

Hanging in the balance is a unique ecosystem of incomparable beauty. With 600,000 annual visits, people from all fifty states boat, bird, fish, and hunt within the legendary swamp that spans across more than 400,000 acres, much of which is protected as a federal wilderness area.

“It's a special place, but in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service it stands out among refuges,” says Jon Andrew, Florida Refuge Liaison for the National Wildlife Refuge Association and former Regional Chief of Refuges for the Southeast Region for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “The Okefenokee is the largest National Wildlife Refuge east of the Mississippi. You have to go to the Southwest or Alaska to find refuges of comparable size, and it presents the opportunity to manage an ecosystem, which is rare anywhere, but especially rare in the Eastern U.S.”

Tourism associated with the swamp supports more than 700 local jobs in the four rural counties surrounding the swamp and generates \$64.7 million in local economic output annually.

In addition, the Okefenokee feeds both the St. Marys and Suwannee Rivers in Georgia and Florida, both of which are rich in outdoor recreation opportunities in their own right and provide habitat for federally protected fish and other rare wildlife.

“The presence of a powerful and united coalition such as OPA is essential,” says Alex Kearns, Chair of the St. Marys EarthKeepers. “It allows local organizations and citizens a megaphone, a way to be heard. Ours are the lives that will be most directly impacted because our health and our economy are fundamentally tied to the well-being of the Okefenokee.”

OPA’s mission is to *“protect the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge from any activities that could jeopardize the integrity of the swamp now and in the future so that the wildlife that inhabits it and the people who recreate and work in the swamp can thrive.”* For more information, please visit: www.protectokefenokee.org

Members of OPA include:

Altamaha Riverkeeper, The Amphibian Foundation, Atlanta Audubon Society, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Center for Biological Diversity, Center for a Sustainable Coast, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, Coosa River Basin Initiative, Defenders of Wildlife, Dogwood Alliance, The EcoStewards Program, Environment Georgia, Flint Riverkeeper, Friends of Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites, Georgia Conservancy, Georgia Conservation Voters, Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, Georgia River Network, Georgia Women (And Those Who Stand With Us), Glynn Environmental Coalition, National Parks Conservation Association, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Ogeechee Riverkeeper, One Hundred Miles, Our Santa Fe River, Satilla Riverkeeper, Savannah Riverkeeper, Sierra Club Florida Chapter, Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, Sierra Club Northeast Florida Group, Southern Environmental Law Center, SouthWings, St. Johns Riverkeeper, St. Marys EarthKeepers, Suwannee Riverkeeper, Waterkeeper Alliance, Waterkeepers Florida, Wayne Morgan Artistry, the Wilderness Society, and Wilderness Watch.

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