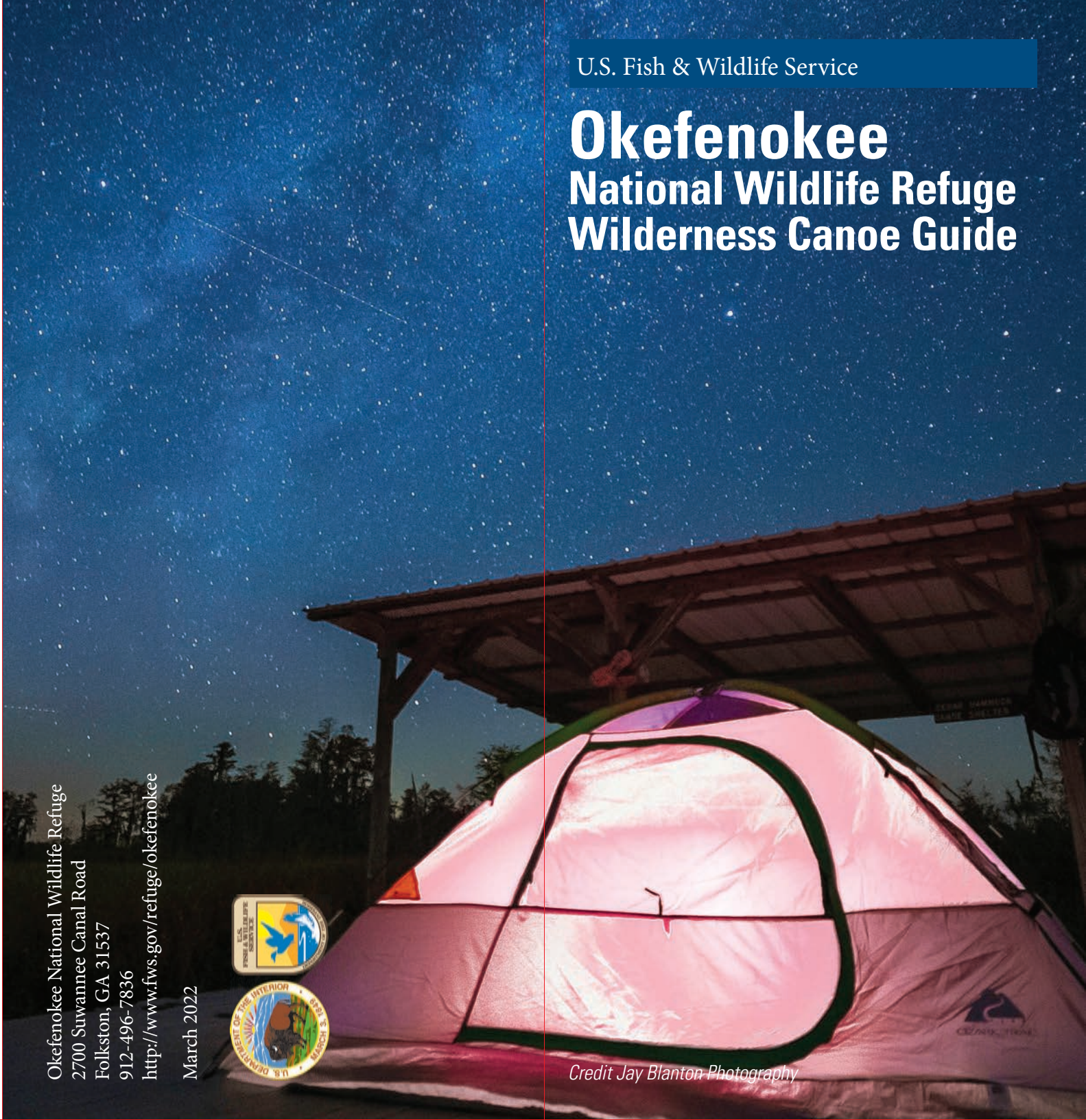


# Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness Canoe Guide



Credit Jay Blanton Photography

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge  
2700 Suwannee Canal Road  
Folkston, GA 31537  
912-496-7836  
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee>  
March 2022



## Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge –

### Wilderness Water Trails

A trip into the Okefenokee is an experience that you will remember for a lifetime. Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge contains over 407,000 acres of open water prairies, cypress forests, interior islands, and pine uplands. Most of the refuge is a nationally designated Wilderness Area, providing opportunities for recreating in solitude. Seven overnight platforms and two islands provide a variety of trips from one to four nights with opportunities for both shorter and longer paddling distances. There are also endless possibilities for day trips into the refuge through several different entrance/access points. Read this brochure carefully and be sure you understand the refuge regulations. Check with each entrance for on- and off-the-water times.

### Day Trips into the Okefenokee

There are many different ways you can enjoy the nearly 120-miles of Wilderness trails within the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Visitors can access the Okefenokee with a personal boat (canoe, kayak, or boat with motor less than 10 HP). Canoes, kayaks, jon boats, and guided tours are available for visitors through Okefenokee Adventures and Stephen C. Foster State Park. Call Okefenokee Adventures at 912-496-7156 for information on mileage and day-use access.

### Overnight Wilderness Camping

Full of outstanding wildlife observation and photography opportunities, visitors can choose to spend anywhere from one to four nights (one- and two-night trips during peak season) on an overnight paddling trip. These paddling trips have a range of distances and can be challenging when considering peat blowups, narrow trails, shallow water, etc. Know the limitations of your group members when making a reservation and check the trail conditions with staff before you set out on your trip. It is required for parties to take man-powered vessels **only** on overnight Wilderness camping trips. No boats with motors are authorized for overnight use.

### Platforms/Islands on the Refuge

Each camping platform in the refuge contains a roof on half of the platform and a pit toilet. Platforms also have a picnic table or shelf for cooking. Some platforms are built over the open water and provide fantastic night sky and sunrise/sunset viewing, while others are built into a bank or scrub-shrub and are a little more protected. Floyds Island and Mixons Hammock are islands in the swamp and provide for a more traditional camping experience, where visitors can have a campfire using the fire ring provided. Canal Run is a platform but is built into the bank of the historic Suwannee Canal, so there is soil land where a fire ring is also provided. Firewood must be purchased on site to reduce the spread of invasive species.

### What Will I See?

**Entering from Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, prairie ecosystems** are most prominent. Here you will see more open areas with relatively shallow water and low growing plants. Scrub-shrub is also typical on this side of the swamp.

### Platforms/Islands on the Refuge

Three islands (or "houses") dot the landscape and are dominated by pond cypress and tupelo trees. This is the ideal area for expansive views, watching the sunrise or sunset, and stargazing. Plant species include water lilies, pitcher plants, and bladderworts. Keep your eyes out for the Okefenokee hooded pitcher plant, which is a variety of hooded pitcher plant that is endemic to the Okefenokee Swamp.

**Entering from Stephen C. Foster State Park, cypress forests** are the dominant environment. Billys Lake is an open area good for fishing and with great opportunities to see alligators, herons, egrets, barred owls, and other wildlife. The trail east and north of Billys Lake is often shaded and can be narrow and winding, depending on the trail. The plants that you are likely to see on this side of the swamp include pond cypress, black gum, bay trees, spatterdock, and Spanish moss. Billys Island is a day-use area that is a "muss-see" for all visitors. In the early 1900s a logging community of over 600 people lived on this island in the middle of the swamp. Today, few remnants of that community remain, but take a walk back in time on the short hiking trail on the north side of the island.

Okefenokee Adventures.



Top, left to right: Maui Hammock, credit USFWS; kayak at the beginning of the Pink Trail, credit Thomas Welch; Cedar Hammock, credit Jay Blanton. Bottom, left to right: Canal Run, credit Randy Cockrill; Canoeing in one of the best ways to experience the Okefenokee Wilderness, credit Chris Moncus; Round Top, credit Joy Campbell/

**Entering from Kingfisher Landing, scrub-shrub areas** are the dominant ecosystem. Kings Canal, dug to facilitate peat mining prior to this area becoming part of the refuge, leads to open, round lakes like Durin Lake, Double Lakes, and Bluff Lake. This area is good for fishing, observing both hooded and trumpeter pitcher plants, and looking for wildlife. Family groups of alligators are often seen along these trails and the spatterdock Kingfisher Landing are the most remote trails for visitors wanting a Wilderness experience. The entrance itself is also remote and simply offers a parking lot, a boat ramp, and a kiosk.

