



The OSP – A Public Private Partnership

Constructing a New Engine for Education, Research, and
Economic Development in Rural Southern Georgia

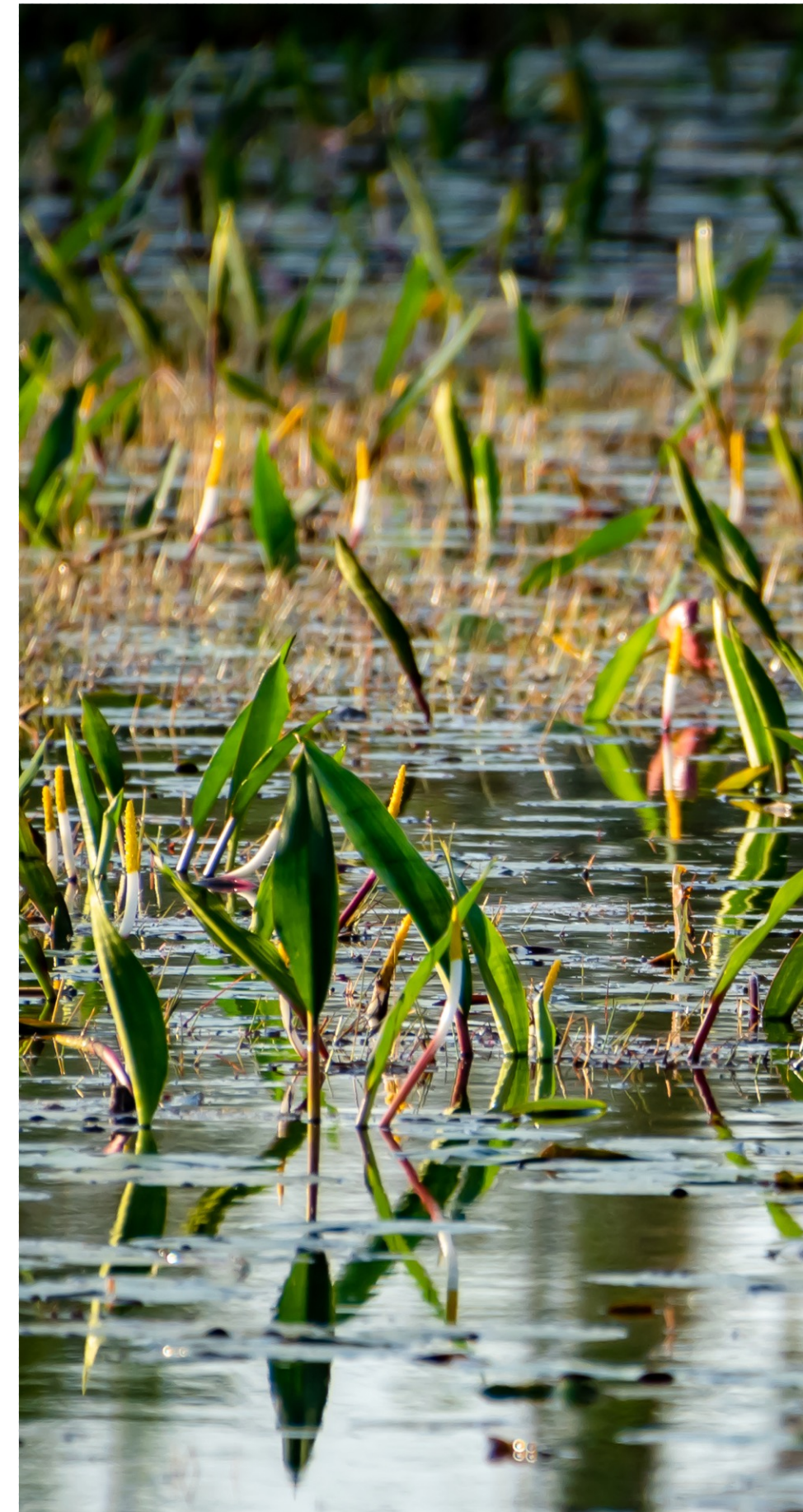


For 77 years, the Okefenokee Swamp Park (OSP), Inc. a 501(c)(3) non-profit, in partnership with the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the state of Georgia, has provided visitor access and interpretive education for the Okefenokee Swamp. Today, the OSP is guided by our **mission to provide visitor access and interpretive education that inspires conservation advocacy for the Okefenokee Swamp** and compelled by our **vision to promote a world where the diversity of life thrives, and people act together to conserve nature for its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives.**

Public-private partnerships can improve infrastructure, create job opportunities and transform communities with better funded social, health, economic, and environmental programs and services.

