



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness

Wilderness Designation



On October 1, 1974, ninety percent of the lands in the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) were designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled (unfettered) by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” The Act further defines wilderness as areas that:

- Are affected primarily by nature, where people are visitors;
- Possess opportunities for solitude;
- Are Federally-owned, undeveloped, and generally over 5,000 acres;
- Are managed to allow natural processes to operate;
- May contain scientific, educational, scenic, or historical features;
- Are formally designated by Congress.

The legislation that created the Okefenokee NWR wilderness area (353, 981 acres) grandfathered in historic uses such as fishing and the use of motorboats up to ten horsepower. It also required the FWS to maintain 4 access areas and up to 120 miles of trails.

Air Quality and Wilderness



A small number of National Wilderness Areas have additional protection as Class I Air Sheds under the 1990 Clean Air Act. Okefenokee is one of only 21 national wildlife refuges across the country with this additional designation.

In the Southeastern United States, the most widespread air pollutants are common, everyday substances: particulates (dust and soot), nitrogen and sulfur gases, and the daily by-products of engine combustion, coal burning power plants, and other industrial processes.

Okefenokee is a partner with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, other federal land management agencies and state agencies in two air quality monitoring programs established to detect airborne pollutants. One detects pollutants deposited by rain on Okefenokee’s plants, soils and surface water, and the other analyzes airborne particles.

Wilderness Values



The Wilderness Act is a uniquely American piece of legislation. It preserves natural areas in their wild, beautiful, and primitive character. Wilderness is a chance for visitors to experience a level of solitude not often found in our increasingly technological society. Wilderness is an opportunity for people to test themselves against the elements and the unknown. Wilderness is the prospect of gazing at the night sky without competition from surrounding city/neighborhood lights.

Studies show that Americans value wilderness areas, even if they never have an opportunity to visit - they just like to know that some pieces of the Earth will not be paved, dredged, mined, harvested, or otherwise impacted by people.

In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create