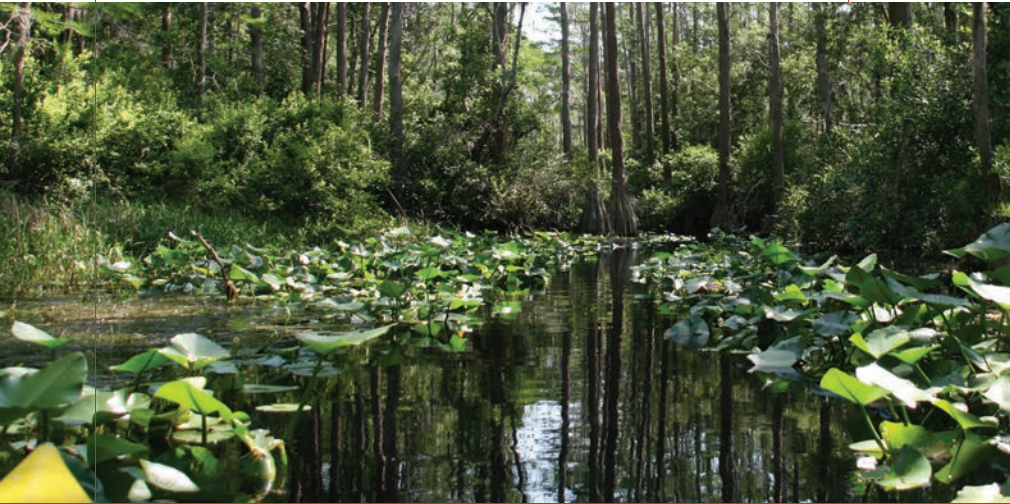
**How Do I Make a Reservation for a Wilderness Camping Permit?**

Camping overnight in the refuge is only authorized with a Wilderness Camping Permit (excluding camping areas within Stephen C. Foster State Park).

**Permits must be made in advance (no walk-in reservations authorized). Reservations are made by**

calling the Permit Reservation Line at 912-496-3331 between 7-10 am ET, Tuesday-Thursday, excluding federal holidays. Reservations can be made up to two months in advance of your trip. Things to know before calling to make a reservation:

- You need to have a profile in Recreation.gov before calling to make your permit reservation. Okefenokee uses Recreation.gov to create your permit and process payments. There is a \$10 non-refundable reservation fee in addition to the \$15/person per night use fees. Be prepared to make payment at time of reservation. All fees will be processed through Recreation.gov, only credit cards will be accepted. No discounts are offered for America the Beautiful passholders. The permit fees cover the refuge entrance fees.
- The cancellation policy is as follows:
  - If you cancel your reservation at least 14 days prior to your entry date, use fees will be refunded, minus one person/night reservation fee (\$15). The \$10 reservation fee is non-refundable for all reservations. If you cancel your reservation 13 days or less prior to the entry date, no fees will be refunded. If the refuge must cancel your reservation due to closure of the refuge, platforms, or trails (extreme weather conditions, water levels, etc.), you will be notified and a full refund of fees will be issued. If you do not cancel and decide to not use your reservation, none of the fees will be refunded. Please cancel your reservation if you are unable to use it as this opens space for others.
  - Changing the number of people with same dates and trip itinerary: log onto Recreation.gov to make changes up to 24 hours prior to trip and before your permit is printed.
  - Kingfisher Landing are the most remote trails for visitors wanting a Wilderness experience. The entrance itself is also remote and simply offers a parking lot, a boat ramp, and a kiosk.
  - Changing the date of entry, the number of days, or the trip itinerary: cancel your current permit and reserve a new permit. Based on when you make this cancellation, a refund may be issued (see above). A \$10 reservation fee and all use fees will apply to the new permit reservation.
  - All permittees will be required to print their own permits and parking placards. You may print your permit up to 7 days in advance of your trip. **Once your permit is printed, no changes will be authorized.**



Water trail near cypress forest near the west side, credit USFWS.

