee information.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook pages at www.facebook.com/okefenokeewildliferefuge or www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>.