

MYTHS VS. FACTS

Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge UNESCO World Heritage Site Status

The Okefenokee Swamp is one of the most incredible and treasured locations in the First Congressional District of Georgia. We are proud to consider it part of our home. We must do everything that we can to protect and maintain the rich natural history and beauty of this landmark. A United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site (WHS) Inscription would place the Okefenokee Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in the same breath as the Grand Canyon to the West, the Everglades to the South, the Great Pyramids to the East, and the Great Smokey Mountains to the North. This designation would bring tourism and economic benefits to our home. The Okefenokee is a jewel, and we can and should seek this designation so the world and future generations can appreciate its beauty.

MYTH: A UNESCO World Heritage Site Inscription will impose legal restrictions on owners and neighbors of the Okefenokee Swamp.

Neither inclusion on the list of potential World Heritage Sites (WHS) nor inscription as a WHS imposes legal restrictions on owners or neighbors of sites. Further, it does not give the United Nations any management authority or ownership rights over US WHS, which continue to be subject only to U.S. law.

MYTH: Inclusion of the Okefenokee Swamp on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list is a new idea

The Okefenokee Swamp has been on the U.S. Tentative List to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list since 1982.

MYTH: If a UNESCO WHS is labeled as “endangered,” that allows the UN more authority to act to preserve the site

This is false. Of the 25 U.S. WHS, only the Everglades are labeled by UNESCO as “endangered.” There have been proposals for a “buffer” to protect it at the state level, but the United Nations (UN) and UNESCO have not imposed any rule or law that has any authority over the Everglades, including a “buffer.”

MYTH: A UNESCO inscription would allow for the United Nations to impose policy restrictions around the swamp

The UNESCO website does have a section on policy suggestions, including a “buffer zone,” but these are, again, only suggestions. All federal, state, and local laws still apply to the area, and those are the only laws that apply to a WHS.

MYTH: World Heritage Site status would not benefit local business owners and residents.

A WHS inscription would add the Okefenokee Swamp to an international list of wonders of the world. It would bring tourists and economic interest from around the world, benefiting local businesses and residents.

MYTH: Rep. Buddy Carter has a bill that would give WHS status to the Okefenokee.

Rep. Carter’s proposed legislation does not give WHS status to the Okefenokee Swamp. It is a House Resolution that conveys the sense of Congress that the Okefenokee Swamp should be considered by the United Nations for this prestigious distinction.