

PUBLIC USE PLAN  
BANKS LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Prepared by: Tama A. Burkhardt 7/27/94  
Supervisory Refuge Ranger Date

Submitted by: M. Shippy Rorer 7/27/94  
Project Leader Date

Approved: Col. Hunt 8/1/94  
District Supervisor Date

Approved: Sam O. Lindred Jr. 8-1-94  
Acting ARD - Refuges and Wildlife Resources Date

Approved: James Williams 8/2/94  
Regional Director Date

## COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

**Purpose:** Public Use Plan

**Station Name:** Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge

**Date Established:** February 22, 1985

**Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:**

Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge, located in Lanier county, Georgia, was acquired February 22, 1985 from The Nature Conservancy. The refuge was authorized under the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 and funded through provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1955 with strong local support from the Lakeland community and the congressional delegation.

**Purpose(s) for which established:**

For lands acquired under 16 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4) "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..."

For lands acquired under the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 U.S.C. 742f(b)(1), the purpose of the acquisition is "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..."

For lands acquired under the Refuge Recreation Act, 16 U.S.C. 460k-1, the acquisition is "... suitable for - (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species ..."

**Management Goals and Objectives:**

See Attachment 1 Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

To provide quality (trophy) fishing opportunities through a naturally sustaining sport fishery.

To provide a showcase outdoor recreational opportunity for the physically challenged.

To provide opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation, interpretation and environmental education.

To provide optimum habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species.

To provide optimum habitat for a wide diversity of native fauna and flora.

**Applicable Laws, Regulations and Policies:**

National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966 as amended

(16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee), Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (U.S.C. 742f (b)(1), Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531-1543), Migratory Bird Conservation Act as amended (16 U.S.C. 715-715r), North American Wetlands Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 4401-4413), Refuge Recreation Act as amended (16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4).

**Description of Use:**

Public Use Plan for Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

**Anticipated Biological Impacts of the use:**

Temporary disturbance of short duration to existing wildlife populations is the only biological impact thought to occur as a result of these activities. The detrimental aspects of the disturbance are far outweighed by the educational benefits that visitors acquire from their trip.

**NEPA Compliance:** (attach Environmental Action Memorandum)  
Categorical Exclusion X  
Environmental Assessment \_\_\_\_\_  
Environmental Impact Statement \_\_\_\_\_  
FONSI \_\_\_\_\_

**Determination:**

This use is compatible X. This use is not compatible \_\_\_\_.

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

Public use regulations as published in the Federal Register, on refuge informational kiosks and refuge signs control the type and variety of wildlife-oriented recreational activities.

**Justification:** The public use plan is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. These activities form the basis for increased educational knowledge and familiarity with wildlife habitat and wildlife species needs. The public use plan thus enhances the purposes for which the refuge was created.

Project leader

M. King Rur 7/26/94  
(Signature, Title, Date)

Reviewed by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature, Title, Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature, Title, Date)

## BANKS LAKE PUBLIC USE PLAN

### LITERATURE REVIEWED

Boyle, S. A.; Samson, F. B. Non-consumptive outdoor recreation: An annotated bibliography of human-wildlife interactions. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. Interior, Fish Wildl. Serv.; 1983; Spec. Sci. Rep. - Wildl. No. 252.

Goff, G. R.; Decker, D. J.; Pomerantz, G.A. diagnostic tool for analyzing visitor impacts on wildlife refuges: a basis for a systematic approach to visitor management. Trans. Northeast Sect. Wildl. Soc. 1988; 45: 82.

Roggenbuck, J. W.; Berrier, D. L. A comparison of the effectiveness of two communication strategies in dispersing wilderness campers. J. Leisure Res. 1982; 14: 77-89.

Clark, R. N.; Stankey, G. H. Site attributes--- a key to managing wilderness and dispersed recreation. Lucas, R. C. Proceedings--national wilderness research conference: current research. Ogden, Utah: U.S. Dept. Agriculture, Forest Serv., Intermt. Res. Sta.; 1986: 509-515.

Dahlgren, R. B.; Korschgen, C. E. Human disturbances of waterfowl: An annotated bibliography. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. Interior, Fish Wildl. Serv.; 1992; Resour. Pub. No. 188.

Hall, D.; Dearden, P. The impact of "non-consumptive" recreation on wildlife: an annotated bibliography. : Vance Bibliographies; 1984; Public Admin. Series No. P-1458.

