

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
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News Release



For Immediate Release

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Okefenokee NWR Reminds Visitors of Alligator Safety When Visiting the Swamp

Folkston, GA....As the summer continues and visitors are boating, canoeing/kayaking, and fishing in the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, refuge officials have noticed a dramatic increase in human/alligator interactions, primarily associated with fishing activity at the Suwannee River Sill, near Fargo. These types of interactions can be dangerous to humans and may be detrimental to alligators. Okefenokee NWR is home to approximately 12,000 alligators, and the vast prairies and waterways of the swamp provide optimal habitat for these curious and magnificent creatures. In order to promote a safe and enjoyable visit, we ask refuge visitors to remember the following guidelines regarding alligator safety.

- Feeding, harassing, and catching alligators is strictly prohibited and can carry a fine of \$550. This includes throwing fish (caught by fishermen) back in the vicinity of an alligator.
- It is the visitor's responsibility to move away from an alligator if they are in the area.
- If you are fishing and not retaining fish caught, DO NOT throw fish back in the vicinity of an alligator. The refuge recommends using a cooler and not a stringer for keeping your fish.
- Swimming in the Okefenokee is prohibited. If near the water, do not splash or wash off your hands if alligators are near. They are curious and the splashing may prompt them to approach.
- Dogs are not permitted in boats in the Okefenokee. If you bring your dog to the refuge, it must be on a lease (10-ft or less) at all times.

This summer, the refuge has had to remove/relocate several alligators that had become “nuisance” alligators. When this happens, the refuge contacts specially trained Nuisance Alligator Agent Trapper, Jackie Carter, who is licensed with the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to remove “nuisance” alligators. “If you see someone getting too close to an alligator or feeding it, please report them to refuge staff as soon as possible,” asks Jackie Carter. “Alligators are curious and opportunistic; don’t put yourself and others in a bad situation.” Okefenokee is requesting that if you are visiting the refuge and witness someone feeding or harassing an alligator, contact refuge personnel immediately or call the DNR hotline at 1-800-241-4113.

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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/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>.