

Funding Georgia's OKEFENOKEE SWAMP & COASTAL National Wildlife Refuges



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Candidate Matt Day

GA-D1

Report on the Okefenokee & Banks National Wildlife Refuge Modernization and Operations Funding Package

By Matt Day, Candidate for U.S. House of Representatives, Georgia's 1st Congressional District

Letter to the Citizens of Georgia's 1st Congressional District

Dear Citizens of Georgia's 1st Congressional District,

The Okefenokee Swamp and its sister refuge at Banks are more than wetlands — they are emblems of Georgia's pride, perseverance, and natural beauty. As your candidate for Congress, I am committed to protecting these lands through action, not rhetoric.

After years of under-resourced operations, it is time for a major reinvestment in the very people and facilities that keep this landscape alive. I will work with Congress to secure a **\$10 million one-time federal allocation** for the Okefenokee and Banks National Wildlife Refuges.

This initiative will:

- Build a **new operations and maintenance compound** at Okefenokee;
- Equip the refuge with a **complete modern heavy-equipment fleet**;
- Fund **infrastructure repairs** to levees, roads, and docks; and
- Strengthen **regional coordination** with the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex.

To sustain these investments, I will also push for **annual budget increases** of **\$2 million for Okefenokee** and **\$1 million for the Savannah Complex**, ensuring long-term capacity for tourism, education, and conservation.

These projects are not excess — they are essential. By self-performing maintenance, habitat restoration, and emergency response, our refuges will **save millions of taxpayer dollars every year**, create local jobs, and reinforce the sovereignty of America's public lands.

Together, we can secure a stronger, safer, more self-reliant future for Georgia's wild heart.

Sincerely,

Matt Day

Candidate, U.S. House of Representatives
Georgia's 1st Congressional District

Letter to the Department of the Interior

Matt Day

Candidate, U.S. House of Representatives
Georgia's 1st Congressional District

[Date]

The Honorable Doug Burgum

Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Subject: Federal Support for the Okefenokee and Banks National Wildlife Refuges

Dear Secretary Burgum,

I am writing on behalf of the citizens of Georgia's 1st Congressional District to inform you that we will pursue a **\$10 million one-time federal appropriation** to modernize the Okefenokee and Banks National Wildlife Refuges under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This funding will provide:

- Construction of a **modern operations compound and three-bay mechanic shop** at Okefenokee;
- A **full heavy-equipment fleet** including dozers, excavators, tractors, fire-response vehicles, boats, and utility trucks;
- A **\$3 million building and maintenance fund** for critical infrastructure; and
- **\$2.5 million for the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex** to strengthen coordination and emergency readiness.

In addition, I will support **annual appropriations increases of \$2 million for Okefenokee and \$1 million for the Savannah Complex** to maintain outreach, visitor services, and habitat management.

We will ask Congress to increase the Department of Interior's Funding in order for the funds to be allocated back to the National Wildlife Refuges on and near Georgia's Coast.

Respectfully,

Matt Day

Candidate, U.S. House of Representatives
Georgia's 1st Congressional District

Section A: The Case for Modernization

The Okefenokee NWR is the largest refuge east of the Mississippi and the centerpiece of Georgia's 1st District, which contains more refuges in one region than any other district on the U.S. mainland.

Years of under-funding have limited staff capability, delayed projects, and increased reliance on costly private contractors. The Okefenokee alone sees over 400,000 visitors annually.

Modernization will give refuge personnel the ability to perform:

- Fire prevention and suppression;
- Levee and culvert reconstruction;
- Road and dock maintenance;
- Habitat restoration and water-control operations; and
- Emergency relief following storms and floods.

Section B: Facility Construction

Facility Components

- Large Open Shelter (~40 000 sq ft) for equipment storage
- Three-Door Mechanic Shop (attached)
- Fuel and Power Pad with containment and generator hookups
- Grading and Drainage infrastructure

Total Facility Cost: \$2 million

Section C: Equipment Fleet

A complete operations fleet stationed at Okefenokee will serve both Okefenokee and Banks NWRs and be available to other Southeastern refuges as needed.

Heavy Fleet Summary ($\approx$ \$1.53 M)

- Bulldozer (V-blade & fire plow) – 1 unit
- Large Excavator (30–35 ton) – 1
- Mini Excavator (10 ton) – 1
- Skid Steer (high-flow cab) – 1
- 100 HP Tractor with Loader – 1
- Semi Truck and Lowboy Trailer – 1 each
- Gooseneck and Dump Trailers – 1 each
- Crew Cab Diesel Trucks – 2
- Rough Terrain Forklift – 1
- AWP Boom Lift – 1

Attachments & Implements ($\approx$ \$230 K)

Mulchers, brush cutters, harrows, grain drill, leveler, spreader, and industrial tools.

Fire & Forestry Support ($\approx$ \$429 K)

Type 6 Fire Truck, UTV with fire rig, portable tanks, fuel trailers, thermal drone, mobile workshop, and solar trail cameras.

Marine Access Fleet ($\approx$ \$150 K)

18-ft Airboat, 20-ft Flat-Bottom Boat, dock and fuel station upgrades.

Energy & Tools ($\approx$ \$95 K)

20 kW generator, air compressor, welding and lighting systems.

Total Equipment Value: $\approx$ \$2.43 million

Section D: Building and Maintenance Fund

A **\$3 million Building and Maintenance Fund** will restore levees, culverts, roads, boardwalks, and public facilities, ensuring visitor safety and long-term resilience.

Section E: Savannah Complex Support

One-time funding: \$2.5 million

Annual increase: \$1 million

These resources will expand staffing, improve habitat connectivity, and provide regional disaster-response coordination across Georgia's coastal refuges.

Section F: Annual Budget Increases

Refuge	Purpose	Annual Increase (USD)
Okefenokee NWR	Tourism & outreach expansion	2 M / year
Savannah Coastal Refuges	Operational support	1 M / year

Section G: Economic and National Impact

- **Self-reliance:** Reduces annual contractor expenses by millions.
 - **Economic boost:** Tourism linked to Okefenokee generates $\approx$ \$60 M each year.
 - **Readiness:** Provides regional equipment for disaster relief and fire control.
 - **Legacy:** Secures America's largest eastern refuge under U.S. management for future generations.
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Conclusion

This proposal represents responsible governance: a single, well-planned federal investment that strengthens operations, saves money, and honors the men and women safeguarding our most treasured wilderness.

With a **\$10 million one-time allocation** and **modest annual budget increases**, Georgia's Okefenokee, Banks and Coastal Refuges can serve as a national model of efficient, locally driven conservation.

Prepared and Authored by

Matt Day

Candidate, U.S. House of Representatives

Georgia's 1st Congressional District