



Volunteer Organization Receives Federal Recognition

The Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners (GOAL) on November 17, 2005, received the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Pulaski Award for the outstanding achievements of its members during several wildland fires that occurred between 2001 and 2004.

The group represents the interests of private landowners, commercial timber and manufacturing companies, state and federal agencies in and around Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp and works voluntarily to manage, protect and promote the area's forest resources.

The group was nominated for its achievements in interagency cooperation and coordination, promoting safety for its firefighters and for outstanding fire management and suppression activities during the Blackjack Bay Complex Fires in 2001-2002, and during the Impassable Bay and Road 1 Fires in 2004. During both wildland fire incidents, GOAL members used firefighting strategies that reduced the amount of damage to habitat, structures, and commercial property. The group also was recognized for using effective communication and management during the incidents. The coordinated approach greatly increased safety of its firefighters, and resulted in one of the region's lowest cost-per-acre suppression efforts in decades.

Named in honor of its creator, Edward "Big Ed" Pulaski, the Pulaski, a half ax, half hoe fire tool, has become the symbol of wildland firefighters. The tool is known worldwide for its utility, strength, and durability. In 1998, the Secretary of Agriculture chose the Pulaski to represent a national award for excellence in firefighting, fire safety, and interagency cooperation within the firefighting community. The November ceremony marked only the fourth time that the award has been presented.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Business Management and Wildland Fire, Nina Rose Hatfield, presented the Pulaski Award to GOAL at a ceremony at the Fargo Elementary School in Fargo, Georgia. The group's current chairman, Jim Barrett, Vice-president of Langdale Woodlands, accepted the award. Representatives of GOAL, district Congressional offices, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission, Florida Division of Forestry, and local community leaders also attended the ceremony.