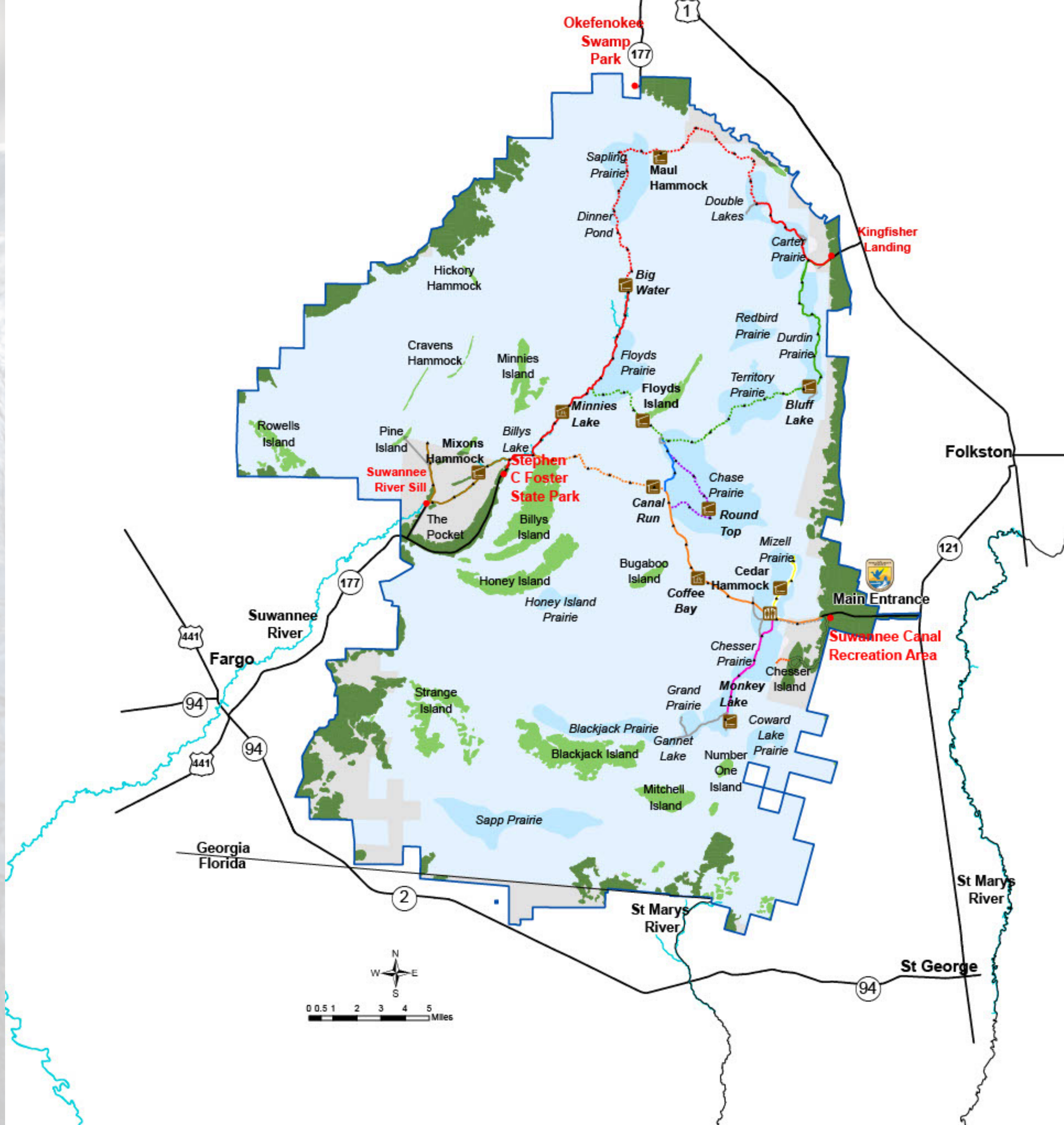
Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is a 402,000-acre National Wildlife Refuge located in Charlton, Ware, and Clinch Counties of Georgia and Baker County in Florida. The Okefenokee is also the headwaters for both the iconic Suwanee and St. Marys Rivers.






The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1937 as a "refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife".



The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge has nearly 120-miles of water trails that visitors can explore.

A person wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a brown jacket is seated in a red kayak on a calm body of water. The kayak is positioned behind a large, dark wooden sign that reads "ENTERING NATIONAL WILDERNESS AREA" in white, bold, capital letters. The sign is mounted on a wooden post. The background shows a dense forest of trees and vegetation along the water's edge under a clear blue sky.

