

October 1, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary

NOTICE TO THE PRESS

The President has signed H. R. 6395 - Okefenokee Wilderness, Georgia, which establishes the Okefenokee Wilderness in Georgia comprising an area of approximately 343,850 acres.

Under the Wilderness Act, Agriculture and Interior are required to make recommendations to the President for additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System, and the President is required to submit these, along with his own recommendations, to the Congress. To qualify for wilderness designation, an area must generally be undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.

The bill will establish the Okefenokee Wilderness comprising an area of about 343,850 acres within the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, located in extreme southeast Georgia. The refuge is a vast and primitive swamp with forests of gum, bay, and cypress covering 80 percent of the area. It also provides habitat for over 225 species of birds, 41 species of mammals, 54 reptiles species, 32 species of amphibians, and 37 fish species -- included are one of the largest concentrations of alligators in the country and the endangered Florida sandhill crane.

The enrolled bill will require that the Okefenokee be administered under the provisions of the Wilderness Act which means its primitive natural state will be retained. To insure that the public can continue to safely use the Okefenokee Wilderness, H. R. 6395 will depart from traditional wilderness criteria to authorize (1) the use of low power boats and (2) the maintenance of canoe trails within the area.

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