**Note:** Kingfisher Landing is an unstaffed entrance.

- Suwannee Canal Recreation Area to Kingfisher Landing: 25 miles
- Suwannee Canal Recreation Area to Stephen C. Foster State Park: 75 miles
- Kingfisher Landing to Stephen C. Foster State Park: 95 miles

### How Difficult is Paddling in the Okefenokee?

Consider the skill level of individuals in your party before choosing a trail! The swamp terrain is flat; there is little moving water/current and dry land is scarce. Your paddle will be used every inch of the way as you wind through cypress forests or cross open prairies exposed to the sun and wind. Paddling can be slow and strenuous on shallow and/or narrow trails. You may have to get out of your canoe and push across peat blowups, shallow water, or trees.

You must plan ahead if you choose a trail that does not return to the same boat launch. Highway distance between landings:

- All licenses, permits, equipment, and effects, including vehicles and canoes are subject to inspection by state and federal officers.

- All state, federal and county laws regarding alcohol consumption are strictly enforced.

- The collection and/or capturing of any plant and/or animal is strictly prohibited. Do not approach, feed, or harass wildlife.

- Open fires (wood or charcoal) are permitted only at Canal Run, Mixons Hammock, and Floyds Island. Restrictions may be put in place during high fire danger. Bringing in firewood from outside of the refuge is prohibited to reduce the spread of invasive fungus and insects. Visit <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org/> for more information.

prohibited in all buildings. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations 50 CFR27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32.

Milky Way at the intersection of the Brown and Red Trails, credit Jay Blanton.

- Each party must sign-in/out when entering and leaving the swamp. Each entrance has a sign in logbook either located at the boat ramp or the concession area.
- Follow the route to your platform as directly as possible. Do not leave designated trails.
- Pets, swimming, motorized vessels, and fires (except in designated areas) are prohibited.
- Children under 13 must wear Personal Flotation Device (PFD). All individuals on the water must have a PFD with them.
- Keep trails free from litter. Visit the Leave No Trace website at <https://lnt.org/learn/7-principle>.
- Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms will comply with all provisions of state and local law. Firearms are

## Know Before You Go

Being prepared is critical for your overnight trip into the Okefenokee. Whether you are staying one night or four, there are many things to consider as you get ready for your trip. Please remember that it is your responsibility to be prepared for a Wilderness experience, which may include temperature changes, precipitation/thunderstorms, difficult trail navigation, and other factors.

- Check the weather conditions prior to your trip – be prepared!
- Each camping group is limited to 20 people.
- Entrance fees are included in the Wilderness Camping Permit.
- Any additions or changes to permits must be completed prior to departure.

- Portable toilets with disposable bags are recommended. Restroom facilities are available at overnight stops and day-use shelters.
- Portable camp stoves are required for cooking in areas where campfires are not permitted.
- There will only be one group per overnight platform. However, day use visitors access a large portion of the Wilderness Trail System and day use shelters.

- Water filters are NOT recommended for drinking water. Canoeists should bring all water they will need for their trip.

## Rules and Regulations

- Canoes and kayaks **only** are permitted on overnight camping trips. Although boats with small motors are permitted on portions of the water trail system for day-use, absolutely no motors (electric or gas-powered) are authorized on overnight trips.

- The Wilderness Camping Permit must be carried by each boat in the party and must be printed by the permittee.

- Parties must launch before 10 am to ensure that the overnight stop is reached before dark each day. All members of the party must be present at time of departure.

- You must remain at the designated overnight area between sunset and sunrise. Each party must leave the platform by 10 am.





