

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release March 14, 1978

SECRETARY ANDRUS ACCEPTS OKEFENOKEE GIFT FROM UNION CAMP CORPORATION AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today accepted a donation of more than 16,600 acres in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp to be added to the Nation's wildlife refuge system.

Union Camp Corporation, a major forest products company with extensive landholdings in the Southeast, presented the gift to The Nature Conservancy-- a national nonprofit conservation organization--for immediate transfer to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The land involved will become part of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, frequented by wildlife enthusiasts and endeared to millions of readers of the popular former comic strip "Pogo," by the late Walt Kelly.

In accepting the gift, which was presented during a ceremony at the Department of the Interior, Secretary Andrus said, "Union Camp Corporation with the help of The Nature Conservancy has made a significant contribution to the legacy this generation will leave for Americans of the future. The Okefenokee lands and waters being donated today will help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a key Interior Department agency, preserve habitat for a fabulous natural community of living creatures. I salute the company for its public-spirited giving, arranged through the unique services of The Nature Conservancy. I earnestly hope other private land owners will follow suit. This is the only game I know where everyone wins."

Others taking part in the ceremony were Alexander Calder, Jr., chairman of Union Camp, Patrick F. Noonan, president of The Nature Conservancy, and former Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel P. Reed, honorary chairman of the American Land Trust. The Conservancy accepted the gift as the part of the American Land Trust program, which it has administered as a national effort to preserve lands of special ecological significance.

Commenting on the donation of the Okefenokee Swamp acreage, Noonan said, "Union Camp once again has clearly demonstrated that American business can move effectively to safeguard key natural areas. Importantly, its gift constitutes a challenge to others of the private sector to protect major elements of the Nation's rich natural heritage."

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The Okefenokee donation involves two tracts: nearly 10,000 acres in the southwest portion of the swamp and 6,600 acres at the east and northeast boundaries.

The Okefenokee covers approximately 404,000 acres and is one of the country's wildest remaining swamps. It shelters a great variety of wildlife, including rare and threatened species. A great assortment of brilliant wildflowers, including several species of wild orchid, grow among its moss-draped cypresses. Its waterways include the headwaters of the Suwannee and St. Marys rivers.

Robert L. Herbst, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, said the Okefenokee land transaction has special significance both for Georgia and the Nation. "President Carter has directed the Interior Department to plan and develop a National Heritage Program. We intend it to preserve significant natural and historical properties for America's future. Donations like this one demonstrate the viability of that concept," he said.

The addition of today's donation brings the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge to almost 395,000 acres. The gift includes all Union Camp's holdings within the swamp and constitutes about 25 percent of the refuge perimeter. The addition of this property brings to 50 percent the perimeter lands of the swamp under protection of the Department of the Interior.

The appraised value of the land is in excess of \$6.5 million, Union Camp said. The company will receive a tax benefit of approximately half the value. Calder referred to that in saying, "Thanks to the normal deductions which extend to all taxpayers, including corporations, for contributions to nonprofit agencies and organizations, the interests of the public and an investor-owned business can be totally compatible in assuring the preservation of areas of such national significance and importance as the Okefenokee."

In February, 1973, Union Camp made the largest single land donation ever received up to that time by the national government for wildlife conservation--almost 50,000 acres in the Great Dismal Swamp of Virginia. That land, also donated to The Nature Conservancy for transfer to the Department of the Interior, became the core of the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, which extends into North Carolina.

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