



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge **Wildlife and Habitat Management**

The biology and forestry programs at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) are responsible for managing and monitoring the refuge's natural resources. Incidental sightings and standardized surveys provide long-term data sets as well as identifying trends in populations. Short-term detailed studies are generally conducted by outside institutions under contract with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The qualities of the Okefenokee Swamp also attract researchers from around the world. These researchers work under a Special Use Permit after compatibility is determined. Twenty to thirty Special Use Permits are issued to researchers in an average year.

The refuge is currently developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan that will guide management over the next 15 years. Through this process, data needs are being examined and survey and monitoring protocols are being evaluated. Strategies have been developed for the following activities:

- Surveying neotropical migrants, breeding birds, marsh and wading birds, and sandhill cranes within designated habitats.
- Monitoring black bear populations in and around the refuge.
- Monitoring amphibian and reptile populations within the swamp and the isolated wetlands.
- Monitoring fish populations and their health.
- Surveying invertebrate composition and relative abundance within specific habitats.
- Monitoring activity within red-cockaded woodpecker clusters.
- Managing habitat for the expansion of red-cockaded woodpecker populations.
- Inventorying forested upland communities around the perimeter of the swamp.
- Establishing vegetation plots, transects, and photo plots on the uplands and within the swamp.
- Maintaining records on prescribed burns and wildfires.
- Controlling pests and exotic species.
- Maintaining two weather stations.
- Monitoring water levels and water quality within the swamp.
- Maintaining air monitoring equipment which includes an IMPROVE site, wet deposition site, and a mercury deposition site.
- Coordinating studies, information and surveys with private, state, and other federal agencies.
- Establishing partnerships with adjacent landowners to improve the quality of habitat on the refuge.
- Presenting technical information and assistance to local, state, and federal agencies, private individuals and companies.

Okefenokee NWR exemplifies an ecologically driven freshwater wetland managed at a landscape level. It provides valuable information and techniques on freshwater wetlands, fire-dependent communities, Wilderness, public use, natural variability within systems, use of natural processes in managing for habitat integrity, and partnerships to accomplish goals. Researchers and environmental organizations have long realized the importance of this world renowned wetland and are proceeding with the establishment of a research and education facility in the area.