Herter, D. R. Habitat use and harassment of sandhill cranes staging on the eastern Copper River delta, Alaska. Fairbanks: Univ. Alaska; 1983.

Liddle, M. J.; Scorgie, H. R. A. The effects of recreation on freshwater plants and animals: a review. Biol. Conserv. 1980; 17: 183-206.

Reed, P.; Merigliano, L. Managing for compatibility between recreational and nonrecreational wilderness purposes. Reed, P. C. Preparing to manage wilderness in the 21st century: proceedings of the conference. Asheville, North Carolina: U.S. Dept. Agriculture, Forest Serv., Southeast. For. Exp. Sta.; 1990: 95-102.

Atkinson-Willes, G. Wildfowl and recreation: a balance of requirements. Br. Water Supply.; 1969; 11: 5-15.

Edwards, R. W.; Bell, D. V. The impact of angling on wildlife. Proc. 4th. Brit. Freshw. Fish. Conf., University of Liverpool. 161-166.; 1987 Apr 1.

Mueller, G. Effects of recreational river traffic on nest defense by longear sunfish. Trans. Am. Fish. Soc.; 1980; 109: 248-251.

Thomas, G. Literature review on crayfish ecology and management methods. :Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.; 1991.

## Goals of the National Wildlife System

To preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems (when practicable) all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.

To perpetuate the migratory bird resource.

To preserve a natural diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on refuge lands.

To provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and man's role in his environment, and to provide refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome, and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent these activities are compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established.

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION MEMORANDUM

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and have determined that the action of:.

REFUGE PUBLIC USE PLAN FOR BANKS LAKE NWR

- X is a categorical exclusion as provided by 516 DM 6 Appendix 1. No further documentation will be made.
- is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact.
- is found to have special environmental conditions as described in the attached Environmental Assessment. The attached Finding of No Significant Impact will not be final nor any actions taken pending a 30-day period for public review [40 CFR 1501.4(e)].
- is found to have significant effects, and therefore a "Notice of Intent" will be published in the Federal Register to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement before the project is considered further.
- is denied because of environmental damage, Service policy, or mandate.
- is an emergency situation. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Other supporting documents:

Regional Director	Date
<u>M. Kirby Ruse</u>	<u>7/26/94</u>
Initiator	Date
<u>Sam O. Drake Jr</u>	<u>8-1-94</u>
Acting ARD/Refuges & Wildlife	Date
_____	_____
Date	REC Date
_____	_____
Date	ARD/AWE Date

RECREATION ACT FUNDING ANALYSIS FORM

STATION NAME: Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge

DATE ESTABLISHED: February 22, 1985

The purposes for which the refuge was established include these:

1. For lands acquired under 16 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4)"... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..."
2. For lands acquired under the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 U.S.C. 742f(b)(1), the purpose of the acquisition is"... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude..."
3. For lands acquired under the Refuge Recreation Act, 16 U.S.C. 460k-1, the acquisition is "... suitable for - (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species..."

RECREATIONAL USE EVALUATED:

Public Use Management Plan for Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

FUNDING REQUIRED TO ADMINISTER AND MANAGE THE RECREATIONAL USE:

The administration, staffing, fixed costs totaling \$45,000 are required to manage this public use program. This funding is supplied from the budget of Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Based on a review of the refuge budget allocated for recreational use management, I certify that funding is adequate in FY 1994 to ensure compatibility and to administer and manage this program.

Project Leader

M. King Rave 7/26/94  
(Signature, Title, Date)



I. PUBLIC USE PLAN  
FOR  
BANKS LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Banks Lake is located in the western half of Lanier County in southern Georgia, two miles west of Lakeland, Georgia along State Highway 122. Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the adjacent Grand Bay Wildlife Management Area (operated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources) comprise one of the largest freshwater Carolina Bay swamp systems in the Coastal Plains of Georgia. The majority of this wetland community consists of pond cypress and swamp shrub scattered in open water. Banks lake National Wildlife Refuge includes a total of 3,600 acres of which 1,000 acres are open water and 2,600 acres are marsh, hardwood swamp, pine upland, hammocks, and creek swamps.

Public access to the lake is via the refuge entrance off Highway 122, two miles west of Lakeland. One triple-ramp concrete boat ramp and fishing pier is available at this entrance for public use. One water control structure is located near the refuge entrance where overflow water from the lake drains into a tributary of the Alapaha River.

