

(x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation

Almost every species of bird and mammal of the U.S. Southeast can be found in the Okefenokee Swamp at some season of the year. The sheer diversity of finding them all there makes the ONWR a most important and significant habitat for conservation. The 2006 RAMSAR update notes: “The wetlands are used as a feeding ground by nationally endangered wood storks (*Mycteria americana*), while the Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrolemys temminckii*) (Vulnerable; IUCN, 2006 and CITES Appendix III) are found year-round within the waters of the Okefenokee NWR. The communities of native longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), considered vulnerable by IUCN, are being restored on the uplands of the refuge and also support the nationally-endangered and IUCN-vulnerable Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*); and the Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), this last one considered nationally threatened, IUCN vulnerable and included in CITES Appendix II.... The site is world renowned for the diversity of amphibians and reptiles that are found here, which are biological indicators of global health.... With its diversity of habitats, Okefenokee NWR is home to over 620 plant, 39 fish, 37 amphibian, 64 reptile, 234 bird and 50 mammal species.... The Florida sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis pratensis*) are non-migratory and are considered to be isolated from other populations in the southeast. In the mid-1980’s the population at the refuge was estimated at 403 individuals. Since this time, it appears that there has been a decline in the population, which nevertheless still exceeds the 1% threshold of 50 Florida sandhill cranes. During the winter, large numbers (up to 1,000) of greater sandhill cranes (*G. canadensis*) migrate to the swamp and overwinter.”

For all these reasons I recommend that the U.S. nominate the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge as a World Heritage site this year.

Thank you for your consideration.

For the rivers and the aquifer,

John S. Quarterman

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/s

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