

#### 4.b (ii) Environmental pressures, natural disasters and risk preparedness

Fires in and around the Okefenokee Swamp are an increasing risk beyond natural prevalence, because of drought and land use. Wildfires in 2007 put some people in the hospital 70 miles away, and sent smoke as far west as Mississippi, as far north as North Carolina, and as far south as Fort Lauderdale. Wildfires in 2015 required assistance from counties throughout south Georgia. This is all in addition to adverse local effects such as destruction of trees and other wildlife habitat. Dewatering of the land around the Swamp or lowering of the water level of the Swamp itself would increase fire pressures. The proposed strip mine near the Swamp could cause such dewatering or water level change, thus increasing the prevalence of wildfires. Public and private landowners around the Swamp cooperate in firebreaks and other measures to minimize wildfire risks. Prohibiting mining near the Swamp would also help.

#### Ten Criteria

In our previous letter, we addressed each of the ten Criteria. Here are a few more notes.

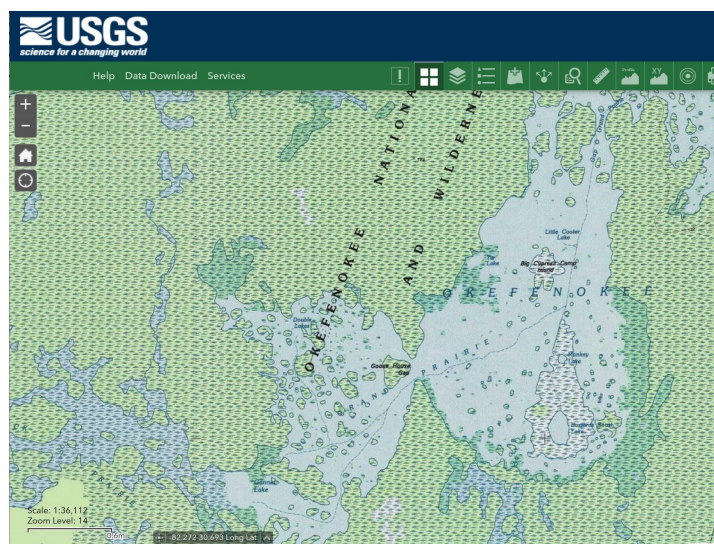
#### **(x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation**

Our previous letter includes many examples, with some drawn from the application that made the ONWR a RAMSAR wetland of international importance since 1986.

<https://rsis.ramsar.org/ris/350>

In addition, the Okefenokee Swamp includes old-growth cypress trees more than 400 years old.<sup>2</sup>

There is “a unique remnant stand of old-growth pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) occurring in a shallow peaty area of the Okefenokee. Apparently, the community has not been sufficiently disturbed in the last few centuries to alter its natural succession to a bay swamp dominated by broadleaf evergreen hardwoods. . . . The stand lies on the northeastern perimeter of Grand Prairie in the southeastern section of the Okefenokee Swamp, Georgia.”



Grand Prairie in USGS The National Map

<sup>2</sup> G. Ronnie Best, et al., “An Old-Growth Cypress Stand in Okefenokee Swamp,” University of Florida, 1984.

<https://cfw.essie.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/312/2020/07/Best-et-al-1984-OldGrowthCypressStandInOkefenokeeSwamp-BookChapter.pdf>