This important wetland complex was threatened with drainage, sale of valuable "lightered stumps", and possible development as a residential area in the early 1980's before it was purchased by The nature Conservancy and then sold to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 1985. The present day Banks Lake was at one time a natural depression with extensive pond cypress stands similar to Florida sink lakes and depression of karst topography.

The original owner of the property, Joshua Lee, built a low level dam on the creek running through his property to form what is today known as Banks Lake. Built between 1827 and 1835, the lake was originally intended to serve as a mill pond. The mill, erected on the dam and powered by flowing water, was a three-story building housing a grist mill, cotton gin, and wheat and rice threshing and grinding equipment. This made Lee's home and plantation a gathering place for settlers to have their corn ground and cotton ginned. Soon a village called Alapaha developed around the lake. This settlement became a part of a main stagecoach route from Savannah to Waycross to Thomasville, Georgia.

In 1848, Mr. Lee traded his Banks Lake property to Mr. William Lastinger. Mr. Lastinger then constructed two other mill ponds known today as Sawmill Pond and Lake Irma and used the runoff waters from Banks Lake three times within a one mile stretch to power additional mills. Shortly after these developments in the 1850's, the name of the town was changed to Milltown.

In 1861, Mr. Lastinger sold the property to Henry Banks from Atlanta. The pond remained in the Bank's estate until approximately 1925 when it was sold to E.D. Rivers who formed the Tobacco Belt and Trust Company. Two subsidiary corporations of the company, Banks Lake Power Corporation and Banks Lake Recreation and Development Corporation, attempted to develop the areas around the lake through 1920. In the 1970's, the administrators of the Rivers estate threatened to drain the lake to harvest the wealth of lightered stumps and cypress trees from

the lake bed. The Nature conservancy purchased the land from the Rivers estate on March 14, 1980. In April 1980, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entered into a lease agreement with The Nature Conservancy for the management and operation of Banks Lake. On February 22, 1985, the land was purchased by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from The Nature Conservancy and designated as a satellite refuge under the management of Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge staff.

## II. PURPOSES FOR ESTABLISHMENT AS A REFUGE

For lands acquired under 16 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4) "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..."

For lands acquired under the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 U.S.C. 742f(b)(1), the purpose of the acquisition is "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude..."

For lands acquired under the Refuge Recreation Act, 16 U.S.C. 460k-1, the acquisition is "... suitable for - (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species..."

### III. REFUGE OBJECTIVES

1. To provide quality (trophy) fishing opportunities through a naturally sustaining sport fishery.
2. To provide a showcase outdoor recreational opportunity for the physically challenged.
3. To provide opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation, interpretation and environmental education.
4. To provide optimum habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species.
5. To provide optimum habitat for a wide diversity of native fauna and flora.

### IV. ASSESSMENT

Very little biological or public use data on Banks Lake is currently available. Refuge objectives emphasize the opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreational activities. Wildlife-oriented recreational activities identified for the refuge include: interpretation, environmental education, sport fishing, boating, concession operations, wildlife observation and wildlife photography.

A. Interpretation and environmental education - The goal of these activities is to reveal ecological meanings and relationships through first hand experience and illustrative media. Both activities attempt to instill in visitors an awareness of the history and development of the area and man's influence on its ecosystem. Visitors will gain an awareness of the area's unique environmental qualities as well as the habitat

requirements for its native fish and wildlife species. These ideals are promoted through refuge leaflets, signs and exhibits. Formal environmental education is promulgated through efforts with the local school system.

B. Boating - Motor-boating and canoeing are carried on within the guidelines established by the State of Georgia and the U.S. Coast Guard through their safe boating program. No horsepower restrictions have been established. Boaters are warned of the shallow water levels and the existence of extensive volumes of cut stumps and partially submerged trees. These hidden hazards control lake speed as well as access to various portions of the refuge. A no-wake zone has been established for the boat basin as well as the area around the fishing pier.

C. Sport fishing - Banks Lake is known locally and regionally for its sport fishing opportunities. Public use records for the years 1981 - 1991 indicate an annual visitation of approximately 20,000 visitors. The vast majority of these visitors are launching fishing boats and moving to various areas of the refuge to pursue sport fishing. A smaller percentage of these participants fish from the bank areas and fishing pier provided. Species of fish known to inhabit Banks Lake include: Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Chain Pickerel, Brook Silverside, Swamp Darter, Lake Chubsucker, Florida Gar, Bowfin, and Catfish. All commercialized fishing tournaments on refuge waters are required to obtain a special use permit to conduct tournaments offering cash awards and expensive prizes. In addition, the tournament organizers are required to return all live fish to refuge waters

and keep a survey of length, weight, numbers of fish caught - which is then submitted to the refuge biologist after the tournament.

