



## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### *Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge*

# Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners (GOAL)

#### History of GOAL

In 1990, the Shorts Fire burned 21,000 acres of swamp and upland in and around Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The fire stretched the staff and equipment of all the organizations involved in fighting the fire: timber industry, private landowners, state and federal agencies. It was apparent that a more concerted and coordinated effort by those involved would result in more efficient efforts.

During the first half of 1994, some informal landowner group supper meetings were held. Some landowners envisioned a more formal gathering of landowners that could deal not only with better preparation and communication during wildfires, but with other issues of forest and wildlife resources in and around the Okefenokee Swamp.

Key landowners were invited to a steering committee meeting to determine if a formal organization was necessary. They identified a number of issues that could benefit from such an organization. Their vision was to develop an organization of interested landowners to address land management issues of special concern to southeast Georgia and northeast Florida and produce a consolidated and influential position to deal with these issues. The Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners was born.

#### Mission of GOAL

To serve as a unified team managing, protecting, and promoting forest resources in and around the Okefenokee Swamp through a stewardship ethic to assure these resources will be available for future generations.

GOAL recognizes that:

- Forest resources are the major industries in the area.
- The Okefenokee Swamp is a National Treasure and economically and biologically beneficial to the local communities and the states of Georgia and Florida.
- It is essential to have a coordinating committee for fire protection of public and private resources.
- A formal organization of landowners will provide an avenue for communications and develop strength in dealing with area issues.

#### Accomplishments

During the past several years, the GOAL organization has addressed a number of fire-related issues. Landowners cooperate on maintenance of the swamp's Perimeter Road, compile and maintain a resource list of fire equipment and personnel, constructed 80 helicopter dipsites surrounding the swamp, and share radio frequencies and cellular phone numbers of members. The organization also supported the black bear research at Okefenokee NWR by providing access to their lands and the expertise of their employees. The U.S. Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service have contributed a total of \$550,000.00 to the construction of the John Bethea State Forest Joint Work Center. The Georgia Forestry Commission is also partnering in this important cooperative venture, which will be located in Baxter, Florida. The work center is designed to decrease the response time to wildland fires in the adjoining GOAL area.

The GOAL website: <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/r8/goal/index.html>

*"To accomplish great things, we must not only act but also dream, not only plan but also believe."*

*-Anatole France*