

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
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<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee>

News Release



For Immediate Release
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Supervisory Refuge Ranger

Changes to Visitor Services Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

Folkston, GA.....The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge has had a long-standing history of providing exceptional visitor experiences to guests from around the world, from paddling across the vast and wild Okefenokee on an overnight trip to the custom-designed education programs offered to the thousands of school children that visit during the spring. In an effort to continue to provide a variety of visitor opportunities to guests in light of staff reductions, the refuge is making several changes to the visitor services program that are outlined below and will be implemented beginning in January 2020.

Overnight camping trips in the Okefenokee require a permit by calling the permit reservation phone line. **Due to staffing reductions, the refuge can no longer staff the phone line Monday–Friday. The new schedule for permit reservations will be Tuesday – Thursday 7:00 A.M. – 10:00 A.M. by calling the permit reservation line at 912-496-3331, when staff are available.**

Additionally, the refuge is implementing a tour schedule of the Chesser Island Homestead, which is staffed exclusively by volunteers. The refuge will offer scheduled tours seasonally at 10:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M, each tour lasting about 20-30 minutes and includes a view of the inside of the house as well as the outbuildings on the property. In January and February, tours will be Saturdays only. The days of the week tours will be offered will vary seasonally, so please call the Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center at 912-496-7836 prior to your visit for information on when tours will be offered. Groups that would like a tour outside of the scheduled events should contact the Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center at 912-496-7836 at least two weeks in advance.

Visitors may notice changes in the level of maintenance of visitor facilities throughout the refuge due to staffing reductions. The refuge will continue to strive to provide access to the upland and water trails, providing for safety first. If conditions require trail/facility closure, the refuge will make the information available on our website, Facebook (@OkefenokeeWildlifeRefuge), and at the refuge visitor center.

Tours and services on the refuge are provided by Okefenokee Adventures, the official onsite concessionaire at the Main Entrance, located outside of Folkston, GA. For information on Okefenokee Adventures, please contact 912-496-7156. The refuge offers outstanding opportunities for wildlife observation, wildlife photography, hiking, paddling, birdwatching, and so much more.

The refuge asks for your patience as we work through these staffing reductions. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Michael Lusk, Refuge Manager, at 912-496-7366 ex 226 or email Okefenokee@fws.gov.

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The Main Entrance (Suwannee Canal Recreation Area) to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is 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>.