

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Minor Expansion Plan
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking on Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Region is seeking public input on a proposal to expand its boundary around Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. An expansion, if adopted, would enable the Service to work with willing landowners to explore voluntary conservation actions, including partnerships or land acquisitions.

2. What are the goals of this action?

The goals of the expansion include establishing a fuel reduction zone around the refuge to prevent the spread of wildfire to neighboring homes and communities; strengthening protection of hydrological integrity of the swamp; and providing opportunities to restore longleaf pine habitat supporting the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and other species, such as the state-protected gopher tortoise.

3. What does scoping mean?

Public scoping involves gathering information, identifying potential issues, and defining the scope of work needed to develop a detailed project plan.

4. What is a fuel reduction zone?

A fuel reduction zone will help protect people and property during wildfire season by lessening the chances of a wildfire escaping the refuge boundary. It includes areas where vegetation and other materials that can catch fire (like downed limbs, dead trees, dry leaves, grasses, or other dry flammable plants) are managed to lower the risk of catastrophic wildfires. The goal is to create a safe area around homes, communities, and other habitats that make it harder for fires to spread. This effort is supported by state and federal partners.

5. What is the definition of a "minor expansion"?

A National Wildlife Refuge Minor Expansion is an action that expands refuge boundaries by up to 15%, allowing for manageable changes to a national wildlife refuge. Minor Expansions can involve adding new areas of land adjacent to the existing refuge boundary, improving habitats, or enhancing visitor facilities, all aimed at better protecting wildlife and their environments.

6. Why is the Service considering this expansion now?

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is part of the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, which is an adaptive plan aimed at identifying important areas for connecting lands and waters to support healthy fish and wildlife populations, as well as improving people's quality of life.

If adopted, the expansion will help meet the objectives of the Blueprint by protecting the hydrology of the swamp and advancing species recovery. The expanded lands may also offer priority public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, and education to the more than 400,000 annual visitors driving a growing ecotourism economy within the community.

7. Would a minor expansion have an impact on the nomination for the Refuge to become a World Heritage Site?

No, the expansion would neither help nor deter any consideration to become a World Heritage Site. In addition, future inclusion as a World Heritage Site would not affect management of the refuge.

8. How does the Refuge acquire additional lands?

The Service only acquires land from property owners who are interested and willing to sell their property. If the expansion is adopted, the Service will develop a plan that outlines proposed acreage the Service would be interested in buying should landowners voluntarily decide they are willing to sell property.