

Okefenokee Swamp Park receives grant to restore boardwalk

Okefenokee Swamp Park (OSP) has been selected as one of the first recipients of funding through the newly launched Expedia Trails Fund, receiving a \$500,000 grant to restore the park’s deteriorating boardwalk to Skull Lake, one of the most iconic and historically significant visitor experiences.

The grant is made possible through a partnership between The Conservation Fund and the Expedia Trails Fund, which is launching with 11 inaugural projects and \$4.3 million in grants to improve safety and access at beloved natural destinations across the United States — from Yellowstone’s Paradise Valley and Hawai i’s Kealakekua Bay to natural areas near Seattle and Chicago.

The Skull Lake Boardwalk, a 1,928-linear-foot elevated pathway through cypress forest and blackwater wetlands, has been inaccessible to visitors since the 2007 Bugaboo Fire. Years of exposure to the Okefenokee’s demanding wetland environment have further deteriorated the structure. OSP has closed the trail to ensure guest safety and identified its repair as a top infrastructure priority.

“Skull Lake is one of the most memorable and photographed destinations within Okefenokee Swamp Park,” said Executive Director Kim Bednarek. “This investment ensures that future generations can safely experience the beauty, wildlife, and wonder of the Okefenokee, and helps us preserve an irreplaceable experience.”

The restored boardwalk will replace existing deteriorated sections with wider, fully ADA accessible structures, including approximately 750 linear feet of 8-foot-wide boardwalk, 1,200 linear feet of 5-foot-wide boardwalk, and two 15-foot bridges, all built from marine-grade, pressure-treated lumber with stainless steel hardware

for long-term durability.

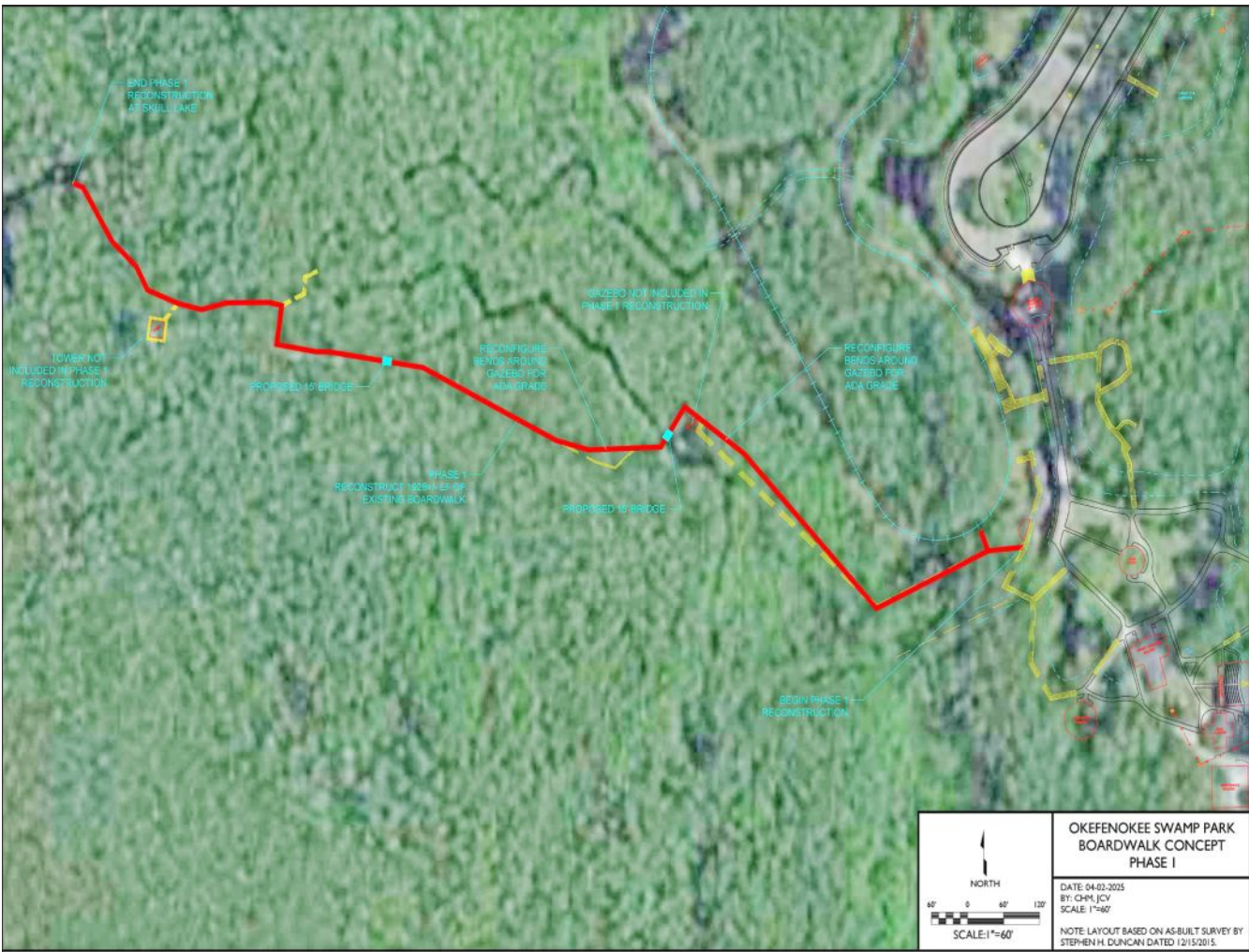
In addition to infrastructure improvements, the project also includes new interpretive signage highlighting the Okefenokee’s globally significant peat ecosystem, rich biodiversity, and unique wildlife-viewing opportunities. Skull Lake holds deep cultural and historical significance. Indigenous cultures are reported to have used the site as a gathering place. The restored boardwalk will provide meaningful access to this landscape for visitors of all abilities, and connect them to the area’s natural and cultural heritage.

