

the St. Marys River to the Atlantic Ocean—and the OSP would be more immediately impacted than the other entrances by any mining operation that might inadvertently result in increased drainage of swamp waters.

When the water levels get too low at our entrance, we are no longer able to offer our boat rides into the swamp, which--along with seeing alligators in their natural environment along the way—are major attractions for our visitors, along with our other natural and cultural exhibits.

Also, in our stewardship mission for the Okefenokee, any project that might result in toxic contamination of any part of the swamp—even as the result of uncommon and unpredictable weather occurrences, such as hurricanes over deforested areas with exposed toxic heavy minerals--would adversely affect our ability to attract visitors to our area.

Last year, there were over 600,000 visits to the swamp, with a multi-million dollar rural economic development impact to each of the swamp's three primary entrances (Waycross, Folkston, and Fargo) and the State of Georgia, far out weighing the economic impact of several hundred employees at the proposed mining site.

We are very impressed with the due diligence that has been detailed by the Twin Pines Mineral LLC in their application for a permit to mine heavy minerals near the swamp. We note that the costs for their extensive research have been entirely funded by the corporation.

As a physician, I am aware that new, potentially life-changing medications are developed and extensive studies funded by private pharmaceutical corporations with initial reports of great benefits and few adverse effects. But before these medications are allowed to be prescribed to our patients, they undergo additional and independent rigorously-controlled studies by the FDA.

Sometimes, the independent research confirms the findings of the initial industry-funded research. This is a win-win situation for our patients and the drug companies. But other times, the independent research uncovers additional adverse effects that were not anticipated, identified or risk-quantified by the industry-funded studies, and approval of the medication is not granted.

After considerable deliberation, the Okefenokee Swamp Park, Inc. neither opposes nor supports the proposed mining project, until further independent study is performed.