



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Wildlife and Habitat Management



Okefenokee NWR exemplifies an ecologically driven freshwater wetland managed at a landscape level. Researchers and environmental organizations have long realized the importance of this world renowned wetland for both conservation and research.



The biology and forestry programs at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) are responsible for managing and monitoring the refuge's natural resources. Management efforts emphasize natural processes to enhance habitat for native fauna and flora. Fire is the main tool that is used to simulate the historic frequency of wildfires. Upland management concentrates on restoring the native longleaf pine communities that provide habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. To support management, incidental sightings and standardized surveys provide long-term data sets as well as identifying trends in populations. Short-term detailed studies are generally conducted by outside institutions under contract with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The qualities of the Okefenokee Swamp also attract researchers from around the world. These researchers work under a Special Use Permit after compatibility is determined. Five to ten Special Use Permits are issued to researchers in an average year.



The 2006 Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan presents strategies to accomplish the goals of the refuge in the next 15 years. The Inventory and Monitoring Plan and Habitat Management Plan fine tune the strategies and protocols so they coincide with regional and national efforts and data sharing. The following are the topics addressed through the strategies:



- Surveying neotropical migrants, breeding birds, marsh and wading birds, and sandhill cranes within designated habitats.
- Monitoring black bear populations in and around the refuge.
- Monitoring amphibian and reptile populations within the swamp and the isolated wetlands.
- Monitoring fish populations and their health.
- Surveying invertebrate composition and relative abundance within specific habitats.
- Monitoring activity within red-cockaded woodpecker clusters.
- Managing habitat for the expansion of red-cockaded woodpecker populations.
- Inventorying forested upland communities around the perimeter of the swamp.
- Establishing vegetation plots, transects, and photo plots on the uplands and within the swamp.
- Maintaining records on prescribed burns and wildfires.
- Controlling pests and exotic species.
- Maintaining two weather stations.
- Monitoring water levels and water quality within the swamp.
- Maintaining air monitoring equipment which includes an IMPROVE site, wet deposition site, and a mercury deposition site.
- Coordinating studies, information and surveys with private, state, and other federal agencies.
- Establishing partnerships with adjacent landowners to improve the quality of habitat on the refuge.
- Presenting technical information and assistance to local, state, and federal agencies, private individuals and companies.