

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
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News Release



For Immediate Release

Date: June 11, 2014

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Okefenokee NWR Accepting Comments on Entrance and Permit Fees

Folkston, GA....Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is accepting comments on the proposed fee structure for a portion of the refuge's entrance and user fees. Since 1981, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has had authority to collect recreation fees. Since 1997, the Service has been able to retain fees collected at the station, first under the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program and then, in 2004, under the authority of Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). The FLREA was established to provide funding for recreation program improvements. Typical projects paid for by recreation fee funds include road and parking lot maintenance, brochures, passes and envelopes handling and mailings of quota hunt permits, and salaries for law enforcement.

Beginning in 1981, the refuge began collecting fees for tram tours, wilderness canoe trails, night time boat tours, and quota hunts. In 1988, the refuge began collecting entrance fees at the east, west, and north entrances. In 1997, under the authority of the Recreation Fee Demonstration Act, the Refuge collected a \$5 daily entrance fee and a \$10/night/person fee for backcountry camping and canoe trail. The refuge fee prices have remained unchanged since 1997. The fee rates that the refuge is proposing are as follows:

- \$15 – Refuge-specific Annual Pass (good for one year from the date of purchase)
- \$15 – Quota Hunt Permit for the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area
- \$15/person – Wilderness Camping Platform Permit
- \$50/year – Commercial Guide Services Special Use Permit (Day-use)

A fee analysis has been done by refuge staff and these fees are proposed based on what nearby facilities and national wildlife refuges are requesting. The refuge is proposing to make these fee changes effective January 1, 2015.

We are interested in hearing from you regarding the proposed new fee requirement and are requesting public comments beginning June 16 through July 16, 2014. Please submit any comments to Refuge Manager, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, via email (okefenokee@fws.gov), phone (912-496-7366), or by mail to 2700 Suwannee Canal Road Folkston, GA 31537. All comments will be reviewed and considered before a final decision is made on the implementation of the fee.

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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/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>.