**What must I bring? What should I bring?**

You **must** carry the following items for your safety:

- Coast Guard approved flotation device (PFD) for each person (children under 13 years of age must wear at all times)
- Compass and map of refuge and trails
- Flashlight
- Cook stove and fuel if you choose to cook on your trip
- Drinking water (4-6 quarts per person each day, depending on weather). Drinking/filtering swamp water is **not** recommended.
- Insect repellent and/or mosquito netting
- Trash bags. The refuge asks our visitors to practice **Leave No Trace** principles (pack it in; pack it out).
- Toilet paper. Each overnight campsite has a pit toilet, but bring TP in case supplies are low.

You **should** carry the following items:

- Extra flashlights and batteries
- Portable toilet with disposable bags
- Rope for pulling canoe
- First aid kit
- Rain gear
- Sleeping bag/free-standing tent or hammock for sleeping
- Insect repellent
- Duct tape for emergency repairs
- Spare paddle
- Waterproof bags/containers
- Cord to tie down tent
- Bailer
- Sun protection (sunscreen, wide brim hat, light-colored long sleeve shirt, and pants)

**What if I am a guide or outfitter?**

If you charge any fees for trips into the Okefenokee, you are required to have a Commercial Guide Special Use Permit. Permits are only issued once annually, in the fall. For more information, call 912-496-3331.

**Do I need a special permit to cross the Suwannee Sill?**

You no longer need a permit to cross the Suwannee River Sill. Contact Stephen C. Foster State Park at 912-637-5274 if leaving a vehicle parked in their parking lot overnight. All overnight trips **must** park at the Stephen C. Foster State Park, not at the Sill parking area (day-use only).

**Wilderness Canoe Trails**

Trails within the refuge are color-coded (blue, brown, green, orange, pink, purple, red, yellow). Numbered mile markers line each trail, while wooden posts painted white on top serve as trail markers to help you find your way. At main intersections wooden signs indicate the direction of several different trails or sites.

**Blue Trail**

Description: This trail connects the Orange Trail with the Green Trail and skirts the edge of Chase Prairie. The deeper holes you come across are good fishing areas. It is used mainly as a route from the Orange Trail to Floyds Island or Bluff Lake.

Difficulty: **moderate**

Overnight Sites: N/A

**Brown Trail**

Description: Campers access Mixons Hammock with an easy two-mile paddle across Billys Lake. To reach the Suwannee River Sill, paddle a total of five miles through the River Narrows. The trail continues an additional three miles along the Sill through mixed cypress, bay, and gum swamp. Trail conditions vary with water levels. There can be a current in the River Narrows, which may make the return trip difficult.

Difficulty: **easy** (to Mixons Hammock), **moderate** (River Narrows)

Overnight Sites: **Mixons Hammock (Island)** - This island is located at the west end of Billys Lake before the River Narrows on the Brown Trail. This site is only two miles from Stephen C. Foster State Park, making it a great site for less experienced paddlers and families with children. There are hiking opportunities on the island. The island has a fire ring for having a campfire.

**Green Trail**

Description: Kingfisher Landing to Bluff Lake is eight miles along a channel originally cut for peat mining and across open lakes and a waterway lined with pitcher plants and spatterdock. The next nine miles to Floyds Island take you through Territory and Chase Prairies with narrow closed-in channels in between the prairies that may be difficult to paddle during low water levels. Floyds Island to Stephen C. Foster State Park is nine miles of marshes and cypress forests, ending in Billys Lake.

Difficulty: **moderate - difficult**

Overnight Sites: **Bluff Lake (Platform)** - This site is located on the Green Trail (accessible from Kingfisher Landing). Paddle across Bluff Lake to get to the overnight shelter. Stars are beautiful on a dark night.

**Floyds Island (Island)** - This site is located on Floyds Island along the Green Trail. A ¼ mile trail traverses across the island, offering access from the east to the west side of the island. If you are camping on Floyds Island as a through trip, you must portage across the island. An old hunting cabin sits partway down the trail across from the campsite. The campsite also contains a fire ring.

