

Trail Ridge serves as the eastern hydrological barrier of the swamp. These beach fronts contain heavy minerals as a small portion of their volume (2 – 9%). These metals and minerals are valuable and can be mined with current technology.

### Issues Overview

The Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500 – 1508) Section 1502.3 ‘Statutory requirements for statements’ includes the following: “As required by 102(2)(C) of NEPA environmental impact statements are to be included in every recommendation or report on proposals for legislation and other major federal actions *significantly affecting the quality of the human environment* (italics added).”

The Service recommends USACE consider the information that follows in developing a determination as to whether the proposed action meets the definition of the term ‘significantly’ as described in the terminology section, 1508.27, both in (a) context and (b) intensity.

As you are aware, “context” refers to scope of the proposed action, i.e. nationally, regionally, or locally. With this in mind, the future of the Okefenokee Swamp, surrounding landscape and the species that depend on them are directly tied to maintaining the integrity of the ecosystem’s complex ecological processes. The Okefenokee Swamp represents one of the very few self-contained, naturally functioning wetlands in the world. Recognizing the need for federal protection, the majority of the Okefenokee Swamp was set aside as a National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in 1937 by Executive Order. The Refuge, currently 406,650 acres in size, was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1974 and a Wetland of International Importance by the Wetlands Convention in 1986. The Okefenokee Wilderness Act of 1974 designated the majority of the Refuge as a National Wilderness Area. The Okefenokee Swamp has shaped the culture of southeast Georgia. Most local residents have ancestors who once lived or worked in the swamp as a part of their heritage.

Today, the Refuge receives more than 600,000 visits annually. Visitors come from all 50 states, Puerto Rico and more than 46 countries. Ten percent are international visitors. The 2017 Banking on Nature Report (Caudill and Carver 2019) identifies the total recreational expenditures for the four counties surrounding the refuge to be \$64.7 million with non-residents accounting for \$59.8 million. This was associated with the creation of about 753 jobs, \$17.2 million in employment income generated, and \$5.4 million in total tax revenue for the counties. The future of people and communities surrounding the swamp is dependent on conserving this popular natural landmark.

“Intensity” refers to the severity of the impact and has a number of considerations. The regulation identifies several items in section 1508.27(b), including:

- Item 3; the unique characteristics of the area. The swamp is of national importance as described above and is the largest National Wildlife Refuge and the third largest nationally designated Wilderness area east of the Mississippi River.
- Item 4; controversial effects of the proposed action. As proposed, a wide range of possible outcomes may result, and possibly impact surrounding areas. Based on currently