



# U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Services and Ecotourism



The Okefenokee is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) with the overall mission “To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of future generations of Americans”... to put it simply **Wildlife FIRST**.



The Okefenokee Swamp has shaped the culture of southeast Georgia. Most residents of Charlton, Clinch, and Ware counties have ancestors who once lived or worked in the swamp and view the swamp as a part of their heritage.

### **Visitation:**

The NWRS supports wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, interpretation, and environmental education. Other types of visitor opportunities vary depending on the refuge.



There are over 500,000 visits to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) each year. The most popular visitor activity at Okefenokee is wildlife observation, which brought 275,000 visits in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017.

Visitors to Okefenokee come from across the country and internationally; in any given year, visitors from all 50 states and over 35 countries have been recorded visiting Okefenokee’s Main Entrance. The refuge estimates at least 10% of our overall visitation is comprised of international visitors.



### **Economic Impact:**

On average, wildlife refuges return \$4.87 to local economies for every \$1 Congress provides in federal funding. (Banking on Nature Report; 2013)

It is estimated that Okefenokee returns \$1.38 for every \$1 appropriated. This does not take into account the societal value of the preservation of the Okefenokee.



Funding for the NWRS has declined substantially since FY 2010’s record high appropriation. The NWRS has nearly 20% fewer visitor services personnel than in FY2011. Visitation to refuges has increased across the system and at Okefenokee; the NWRS sees 48 million visits each year, with less capacity to serve visitors today than ever before.

### **Designations:**

The Okefenokee Swamp is the largest intact freshwater wetland in North America. It has been designated a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention of 1971.

The Okefenokee NWR is a proposed World Heritage Site.

Other designations include:

- National Wilderness Area
- National Natural Landmark
- National Water Trail System
- National Recreation Trail
- Important Bird Area (Audubon Society)
- One of the seven natural wonders of Georgia