ENTERING NATIONAL
WILDERNESS AREA

An aerial photograph of a swampy area. The water is dark and filled with green lily pads. A wooden dock extends into the water, with a white canopy structure on top. The background is a dense forest of green trees.

**Annual Okefenokee region
recreation & education
expenditures exceed
\$50M, providing 826 jobs
(*USFWS Banking on Nature*)**



The Challenge

While on one hand celebrating a wetlands footprint largely undisturbed since prehistoric times and increasing international acclaim for our significant stores of sequestered carbon, **the swamp is facing a number of stark environmental threats. The communities around the swamp are facing equally difficult circumstances, with local residents seeking assistance to build meaningful lives in spite of persistent economic uncertainty in rural South Georgia.**



The Opportunity – A Public Private Partnership
Constructing a New Engine for Education, Research, and
Economic Development in Rural Southern Georgia





The Vision

OSP is working towards an interdependent economic development model, one in which the private sector and government alike support the development of vital infrastructure and services -- deploying a combination of targeted grants, entitlements, concessional loans, and charitable contributions -- and working collaboratively through the prism of one of the world's great natural resources.

We believe it is vital to recognize that the sustainability of Okefenokee is only as great as the strength and resilience of the local communities and stakeholders that surround it.

Why the Okefenokee Matters

- On the northernmost edge of Florida and in the heart of southern Georgia lies one of the most outstanding examples of an ecologically intact swamp in North America.
- **The Okefenokee Swamp is North America's largest blackwater wetland, sheltering diverse habitats and an incredible array of wildlife.**
- The Okefenokee retains its natural hydrology, storing immense volumes of water through both flood and drought years and supporting dependable, quality habitats ensuring resiliency for the communities around it.
- The swamp serves as the headwaters to two major rivers, the Suwannee and St. Marys. Its health and vitality are essential to supplying downstream ecosystems with clean freshwater.
- In addition to providing refuge to wildlife, the Okefenokee provides escape to hundreds of thousands of people who boat, bird, fish and hunt in its wild lands.
- It is essential that we continue to ensure Okefenokee's healthy functioning for future generations of humans and wildlife.





The Okefenokee UNESCO Bid

In 2022 the refuge and OSP launched a unique public-private partnership to seek UNESCO World Heritage Site status and deliver on a 40-year quest to be awarded this international designation. In 2023 our efforts accelerated with the announcement by the National Park Service that it will formally nominate the site, which could yield a final decision in 2026.

If inscribed, Okefenokee NWR would be the first site entirely managed by the National Wildlife Refuge System, the first natural site of its kind to be recognized as a World Heritage Site, and the first World Heritage Site in the state of Georgia. World Heritage status would further the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service vision to protect the Okefenokee and its vast ecological resources for years to come



Education Inspires Advocacy

“Our mission is to provide visitor access and interpretive education that inspires conservation advocacy for the Okefenokee Swamp.”

Interpretive Tours

Paddle or hike with an interpretive naturalist; day, overnight, multi-day wilderness.

Science Programs

Hands-on education of swamp ecology, flora, and fauna.

Living History

Imagine what life was like on the edge of wilderness; from the first people through modern swampers.

Nature Shows

Learn from our ambassador animals about the wildlife found in the Okefenokee swamp.

Boat Experiences

Paddle through 120 miles of the cypress-forested water trails.

Train Experiences

Tour through the pine flatwoods and learn about the first people in the Okefenokee.

The Okefenokee Experience

In collaboration with the Okefenokee Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA), the Experience will inspire student-centric immersive learning and STEM education programs for K-12 students in the southeast and beyond. To realize all the benefits of the World Heritage nomination, we must also develop a robust and inclusive natural resources economy in the Okefenokee. Regionally driven and inclusive conservation is the foundation upon which we can build the capacity of local economies and increase community wealth, prosperity, and health.



**Cultural History &
Community Center in
Charlton County**

**Natural History &
Ecological Interpretive
Center In Ware County**

**Dark Sky Observatory in
Clinch County**

**Top-flight learning
experiences in the
Okefenokee region**

We Believe

Using private- and public-sector funding and collaboration to strengthen this global natural resource -- Okefenokee can be a catalyst for regional education & economic opportunities.

Expand	Spearhead	Act
<p>Expand the Region's Recreation & Sustainable Tourism Infrastructure.</p>	<p>Spearhead The Okefenokee Experience, showcasing regional cultural and ecological heritage.</p>	<p>Act as the fundraiser and project organizer for the UNESCO World Heritage bid – when inscribed, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge will be the first site entirely managed by the National Wildlife Refuge System</p>

