

# Okefenokee

## National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness Canoe Guide



- Pets, swimming, motorized vessels, and fires (except in designated areas) are prohibited.
- Children under 13 must wear Personal Flotation Device (PFD). All individuals on the water must have a PFD with them.
- Keep trails free from litter. Visit the Leave No Trace website at <https://lnt.org/learn/7-principle>.
- Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms will comply with all provisions of state and local law. Firearms are prohibited in all buildings. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations 50 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32.
- The collection and/or capturing of any plant and/or animal is strictly prohibited. Do not approach, feed, or harass wildlife.
- Open fires (wood or charcoal) are permitted only at Canal Run, Cravens Hammock, Mixons Hammock, and Floyds Island. Restrictions may be put in place during high fire danger. Visit <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org/>; bringing in firewood from outside of the local region is prohibited to try to reduce the spread of invasive fungus and insects.



**NOTE:** Kingfisher Landing is an unstaffed entrance. There are no facilities, except a composting toilet and kiosk.

### What must I bring? What should I bring?

You **MUST** carry the following items, for your safety:

- Coast Guard approved flotation device (PFD) for each person (children under 13 years of age must wear at all times)
- Compass and map of refuge and trails
- Flashlight
- Cook stove and fuel if you choose to cook on your trip
- Drinking water (4-6 quarts per person each day, depending on weather). Drinking/filtering swamp water is not recommended.

You **SHOULD** carry the following items:

- Extra flashlights and batteries
- Trash bags
- Portable toilet with disposable bags
- Rope for pulling canoe
- First Aid Kit
- Food (plus enough for one extra day)
- Foul weather gear
- Sleeping bag or blanket
- Insect repellant
- Duct tape for emergency repairs
- Spare paddle
- Waterproof bags
- Toilet paper
- Free-standing tent
- Cord to tie down tent
- Bailer
- Sun protection (sunscreen, wide brim hat, light-colored long sleeve shirt, and pants)

### How Difficult is Paddling in the Okefenokee?

Consider the skill level of individuals in your party before choosing a trail! The swamp terrain is flat; there is little fast water and dry land is scarce. Your paddle will be used every inch of the way as you wind through cypress forests or cross open prairies exposed to the sun and wind. Paddling can be slow and strenuous on shallow and/or narrow trails. You may have to get out of your canoe and push across peat blowups, shallow water, or trees.

**You must plan ahead if you choose a trail that does not return to the same landing. Highway distance between landings:**

- Suwannee Canal Recreation Area to Kingfisher Landing: 25 miles
- Suwannee Canal Recreation Area to Stephen C. Foster State Park: 75 miles
- Kingfisher Landing to Stephen C. Foster State Park: 95 miles

### What if I am a guide or outfitter?

If you charge any fees for trips into the Okefenokee, you are required to have a Commercial Guiding Special Use Permit. Permits are issued once annually, in the fall. For more information, call 912/496 3331. NOTE: Visit the refuge website (Wilderness Canoeing page) for a list of permitted day use and overnight guides.

### Do I need a special permit to cross the Suwannee Sill?

You no longer need a permit to cross the Suwannee River Sill. Contact Stephen C. Foster State Park at 912/637 5274 if leaving a vehicle parked in their parking lot overnight. All overnight trips MUST park at the Stephen C. Foster State Park, not at the Sill parking area (day-use only).





### Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge – Wilderness Canoe Trails

A trip into the Okefenokee is an experience that you will remember for a lifetime. Alligators glide through the dark water stained with tannic acid. Herons and egrets wade through tall grasses and water lilies. Bears meander through

hammocks and islands. Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is a haven for these and other animals – over 400,000 acres of wet prairies, cypress forests, interior islands, and pine uplands. Most of the refuge is a nationally designated Wilderness Area, which offers opportunities for solitude and rejuvenation. Seven overnight shelters and three islands are available for camping in the swamp with a permit. There are also endless possibilities for day trips into the Okefenokee Swamp through several different entrances/access points. Please remember that it is your responsibility to be prepared for a Wilderness experience, which may include temperature changes, precipitation, difficult trail navigation, and other factors. Read this brochure carefully and be sure you understand all of the procedures and regulations.

*Here forests of moss-draped cypress stand mile on mile in dense, almost unbroken formation and watery “prairies” spread their colorful panorama of sight and sound. Here the swamp dwellers – the alligator, bear, raccoon, otter, and many water birds – follow their way of life with little interference from man. – E.U.Curtis Bohlen*

#### What is Wilderness?

The open water prairies, cypress-lined lakes, and scrub-shrub thickets of the Okefenokee are not only part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, but also a National Wilderness



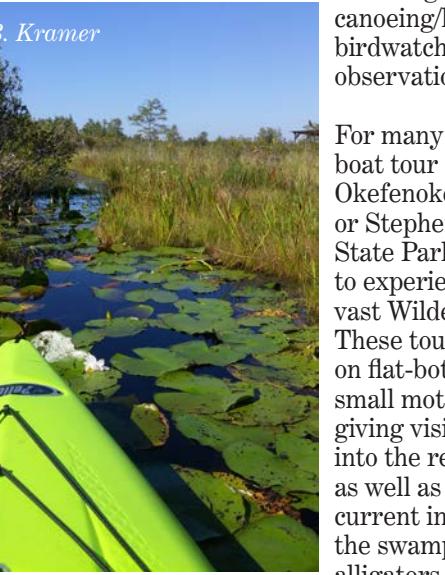
Area. Wilderness is a rare and wild place, untamed and undeveloped, where one can retreat from the mechanized world and reconnect with nature and oneself. Where man is just a visitor, the Wilderness in Okefenokee provides

unparalleled opportunities for solitude, wildlife observation, and serenity.

