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BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
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WILDERNESS STUDY HEARINGS SCHEDULED FOR OKEFENOKEE SWAMP, GEORGIA

A public hearing is scheduled April 21 in Waycross, Ga., as part of the Department of the Interior study of whether to recommend that about 332,000 acres of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in Southern Georgia be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The swamp, now administered as a migratory bird refuge by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, was first described in 1539 by a Spanish explorer who called it a "great morass bordered by forests of huge and lofty trees with a dense underwood of thorns and brambles and clambering vines, so interwoven and matted together as to form a perfect barrier."

"This is still a good description," Bureau Director John S. Gottschalk said. "In the late 1800's efforts to drain the swamp and remove the timber threatened the area, but under Federal ownership this beautiful region has returned to its primeval state."

Much of Okefenokee is a vast bog with many unusual forms of animal and plant life. A thick deposit of peat covers much of the swamp floor. This peat is so unstable that in some areas a heavy stamping of the feet will cause nearby trees to tremble, a phenomenon that gave the area its Indian name meaning "land of the trembling earth."

The brown waters of Okefenokee leave the swamp through its two outlets--the famed Suwannee River, which flows to the Gulf of Mexico, and the St. Mary's River, which flows eastward into the Atlantic.

The public hearing April 21 will be at 9 a.m. in the Ware County Courthouse in Waycross, Ga.

Information on the proposed wilderness study is available from the Refuge Manager, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, P.O. Box 117, Waycross, Ga. 31501.

Individuals or organizations may express their views on the proposals orally or in writing. Written comments for the official record should be sent to the Regional Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, 809 Peachtree-Seventh Building, Atlanta, Ga. 30323.

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