

Banks Lake

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Skippy Reeves, Refuge Manager
Okefenokee NWR
Route 2, Box 3330
Folkston, GA 31537
Phone: 912/496 7366
Fax: 912/496 3332
E-mail: skippy_reeves@fws.gov

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1985.
- Size: 4,049 acres (1,000 acres open water+3,049 acres marsh, hardwood swamp, upland).
- Located in Lanier County, GA.
- Location: western half of Lanier Co. in southern Georgia, 2 miles west of Lakeland, GA along State Highway 122.
- Administered under Okefenokee NWR.

Natural History

- Banks Lake is a natural Pocosin or Mill Pond probably created by tidal action of the ocean and shaped by a more temperate climate thousands of years ago.
- Joshua Lee built a low-level dam across the drainage creek on his property and utilized the impounded running water to power a grist mill to grind corn, wheat, and rice. The impounded lake and accompanying mill established the area as a trade center along the early stagecoach route between Waycross and Thomasville, GA.
- In the 1920's, the E.D. Rivers family attempted to develop the area around the lake for electric power and home development.
- In the 1970's, the E.D. Rivers Estate threatened to drain the lake and harvest the "lightered stumps" and cypress trees.
- The Nature Conservancy purchased the land from the E.D. Rivers Estate on March 14, 1980.
- In April, 1980, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entered into a lease agreement with The Nature Conservancy for management and operation of Banks Lake.

- On February 22, 1985, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service purchased Banks Lake from The Nature Conservancy.

Financial Impact

- This refuge has no operational budget. Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge supplies all of the manpower and supplies. Any costs incurred are paid out of Okefenokee funds.
- Public use at the refuge is estimated at 20,000 visitors per year.

Refuge Objective

- To provide optimum habitat for a wide diversity of native fauna and flora.
- To provide optimum habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species.
- To provide opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation, interpretation, and environmental education.
- To provide a showcase outdoor recreational opportunity for the physically challenged.
- To provide quality (trophy) fishing opportunities through a naturally sustaining sport fishery.

Management Tools

- Prescribed burning of uplands.
- Periodic lake drawdowns to control noxious weed growth.
- Law enforcement.

Public Use Opportunities

- Trails (hiking and boating).
- Fishing (freshwater).
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.

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Questions and Answers

What kind of fish can I catch?

Sportfish most caught include largemouth bass, chain pickerel, crappie, bluegill, warmouth perch, flier, and catfish.

Is there a launch ramp and what is the fee?

There is a triple wide concrete launch ramp. No launch fee is currently charged.

Is there a concession that rents boats, motors, and canoes and sells bait?

There is a concession building at the launch area but there is not a concessioner currently under contract.

Is there a horsepower limitation on the refuge?

There is no horsepower limitation on the refuge. However, due to the extensive amount of stumps and logs both floating and anchored to the bottom of the lake, idle speed or exclusive use of an electric trolling motor is suggested.

Can't you do anything with the extensive amount of surface vegetation that is interfering with my fishing?

Our only available method of dealing with this problem is to drawdown the surface of the lake and periodically expose this vegetation to the killing effects of cold winter temperatures. A boundary line issue currently being decided in Federal Court has prevented us from manipulating water levels to remedy this situation.