

National Park Service
US Fish and Wildlife Service

News Release



Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
2700 Suwannee Canal Road
Folkston, GA 31537
Phone: (912) 496-7836
Fax: (912) 496-7991
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee>

Cumberland Island National Seashore
101 Wheeler Street
St Marys, GA 31558
Phone: (912) 882-4336
Fax: (912) 882-6284
<http://www.nps.gov/cuis>

For Immediate Release

Date: June 24, 2014

Contact: Susan Heisey, 912-496-7366, ex 233
Supervisory Refuge Ranger

CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE and OKEFENOKEE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE highlight the Wilderness Act's 50th anniversary with joint activities this September

Southeast Georgia – Cumberland Island National Seashore and Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge announced plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the National Wilderness Preservation Act by sponsoring two weekend Wilderness events in partnership with Okefenokee Adventures and Up the Creek Xpeditions. Over the course of two September weekends, September 13-14 and 20-21, the public can join NPS, FWS and expert guides from each outfitter company and explore the Congressionally designated Wilderness of each area. Group size will be limited for each outing and registration will be required.

In 1964, the United States Congress passed the National Wilderness Preservation Act, almost by unanimous vote. Today nearly five percent of the U.S., more than 109.5 million acres in 757 areas in 44 of the 50 states and Puerto Rico, is designated Wilderness. The goal of the Wilderness Act in 1964, and today, is to protect “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and ..., with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable;...has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;...and may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, or historical value.”

Southeast Georgia is home to two unique and large east coast Wilderness areas, Okefenokee Wilderness and Cumberland Island Wilderness. These two areas are often best explored by canoe and kayak and as a tribute to the 50th anniversary, the agencies will host two joint celebrations.

September 13-15 will be a Wilderness Weekend paddle, starting at the Folkston entrance of the Okefenokee NWR on Saturday September 13. Guides will take participants through the tree dotted marshes of Chesser Prairie, looking for fall flowers and enjoying birding on this 8-mile paddle to overnight at the Coffee Bay camping platform in the middle of the vast Okefenokee. Sunday morning will be a return paddle to the boat basin. Participants will then pack up and travel to Crooked River State Park for leg two of the weekend. Sunday afternoon, September 14, the participants will meet the guides from Up the Creek Expeditions at Crooked River State Park for the 8-mile paddle to the Plum Orchard Dock on Cumberland Island. Once camp is set, hikes through the island to the beach await. Return trip to Crooked River will be Monday morning. If participating in both expeditions the cost is \$500 total per person. Otherwise the cost will be \$280 if registering for just one of the trips. Registration for the Okefenokee trip will be made through Okefenokee Adventures by calling 912-496-7156; registration for the Cumberland Island trip will be made through Up the Creek Expeditions by calling 912-882-0911 or submitting a booking request at www.upthecreekx.com. Price includes boat rental (canoes at Okefenokee and kayaks at Cumberland Island), camping gear (except sleeping bags for the Cumberland Island trip) and meals. Prices will increase to \$270 per person for each leg of the trip if reservations are made after August 28 (\$300 if registering for just one of the trips).

September 20 and 21 are Wilderness day trip paddle excursions. Spend the day exploring each Wilderness area with expert guides and Wilderness staff from the Park and Refuge. September 20 will focus on Okefenokee NWR and September 21 will focus on Cumberland Island. Each trip is \$75 per person for the dual experience (\$85 if registering for just one of the trips) if registration is completed before August 28. Each trip is expected to last 6-8 hours and includes gear rental and snacks. Trip prices increase to \$85 per person per trip after August 28 (\$100 if registering for just one of the trips).

Cumberland Island is the largest barrier island off the coast of Georgia, encompassing more than 36,000 acres of maritime forests, salt marsh and beaches. The island is also home to over 9,800 acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness. The island's natural and cultural resources provide a rich and diverse habitat for wildlife and offer a glimpse into the long history of coastal Georgia. The Seashore is accessible by foot-only, passenger ferry from the historic community of St. Marys, Georgia.

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 Okefenokee is home to over 354,000 acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness. 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/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>.

###