

Hebard Cypress Company ran railroads throughout the Swamp and cut down most of the cypress and pine trees in the Swamp between about 1909 and 1926. My distant cousin Harry Quarterman was the manager of the logging boom town on Billys Island. Until the timber was gone and the town went bust.

More recently Dupont's attempt at mining next to the Swamp a couple of decades ago and the current application by coal miners from Alabama to strip mine for titanium dioxide show that the swamp still needs protecting.

The proposed expansion will not prevent that mining application from being granted, nor stop the mining. But at least it will provide a mechanism by which the Refuge can buy the miners' land should they choose to sell, either before or after mining.

Suwannee Riverkeeper also supports the expansion especially because it protects the entire Swamp, not just one side. Last year Canadian company Nutrien said during its update to its Hamilton County, Florida, mining permit that it expected to shut down its huge phosphate mine within ten years. But it did not say it would not continue mining. The same phosphate deposits continue east across the Suwannee River into Columbia County, Florida, and north across the state line into Lowndes, Echols, and Clinch Counties, Georgia. A 1966 report<sup>1</sup> showed two almost economically viable test wells near the Suwannee River near Fargo, Georgia. Given advances in mining technology, those sites are probably even more economically viable now.

What all the counties around the Swamp in Georgia and Florida need, like many others in south Georgia and north Florida, is jobs. The ONWR is an economic engine, but not everybody can work for the Refuge or for immediately-related businesses.

Fortunately, there are efforts underway to bring economic opportunities to the area, including a Culture History & Community Center in Charlton County, a Natural History & Ecological Interpretive Center in Ware County, and a Dark Sky Observatory in Clinch County. <https://wwals.net/?p=63428>

WWALS is promoting the idea of more boat ramps on the Suwannee River in Georgia. <https://wwals.net/?p=62814> That is now in the hands of Clinch and Echols Counties and the local landowners.

We hear the concerns of people who live around the ONWR, we sympathise with them, and we are doing what we can to help.

Suwannee Riverkeeper considers the proposed ONWR expansion also to be good for local economies and lifestyles. We support the proposed expansion. After all, if we are not going to protect the Okefenokee Swamp, what will we protect?

For the rivers and the aquifer,

John S. Quarterman  
Suwannee Riverkeeper  
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<sup>1</sup> PHOSPHORITE EXPLORATION IN PORTIONS OF LOWNDES, ECHOLS, CLINCH AND CHARLTON COUNTIES, GEORGIA, By Norman K. Olson, Industrial Development Department, Southern Railway System, October 1966, Project Report No. 4, South Georgia Minerals Program, Georgia State Division of Conservation, Department of Mines, Mining and Geology.