

Okefenokee Swamp



The Okefenokee Swamp is an extensive wetland in southeastern Georgia and is the main source of the Suwannee River. It is a mosaic of different habitats including forested upland, forested wetland, scrub-shrub wetland, and prairie.

The Okefenokee Swamp encompasses about 50% of the Okefenokee watershed. It is mainly comprised of peat-forming wetland and occupies 1,700 square kilometers of the Atlantic Coastal Plain in Georgia. Even though the swamp appears flat, there is 2 – 3 meter change in gradient across 50 km of wetland.

Okefenokee is a Seminole Indian word meaning, “the land of the quaking earth” which reflects the nature of the floating peat “batteries,” the floating and anchored “tree houses,” and the unstable conditions of peat deposits through the wetlands. Native Americans inhabited this swamp for several thousand years. European settlers drove the Native American population out of the area in the early 19th century. The newcomers were mostly loggers working for the Hebard Lumber Company. Some 2 million board feet of timber was removed from the Okefenokee. In 1936, after a 20 year effort by early environmentalists and naturalists, the wetland was repurchased by the Federal Government.

The Okefenokee is drained by two major rivers, the Suwannee River and the St. Mary’s River. The Suwannee takes 75% of the flow and the St. Mary’s gets the remaining 25%.

The Okefenokee has long been recognized as a unique natural area and its picturesque beauty has been preserved as a National Wildlife Refuge. The town of Folkston, Georgia is located at the edge of the refuge.

As South Georgia grows and develops, the demand from development and agriculture could starve the Okefenokee of its essential water.



Some information excerpted from USGS Open File Report #87-557

History and Description of the Okefenokee Swamp—Origin of the Suwannee River by R.L. Malcolm, D.M. McKnight, and R.C. Averett



For more information on the Okefenokee Swamp:

New Georgia Encyclopedia – Okefenokee Swamp

<http://www.newgeorgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-649>

Summary report on the geology and mineral resources of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Georgia

<http://pubs.er.usgs.gov/usgspubs/b/b1260N>

Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge

<http://www.fws.gov/okefenokee/>

Image from USGS Scientific Investigations Report 2004-5276 page 2