**Orange Trail**

Description: Follow the historic Suwannee Canal, dug in the late 1800s in an attempt to drain the swamp. Six miles from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area is a day use shelter, Coffee Bay, which is a great spot to stretch your legs and have lunch. Canal Run Shelter is a 10-mile paddle from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area (east entrance). The trail past Canal Run Shelter becomes narrow and winding for five miles to Billys Island. Follow Billys Lake for two miles to Stephen C. Foster State Park. During times of low water levels, paddlers may be navigating stumps, peat blow-ups, and encroaching vegetation between Canal Run and Billys Island.

Difficulty: **easy to moderate due to distance** (Suwannee Canal Recreation Area to Canal Run), **difficult** (Canal Run to Stephen C. Foster State Park)

Overnight Sites: **Canal Run (Platform)** - This platform is located on the edge of the historic Suwannee Canal, where the trail is surrounded by pines, cypress, and loblolly bays dripping with Spanish moss. The platform is adjacent to a small hammock, where a campfire ring is available for use. It is located 10 miles from Suwannee Canal Recreation Area and seven miles from Stephen C. Foster State Park.

**Pink Trail**

Description: This trail starts off of the Suwannee Canal or Orange Trail, heading south into Chesser Prairie, then Grand Prairie, and ending at Monkey Lake. This trail goes through some of the most iconic open prairie, where you may see alligators, wading birds, and plants such as water lilies and golden club.

Difficulty: **moderate**

Overnight Sites: **Monkey Lake (Platform)** - This platform is located in Grand Prairie. The platform sits on the edge of Monkey Lake with the back of the platform surrounded by scrub-shrub habitat. Be sure to take time to paddle out to Buzzards Roost if you are camping at Monkey Lake, this wide round lake provides excellent wildlife viewing and fishing opportunities.

**Purple Trail**

Description: This trail connects to the Orange Trail through Chase Prairie and back to the Blue Trail. The challenges of this trail come from the plants that may slow paddlers' progress through the prairie.

Difficulty: **moderate**

Overnight Sites: **Round Top (Platform)** - This platform is located in Chase Prairie. It offers a 360-degree view of the swamp surrounding it. Round Top is a great location for stargazing. This site also provides some of the most beautiful sunrises and sunsets.

**Red Trail**

Description: Kingfisher Landing to Maul Hammock is a long day of paddling 12 miles through scrub-shrub, marsh, and small lakes. The nine-mile stretch between Maul Hammock and Big Water goes through marsh, a narrow/closed channel, and into a wider river channel surrounded by cypress. The Big Water shelter is at the north end of Big Water Lake. The last 11 miles to Stephen C. Foster State Park go through cypress forest, and Minnies Lake (day-use shelter) to Billys Lake. The slow current is with you as it travels towards the State Park.

Difficulty: **difficult**

Overnight Sites: **Maul Hammock (Platform)** - This platform is located on the left edge of Maul Hammock Lake, so be sure to look behind you to find your overnight stop as you enter Maul Hammock. The lake, and the other lakes along the Red Trail, provide good fishing opportunities. This site is one of the most

remote locations along the overnight camping trails. Enjoy beautiful night sky viewing from this location.

**Big Water (Platform)** - This platform is at the north end of Big Water Lake. The area provides great fishing opportunities (seasonally). There are fantastic night sky and sunrise/sunset viewing opportunities at this platform.

