



## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### *Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge*

# Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners (GOAL)

#### History of GOAL



In 1990, the Shorts Fire was a turning point in fire management operations in this unique fire ecosystem. The fire stretched the staff, equipment and all organizations involved in firefighting operations. It was apparent that a more concerted and coordinated effort by those involved would result in more efficient efforts.

During the first half of 1994, several informal landowner supper meetings were held. Some landowners envisioned a more formal gathering of landowners that could deal not only with better preparation and communication during wildfires, but with other issues of forest and wildlife. Key landowners were invited to a steering committee meeting to determine if a formal organization was necessary. They identified a number of issues that could benefit from such an organization. Their vision was to develop an organization of interested landowners to address land management issues of special concern to southeast Georgia and northeast Florida and produce a consolidated and influential position to deal with these issues. The Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners was born.

#### Mission of GOAL



“To serve as a unified team managing, protecting, and promoting forest resources in and around the Okefenokee Swamp through a stewardship ethic to assure these resources will be available for future generations. “

GOAL recognizes that:

- Forest resources are the major industries in the area.
- The Okefenokee Swamp is a National Treasure and economically and biologically beneficial to the local communities and the states of Georgia and Florida.
- It is essential to have a coordinating committee for fire protection of public and private resources.
- A formal organization of landowners will provide an avenue for communications and develop strength in dealing with area issues.

#### Accomplishments



In 2005 and again in 2015, GOAL received the United States Department of Agriculture’s Pulaski Award. Named in honor of its creator, Edward “Big Ed” Pulaski, the Pulaski, a half ax/half hoe fire tool has become the symbol of the wildland firefighters. The Pulaski Award is awarded annually to the group that shows the greatest example nationally of interagency cooperation, coordination, and standardization; safety of firefighters and/or the American public during a wildfire; and outstanding group performance in fire management and suppression activities. Through the years, the GOAL organization has addressed a number of fire-related issues. Landowners cooperate on maintenance of the Swamp Perimeter Road, compile and maintain a resource list of fire equipment and personnel, maintain 80 helicopter dip-sites surrounding the swamp, and share radio frequencies and contact information for members. The organization also supported the black bear research at Okefenokee NWR and Osceola NF by providing access to their lands and the expertise of their employees. The U.S. Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service contributed a total of \$550,000.00 to the construction of the John Bethea State Forest Joint Work Center. The Georgia Forestry Commission is also partnering in this important cooperative venture located in Baxter, Florida. The work center is designed to decrease the response time to wildland fires in the adjoining GOAL area.