

OPINION

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Seeks comments on proposed mining

Dear editor:

For boating, fishing, hunting and wildlife, the Okefenokee Swamp and the St Marys River are local one-of-a-kind treasures famous nationwide and throughout the world. A new company called Twin Pines Minerals is proposing to operate a heavy mineral sand mining facility on approximately 12,000 acres comprised of six different tracts of land. The first mining phase is the currently proposed project area of 2,414 acres between the Okefenokee Swamp and the St. Marys River in Charlton County, Georgia. The site is located North of Georgia Highway 94, West of Georgia Highway 23, and East of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, St. George, Georgia and Charlton County, Georgia.

During Hurricane Irma, the only industrial pollution spills in the Suwannee River Basin were accidental overflows and emergency releases from the Chemours mine on Trail Ridge in Baker and Bradford Counties.

Do we want to risk that on Trail Ridge in Charlton County, where downhill is either the Okefenokee Swamp or the St. Marys River? The swamp and the river are everyone's recreational resort.

The refuge, directly and indirectly, supports hundreds of jobs and over 600,000 people visit the swamp each year. About \$88 million of annual expenditures can be attributed to the swamp yearly in the form of jobs, tax revenue and economic output. Mining on Trail Ridge could jeopardize an extremely important and iconic places.

Twin Pines Minerals is based in Birmingham, Alabama. People from there warn us of the company's poor environmental record concerning coal mining. At least let's get some independent evaluation of the miners' claims of being good environmental stewards. We need a thorough and sound Environmental Impact Statement. Let's encourage Charlton County commissioners to help with that.

The next Charlton County Commission meeting is Thursday, July 18 in Folkston at 68 Kingsland Drive.

The Army Corps is soliciting comments from the public, federal, state and local agencies and officials; Native American tribes and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps to determine whether to issue, modify, condition or deny a permit for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of an environmental assessment and/or an impact statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

Anyone wishing to comment on this application for a Department of the Army permit should submit comments in writing to the Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, Attention: Ms. Holly Ross, 1104 North Westover Boulevard, Suite 9, Albany, Georgia, 31707, or by email to holly.a.ross@usace.army.mil, no later than 30 days from July 12.

Please refer to the applicant's name and the application number in your comments: Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, 2100 Southbridge Parkway, Birmingham, Alabama 35209, Application Number: SAS-2018-00554. If you have any further questions concerning this matter, please contact Ms. Ross, Project Manager, Albany Field Office at 648-422-2727 or via email at the above address.

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