

across was a website talking about 120 miles of water trail and multiple camping options in the swamp. I immediately wanted to do this trip or at least a portion of it. I have since made a handful of trips into the swamp and learned about the history of Billy's Island, the Sill, the timber operation and among other stories. My most recent trip into the swamp was with the WWALS Watershed Coalition. We paddled 8 miles out to camp at Floyds Island. The entire journey was just so peaceful. However, when we made the turn onto the green trail from Stephen C. Foster State Park, the swamp became extraordinarily enchanting. The cathedral-like tunnel that we paddled through for miles until we reached Floyd's Island was like a portal to a fairytale dimension. In many instances, the colors of the fall, the canopy formation of the trees and the mirrored reflections were hypnotizing, we could have paddled this natural tunnel for hours and still want more. Upon reaching the camp site, everyone in our party was just magically delighted about the spiritual connection that the swamp bestowed upon us. The return trip the next day was even more mesmerizing. I never would have thought that I would have used the word enchanting to describe a swamp, but it was just that. I am glad to add the Okefenokee Swamp to my long list of must-see places. As with all of the places listed above, I never knew that I needed to experience them until I did. The Okefenokee is no different, it's an enchanting place that you never knew you needed to experience."

Yet for the second time in twenty years, a titanium strip mine threatens the Okefenokee Swamp, this time organized by coal miners from Alabama. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has abdicated oversight, leaving only the state of Georgia, with decisions on five permit applications, standing between the miners and the Swamp. <https://wwals.net/?p=54459> The Swamp and the ONWR can use all the protection they can get.

While the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge most obviously satisfies number x of the ten Selection Criteria, and it may be necessary to satisfy only one of them, the ONWR actually has significant features of all ten criteria.

(i) to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

While the Okefenokee Swamp is primarily a wild ecosystem, ONWR carefully prunes paddle trails into tree tunnels that continue to enable almost religious experiences for paddlers. One of our very experienced paddlers recently on the way to Floyd's Island was overwhelmed with awe at the way the tree tunnel trail framed the natural swamp; see above testimonial by Bobby McKenzie. The paddle trails and sleeping platforms in general make the Swamp accessible to paddlers without unduly disrupting the ecosystem that paddlers come to experience.

(ii) to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world...;

Fifty years ago, WWALS President Tom H. Johnson Jr. grew up driving 57 miles to Stephen C. Foster State Park, fishing and looking there all day with other high schoolers. He says, "I never dreamed that what I took for granted, could or would seem like religious experience to others." We can not take the Okefenokee for granted; we must preserve it for future generations. The Okefenokee Swamp is especially important to south Georgia and north Florida, which form a cultural area unlike the rest of either of those states. Yet when the Swamp is threatened, as it is now by another proposal to strip mine for titanium, the supporters of the culture of appreciation of nature, boating, birding, and fishing, with hunting nearby, represented by the Okefenokee Swamp, turn out to be from all over the U.S. and the world.