“Outdoor recreation and conservation go hand in hand,” said Bednarek. “This project is a testament to what’s possible when partners invest in places that matter — and the Okefenokee is a place that matters to the world.”

The project will be undertaken in close partnership with the Georgia Forestry Commission, which owns the land on which OSP operates. Design and permitting are underway, with construction expected to begin in fall 2026, and project completion anticipated in spring 2027.

The Skull Lake boardwalk restoration is part of OSP’s broader Okefenokee Experience initiative, a \$36 million regional vision to revitalize the park’s Waycross campus, expand educational programming, and position the Okefenokee as a world-class ecotourism destination. The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is currently under consideration for World Heritage Site Inscription.

OSP welcomes more than 150,000 visitors and serves over 10,000 students through field trips, homeschool programs, and science summer camps. The broader Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge draws more than 600,000 visitors per year and generates \$91.5 million in economic impact.



Above is the boardwalk concept plan, and below is the boardwalk prior to renovation.



CMH ER

(Continued from Page 1)

average wait time were in the metro Atlanta area, with Southern Regional Medical Center (Riverdale), Grady Memorial Hospital (Atlanta), and Emory University Hospital Midtown all topping the six-hour mark.

Area hospitals on the longest wait time list are Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital in Albany (4 hours 38 minutes), Tift Regional Medical Center in Tifton (4 hours 29 minutes), Archbold Hospital in Thomasville (4 hours 18 minutes), and SGMC Health in Valdosta (4 hours).

This new analysis conducted by Compare the Market, using publicly available hospital performance data compiled from CMS reporting datasets via HospitalStats.org, showed that nationally the average emergency room wait time was reported at 2 hours and 42 minutes in 2024.

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In accordance with the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 the Homerville Housing Authority will hold a hearing on Tuesday June 23, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. at the Homerville Housing Authority Central Office located at 58 Crescent Drive, Homerville GA. The purpose of this hearing is to solicit public comment on the Capital Fund program 2026 Annual Plan and Five Year Plan. This hearing is open to the citizens of Homerville. Any citizen with a physical disability or other special need may contact the Housing Authority at (229) 242-4130 ext. 103 to make arrangements to arrange transportation. In addition, effective with the publication of this notice, the Capital Fund Program 2026 Annual Plan will be available for public review prior to the Public Hearing at the Housing Authority main office.

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