

Click here to find your legislator in the Georgia Gen. Assembly

<https://pluralpolicy.com/find-your-legislator/> Enter your address and both Fed & State legislator will appear. Click on your Georgia State Representative and his/her email address will appear. Write a note in your own words to express your concerns. Pick the talking points most meaningful to you. Be sure to say you are a constituent living in (town/city) and a member of the garden club.

If your legislator sponsored the bill, thank him/her. If he/she did not - ask him/her to do so and support the fight to protect the OKE.

## What is so special about the Okefenokee?

- The Okefenokee is the Wild Heart of Georgia and the largest blackwater swamp in North America. At over 400,000 acres, the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is the nation's largest wildlife refuge east of the Mississippi.
- [Over 100 Georgia faith leaders](#) have urged Georgia's political leaders to protect the Okefenokee. Their open letter describes the Okefenokee as "a uniquely holy and sacred space.
- Noting its tremendous ecological significance, the [National Park Service](#) announced in 2023 that it would nominate the Okefenokee as a World Heritage site.
- According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service: "*The [2017 Banking on Nature Report \(Caudill and Carver 2019\)](#) identifies the total recreational expenditures for the four counties surrounding the refuge to be \$64.7 million with non-residents accounting for \$59.8 million. This was associated with the creation of about 753 jobs, \$17.2 million in employment income generated, and \$5.4 million in total tax revenue for the counties. The future of people and communities surrounding the swamp is dependent on conserving this popular natural landmark.*" [Donald W. Imm, Field Supervisor, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Letter to US Army Corps of Engineers, May 28, 2020.](#)
- The Okefenokee is rich in biological diversity and home to over 2,000 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and plants. Mining along Trail Ridge could compromise the habitat the swamp offers all species, [including the endangered](#) gopher tortoises, round-tailed muskrats, red-cockaded woodpeckers, wood storks, and eastern indigo snakes.
- The Okefenokee protects our climate by [storing millions of tons of carbon-rich peat deposits.](#)
- The human and cultural history of the Okefenokee is significant as well. The Okefenokee has provided a refuge for thousands of years:
- "*There are a number of indigenous culture sites across the Okefenokee. Man-made earthen mounds are scattered across the swamp that stand as a testament to Native People living and thriving in the Okefenokee for hundreds of generations prior to the*

arrival of Europeans.” [Turner W. Hunt, Historic and Cultural Preservation Department | Archaeological Technician, Muscogee \(Creek\) Nation.](#)

### **What is Trail Ridge and How is it important to the Okefenokee?**

- Trail Ridge forms the eastern boundary of the Okefenokee swamp.
- In September 2022, dozens of noted scientists and engineers signed on to an [open letter outlining significant concerns](#) with mining on Trail Ridge adjacent to the Okefenokee. Specifically, this area acts as an “earthen dam that creates the swamp itself.”
- Water passes through Trail Ridge into the Okefenokee Swamp and the St. Marys River.

### **How does mining on Trail Ridge threaten the Okefenokee? And surrounding property?**

- In May 2020, the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) cited concerns with the proposed project, including lower water levels creating increased chances for wildfire in the swamp and on private property nearby. The agency [reiterated those concerns in letters issued December 2021](#) and again in [March 2023](#):

*“FWS is concerned that the mining operations are likely to negatively impact the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (ONWR)...resulting in decreased habitat quality for federally listed and at-risk species that rely on the wetland ecosystem and the possibility of permanently altering the hydrology and fire regimes.*

*FWS is concerned that the ONWR may be negatively affected by changes to the existing soils in Trail Ridge from the proposed mining activities.*

*Additionally lowered water tables within the Okefenokee swamp would elevate wildland fire frequency and intensity due to increased exposure of typically wetted areas and result in degradation of carbon-rich peat soils. This would in turn reduce the capacity of the swamp, a major carbon storage area in Georgia, to retain and capture carbon and assist in controlling greenhouse gasses and climate change.”* [Mike Oetker Acting Regional Director, US Fish and Wildlife Service Letter to Richard Dunn, March 17, 2023, Reference: FWS/R4/ES/DCN 078450](#)

- Wildfires and lower water levels have been found to [increase toxic mercury levels](#) in wildlife in the Okefenokee.
- The mining could lower water flows to the Okefenokee and the St. Marys River system, particularly during droughts. ([Click here to view the full presentation](#) on this issue given by Dr. Rhett Jackson, UGA Warnell School of Forest Resources)

If you wish more information on the subject, click here for additional FAQs

<https://www.gawater.org/okefenokee-swamp>