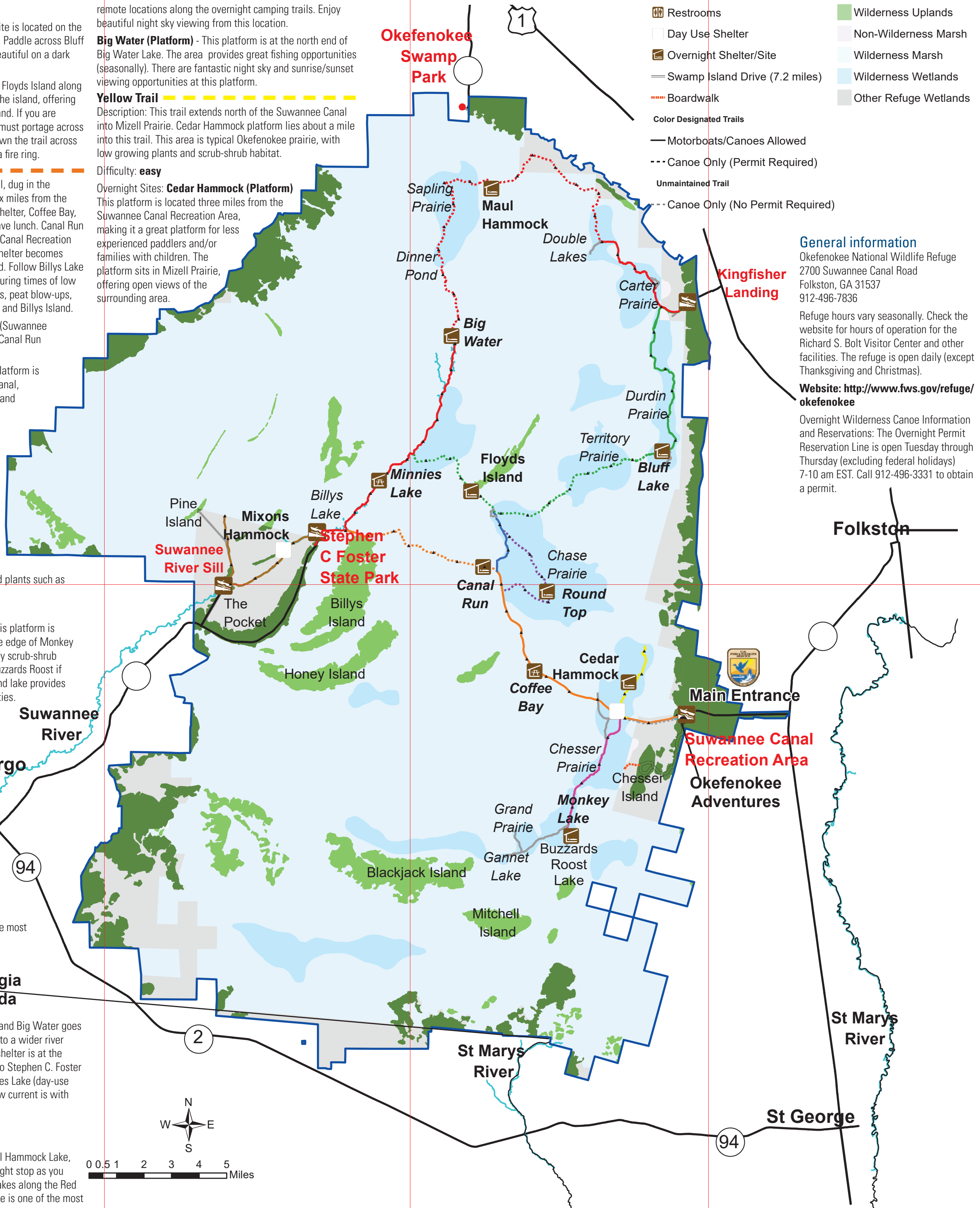
**Yellow Trail**

Description: This trail extends north of the Suwannee Canal into Mizell Prairie. Cedar Hammock platform lies about a mile into this trail. This area is typical Okefenokee prairie, with low growing plants and scrub-shrub habitat.

Difficulty: **easy**

Overnight Sites: **Cedar Hammock (Platform)**

This platform is located three miles from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, making it a great platform for less experienced paddlers and/or families with children. The platform sits in Mizell Prairie, offering open views of the surrounding area.



**General information**

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge  
2700 Suwannee Canal Road  
Folkston, GA 31537  
912-496-7836

Refuge hours vary seasonally. Check the website for hours of operation for the Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center and other facilities. The refuge is open daily (except Thanksgiving and Christmas).

**Website:** <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee>

Overnight Wilderness Canoe Information and Reservations: The Overnight Permit Reservation Line is open Tuesday through Thursday (excluding federal holidays) 7-10 am EST. Call 912-496-3331 to obtain a permit.