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SWAMP LIFE RESTS AS 'GATORS, SNAKES, WATERFOWL AWAIT RAINS IN OKEFENOKEE

The great swamps are thirsty. The Trembling Earth of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in Georgia, second largest swamp area in the United States, is drier than it has ever been since 1932, and the thousands of alligators, snakes, herons, Florida cranes, and other animals on the primitive wilderness area have holed up or gathered in their roosts, patiently waiting the coming of the rains. The great Okefenokee swamp definitely is thirsty.

Officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the area, are hopeful that winter rains will cover the dry prairies and cypress swamps whose waters give rise to the famous Suwanee and St. Mary Rivers, according to a report received by Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes today.

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is about 35 miles long and between 15 and 25 miles wide, and is filled primarily with huge cypress, pine, and black gum trees. In the open swamp prairies and the thick forests of cypress trees, with their heavy undergrowth of "hurrah" bushes and other vegetation, lives one of the most unusual varieties of wildlife in the country.

One of the most popular tourist attractions in the southeastern States, Okefenokee wildlife is quiescent. A Service official reporting conditions

declared that the coal-black waters of the swamps have receded into the thick, deep muck or have been evaporated. Where visitors usually are guided in poled rowboats or by outboard motor, one sees nothing but "dry" ground.

Alligators have holed up beneath the waters of the few lakes that are still covered with water or beneath the heavy, oozy swamp muck formed by centuries of decaying vegetation.

"One would hardly suspect that this summer some 3,300 fishermen caught about 30,000 big-mouthed black bass, pickerel, and other fishes in those lakes and boat runs," declared Refuge Manager John M. Hopkins, "and from the condition of those prairie swamps, one would never suspect that thousands of waterfowl drop into this wilderness area to winter. But that has been the record up to this year."

The refuge manager, however, is not worried. One good heavy rain will do the job, he says. With one warm day, the alligators will come out of their holes, the American egrets, that are usually here in large flocks will suddenly appear, and the mallards, pintails, wood ducks, and other waterfowl will almost fall out of the skies to drop into their favorite spots in the swamps.

"Even the Spanish moss will take on a gayer air," Mr. Hopkins said, "and the bears will splash through the waters, while the Florida cranes preen themselves along the canal banks, in sight of all who wish to see them."

"All we need is rain."

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