

Forty four years later, those three trees are now 489, 572, and 631 years old. Older pond cypress exist elsewhere, but they are rare.

Even though this old-growth cypress stand is deep in the Swamp, it is still threatened by wildfires.

“Fire scars on the larger trees and several of the younger understory trees indicate that the area has been burned, though not severely, during recent fires. Numerous completely burned trunks exist on the outermost perimeter of the forest facing Grand Prairie indicating the forest may have covered a greater area than it presently does.”

This is a practical fire risk: “Under drought conditions, peat fires that burn below the surface of the organic soil may kill the roots of cypress trees, thus killing the plant. A peat fire in the Okefenokee swamp in Florida killed 97 percent of the cypress trees in a 3,000-acre plot (1,214 ha).”⁵

Listing as a UNESCO World Heritage site would encourage legislation and other protections to lower the risk of wildfires.

Conclusion

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

We continue to support the ONWR through paddle trips into the Okefenokee Swamp, through support of legislation to protect the Swamp, through opposition to the titanium dioxide strip mine proposed far too close to the Swamp, and through support of this nomination.

Thank you for your consideration.

For the rivers and the aquifer,

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/s
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Attachments:

- WWALS letter of January 26, 2021
- G. Ronnie Best, et al., “An Old-Growth Cypress Stand in Okefenokee Swamp,” University of Florida, 1984.

⁵ USDA Fire Effects Information System (FEIS), Index of Species Information, SPECIES: *Taxodium ascendens*, *T. distichum*, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/database/feis/plants/tree/taxspp/all.html#14> which cites Cypert, Eugene. 1961, “The effects of fires in the Okefenokee Swamp in 1954 and 1955,” *American Midland Naturalist*. 66(2): 485-503. [11018]