



Muscogee (CREEK) Nation

Executive Office

March 13, 2023

Representative Lynn R. Smith
Chairperson, Natural Resources and Environmental Committee
House of Representatives
State Capital Room 228
Atlanta, GA 30334

Subject: Natural Resources and Environment Committee Hearing on HB-71, Okefenokee Protection Act

Honorable Rep. Lynn R. Smith,

As the Principal Chief of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and the other Natural Resources and Environment Committee members for taking the time to hear our comments on HB 71 – the Okefenokee Protection Act.

Since before the founding of Georgia in 1733, the Okefenokee Swamp has been an important place for Muscogee (Creek) people. Through events outside the control of any living person, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation now finds itself in the modern state of Oklahoma. While our nation is tied to Georgia in the past, we are united with the Georgians of the present in support of HB-71.

The Okefenokee Swamp is a special place. It is special because of the natural ecosystem found in no other place than southeast Georgia. It is special for many because of its role in Georgia's history and its contributions to the foundations of American history. It is special for a number of reasons to many Georgians. A fact that many of you know and understand.

Through our trust relationship with the U.S. Government and in consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, I declared the Trail Ridge from Hoboken, Georgia, to the St. Marys River, a sacred site. I have attached that letter for the committee's record. HB-71 aims to protect the same area from the same threats with a law written, supported, and passed by the people of Georgia.

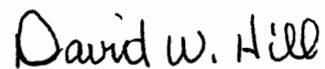
The Trail Ridge and the Okefenokee Swamp are tied together, each contributing to the formation and importance of the other. Both are worthy of the protections the State of Georgia can place on

them with HB-71. They are Georgia's natural wonders, and we want to join you in preserving the area for future generations of Georgians by supporting HB-71.

Over 200 years ago, early Americans wrote how the Muscogee (Creek) people described the Okefenokee Swamp as the most blissful spot on the earth. In 2023, Muscogee people are still drawn to the waters of the Okefenokee. Now, with the simple request to go and visit the Okefenokee Swamp because if you visit, you too will understand the beauty and sacredness of the area.

Again, I appreciate the committee receiving our comments on HB-71. We hope the committee recognizes us as partners in preserving important sites that benefit Georgians of the past, present, and future.

Mvto (Thank you).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David W. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

David W. Hill
Principal Chief