D. Concession Operations - A new building which is currently under construction is scheduled for occupation by an authorized concessioner. The concessioner will operate under a contractual agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Concessioner offerings will include sale of bait, fishing tackle, and snack foods. In addition, rental of boats, motors, and canoes may also be included in the contract. A set percentage of the concessioner's monthly gross income is forwarded to the national treasury in lieu of a flat fee or rental for use of the refuge building and facilities. Concessioner contracts are awarded to the highest bidder as a result of periodic advertisements in local newspapers.

E. Wildlife Observation and Photography - A direct benefit of many of the visits to the refuge is the opportunity to observe wildlife in a natural setting. Numerous opportunities exist to view and photograph alligators, wood ducks, and a variety of marsh and wading birds. The sheer beauty of a cypress forest reflected in its surrounding waters is the subject of many amateur as well as professionally produced photographs. All commercial photographers are required to apply for a special use permit to photograph on the refuge. Special use conditions written into the permit ensure that all regulations are obeyed.

## V. DESCRIPTION OF THE PUBLIC USE PROGRAM

A. Areas of the Refuge Open to Public Use - The entire refuge is open to public use. Some areas are very shallow and overgrown with vegetation. Visitors are obliged by the vegetational density to confine their activities to the more open water areas.

B. Visitation Periods - The refuge is open daily all year from sunrise to sunset. In addition, night fishing use of the refuge is allowed from March 1 through October 31.

C. Permits - Permits are not required unless an activity is of a commercial nature, offers cash prizes or rewards, or requires some type of special assistance for accomplishment.

D. Consultation - Refuge administration is accomplished in consultation with Georgia Department of Natural Resources for purposes of establishing regulations regarding fishing, safe boating, and law enforcement. Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries Division personnel assist with fish population sampling and water quality monitoring. Additional consultation occurs on a regular basis with the County and city officials. The refuge administration has also forged a working relationship through several Memorandums of Understanding between the Fish and Wildlife Service, The Valdosta Bassmasters, and the Bassmasters Sportsmen Society for facility development and resource management of the refuge.

E. Methods of Control and Enforcement - Refuge officers on established patrols ensure adherence to refuge regulations and cite violators where necessary. Georgia Department of Natural Resources law enforcement officers also patrol refuge waters.

Night security patrol is handled by the Lanier County Sheriff's Department.

F. Funding and Staffing - Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge is an unfunded satellite refuge managed by the staff of Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Costs incurred with the funding and staffing of Banks lake are absorbed in the budget of Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

1. Fixed Costs - (toilet pumping, maintenance of lawns, litter cleanup, boat ramp and fishing pier repair, road repair, sign maintenance, maintenance equipment, etc.)

\$15,000.00

2. Staffing Costs -

Staff support for records, administration, and law enforcement - \$30,000.00

Funding total \$45,000

## VI. CONFLICTS

A. Biological Conflicts - The refuge has taken precautions to minimize biological conflicts. Unforeseen and changing circumstances often require accompanying policy and regulation changes to mitigate circumstances. Biological monitoring systems are in place. Analysis of these results indicates when mitigating changes are needed.

B. Public Use Conflicts - The refuge currently accommodates about 20,000 visitors annually. The vast majority of these visitors are recreational sport fishermen. Some conflicts



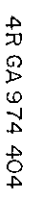
revolving around personal space and noise intrusion occur. These conflicts are relatively short in duration and usually do not affect the overall recreational experience in an adverse manner. No anti-fishing or anti-recreational groups have ever pursued legal action against the refuge or its public use program.

C. Administrative conflicts - The only administrative conflict arises in the reassigning of Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge employees from their primary duties to assist with these public use functions as much as two hours driving time from their duty station. In addition, there is a drain on Okefenokee's budget to accomplish refuge objectives at Banks Lake.

#### VII. REFUGE REGULATIONS

Specific refuge regulations are advertised yearly in the Federal Register. Regulations governing specific public use activities are posted at the refuge entrance just outside Lakeland, GA. Newspaper articles and magazine articles also include mention of refuge specific regulations.

UNITED STATES  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



BANKS LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
Refuge size 3500 ac. includes marsh  
Open water 1000 ac.

