



In 1990, the Shorts Fire burned 21,000 acres of swamp and upland in and around Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in South Georgia. The fire stretched the staff and equipment of all the organizations involved in fighting the fire: timber industry, private landowners, state and federal agencies. It was apparent that a more concerted and coordinated effort by those involved would result in more efficient efforts. During the first half of 1994, some informal landowner group supper meetings were held. Some landowners envisioned a more formal gathering of landowners that could deal not only with better preparation and communication during wildfires, but with other issues of forest and wildlife resources in and around the Okefenokee Swamp. Key landowners were invited to a steering committee meeting to determine if a formal organization was necessary. They identified a number of issues that could benefit from such an organization. Their vision was to develop an organization of interested landowners to address land management issues of special concern to southeast Georgia and northeast Florida and produce a consolidated and influential position to deal with these issues. The Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners was born.

The 80 member Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners (GOAL) represents more than two million acres of public, private and commercial lands in south Georgia and north Florida. The grassroots group's stewardship ethic aims to manage, protect, and promote forest resources in and around the Okefenokee Swamp. Moreover, the group's vision is to produce a consolidated and influential entity to actively assure that these resources will be available for future generations.

MISSION: To serve as a unified team managing, protecting, and promoting forest resources in and around the Okefenokee Swamp through a stewardship ethic to assure these resources will be available for future generations. GOAL recognizes that:

- Forest resources are the major industries in the area.
- The Okefenokee Swamp is a National Treasure and economically and biologically beneficial to the local communities and the states of Georgia and Florida.
- It is essential to have a coordinating committee for fire protection of public and private resources.
- A formal organization of landowners will provide an avenue for communications and develop strength in dealing with area issues.

There is an opportunity for landscapes with similar compositions of landholdings to model activity and learn from the activities of the GOAL organization and structure.

In 2005, GOAL was recognized by the USDA to recognize outstanding contributions to wildland firefighting and America's wildland firefighters. The Pulaski Award recognizes groups which show outstanding successful performance in interagency cooperation, coordination, and standardization; safety of firefighters and/or the American public during a wildfire; and outstanding group performance in fire management and suppression activities according to the Federal Wildland Fire Policy.



GOAL – A Southern Success Story

Every year, wildfire damages commercial timberland surrounding the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Ironically, at the same time, wildfire can benefit the neighboring Okefenokee Swamp ecosystem. The GOAL organization provides landowners the opportunity to share concerns and solve problems that impact the daily decisions of land management. To date, GOAL projects have included: wildfire preparedness, fire suppression coordination (from communication / radio frequencies/shared cell phone numbers, to resource lists of equipment and personnel), and creating helicopter dip sites. Nonfire endeavors have included a black bear study and creation of a special conservation fund.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: During the recent past, the GOAL organization has addressed a number of fire-related issues. Landowners cooperate on maintenance of the swamp’s Perimeter Road, compile and maintain a resource list of fire equipment and personnel, constructed 80 helicopter dip sites surrounding the swamp, and share radio frequencies and cellular phone numbers of members. The organization also supported the black bear research at Okefenokee NWR by providing access to their lands and the expertise of their employees. The U.S. Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service have contributed a total of \$550,000.00 to the construction of the John Bethea State Forest Joint Work Center. The Georgia Forestry Commission is also partnering in this important cooperative venture, which will be located in Baxter, Florida. The work center is designed to decrease the response time to wildland fires in the adjoining GOAL area. Numerous educational efforts have also occurred including: , Homeowner Assistance, Swamp Edge Break Buffer Project, and Hazard Fuels Mitigation Projects.

More information on the organization of GOAL, please contact
<http://goalpartners.org/>

Special thanks to members of the GOAL steering committee for allowing reprinting of much of the verbiage above. Additionally, a summary of “Managing the Unexpected in Prescribed Fire” workshop held several years ago was a useful resource.

CS Overview and Update

The Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy is currently in the middle of Phase III (September 2012). Phase III encompasses the construction of a regional risk analysis heavily informed by science and science modeling. Phase III will culminate in regional and national action plans being finalized that will help set a new pathway for addressing wildland fire for years to come.

Through collaborating with numerous stakeholders and interested parties, the development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy has brought together groups who have not collaborated as closely in the past on issues of restoring and maintaining landscapes, creating fire-adapted communities and enhancing wildfire response.

More information available at:

<http://sites.nemac.org/southeastcohesivefire/>

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