#### Day Trips into the Okefenokee

There are many different ways you can enjoy the nearly 120-miles of Wilderness trails within the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Each season in the swamp is varied and offers a unique experience for visitors. Visitors can enjoy

the refuge by fishing, canoeing/kayaking, birdwatching, and wildlife observation year-round.



For many visitors, a boat tour offered by Okefenokee Adventures or Stephen C. Foster State Park is a great way to experience the refuge's vast Wilderness Area. These tours are offered on flat-bottom boats with small motors year-round, giving visitors a glimpse into the refuge's history as well as observing the current inhabitants of the swamp, American alligators, great blue herons, red-shouldered

hawks, and more! There are also canoes, kayaks, and small boats to rent for visitors who would like to explore a little further.

Call Okefenokee Adventures at 912/496-7156 for tour and rental information for the Main Entrance (Suwannee Canal Recreational Area). Call Stephen C. Foster State Park at 912/637 5274 for tour and rental information for the Stephen C. Foster State Park (West Entrance) near Fargo.

Visitors can also access the Okefenokee with a personal boat (canoe, kayak, or small boat with motor less than 10 HP). Kingfisher Landing between Folkston and Waycross has a boat ramp and a small dock to access the Red Trail to Double Lakes (5 miles) and Green Trail to Bluff Lake (8 miles). The Suwannee Canal Recreation Area near Folkston has a boat ramp, a small dock, and a public canoe/kayak launching “beach” area and gives visitors access into the historic Suwannee Canal and associated trails. The Stephen C. Foster State Park has a boat ramp, small dock, and canoe/kayak launching area to access Billys Lake, Billys Island, Minnies Run to Big Water (11 miles), and the River Narrows. The Suwannee River Sill near Stephen C. Foster State Park

also has a boat ramp and accesses the Brown Trail. Refer to map for additional information on mileage and day-use access versus overnight trail access.

#### Overnight Wilderness Camping

Full of outstanding wildlife photography and wildlife observation opportunities, visitors can choose to spend anywhere from one night up to four nights (based on trail conditions) camping within the Okefenokee. These paddling trips are anywhere from 2 – 15 miles/day and can be through difficult conditions like peat blow-ups, narrow trails, shallow water, etc. Know the limitations of your group members when making a reservation. It is required for parties to take man-powered vessels ONLY on overnight Wilderness camping trips. NO boats with motors are authorized for this use.

It is your responsibility to be prepared for a trip, which may include temperature extremes, precipitation, high winds, high humidity, and other factors. While you may choose to bring communication and navigational equipment (cell phones, GPS units) on a trip, this is not a substitute for proper preparation. Cell phone coverage may be inconsistent, batteries die, and equipment gets dropped or wet. It is imperative that you keep on the trail specified on your permit for safety. Check the weather conditions for the refuge prior to your trip - be prepared!

#### How Do I Make a Reservation for a Wilderness Camping Permit?

Camping overnight is only authorized with a Wilderness Camping Permit (excluding camping areas within Stephen C. Foster State Park). **Permits must be made in advance of your planned trip and Reservations are made by calling the Canoe Reservation Line at 912/496 3331 between 7:00 am. – 10:00 am., Monday-Friday, excluding federal holidays.** Reservations can be made up to 2 months in advance of your trip. Things to know BEFORE calling to make a reservation:

**Okefenokee uses Recreation.gov to book your trip. You should have a profile in Recreation.gov before calling to make a reservation.**

**There is a \$10.00 non-refundable reservation fee in addition to the \$15/person per night use fees. Be prepared to make payment (or partial payment) at time of reservation. All fees will be processed through Recreation.gov; only credit cards will be accepted.**

**The cancellation policy is as follows:**

- If you cancel your reservation at least 14 days prior to your entry date, all use fees (less one person/night reservation - \$15) will be refunded. The \$10.00 reservation fee is non-refundable for



■ Each camping group is limited to 20 people. The group leader will be responsible for printing all permits and parking placards.

■ Entrance fees are included in the Wilderness Camping Permit.

■ Any additions or changes to permits must be completed prior to departure.

■ Portable toilets with disposable bags are recommended. Restroom facilities are available at overnight stops and day-use shelters.

■ Portable camp stoves are required for cooking in areas where campfires are not permitted.

■ There will only be one group per overnight platform. However, day use visitors access a large portion of the Wilderness Trail System and day use shelters.



#### Rules and Regulations

■ Canoes and kayaks ONLY are permitted on overnight camping trips. Although boats with small motors are permitted on portions of the Okefenokee Water Trails, absolutely no motors (electric or gas-powered) are authorized on overnights.

■ The Wilderness Camping Permit must be carried by each boat in the party.

■ Parties must launch before 10:00 am to ensure that the overnight stop is reached before dark each day. All members of the party must be present at time of departure.

■ You must remain at the designated overnight area between sunset and sunrise. Each party must leave the platform by 10:00 am.

■ Each party must sign-in/out when entering and leaving the swamp and at each overnight stop. Each entrance has a sign in logbook either located at the boat ramp or the concession area.

■ Follow the route exactly as it is on your permit. Do not leave designated trail.