

2019's Worst Offenses Against GEORGIA'S WATER

OKEFENOKEE SWAMP, ST. MARYS AND SUWANNEE RIVERS

Proposed 2,400-Acre Titanium Mine Threatens Signature Landscape of Georgia

INTRODUCTION:

Twenty years ago when chemical giant DuPont proposed mining titanium dioxide ore near the Okefenokee Swamp, opposition to the plan was so strong—from local environmental groups all the way up to the Secretary of the Interior—that the company ultimately abandoned its plans. Now, like a monster in a horror film returning from the dead, a new proposal to mine near the largest blackwater wetland in the United States is on the table. Twin Pines Minerals, LLC has asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) for environmental permits that will allow the company to destroy 587 acres of wetlands and 1.4 miles of streams to strip mine on some 2,400 acres of land located within four miles of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. The long-term health of the Okefenokee and the rivers it feeds now hang on the decisions of these federal and state agencies.

THE WATER BODY:

The Okefenokee Swamp is a signature landscape of Georgia. Covering 438,000 acres, it is considered the largest blackwater wetland in North America and virtually all of it—some 630 square miles in Charlton, Ware, Brantley and Clinch counties as well as Baker County in Florida—is protected as the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. It is home to a dizzying array of wildlife, with more than 400 species of vertebrates, including 200 varieties of birds and 60 kinds of reptiles. From the swamp flow the St. Marys River to the east, and the fabled Suwannee River to the southwest. These rivers and the swamp are popular tourist and recreation destinations. A U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service report estimated that the National Wildlife Refuge hosts some 650,000 visits annually and generates some \$60 million in revenue annually while creating 750 jobs in Georgia and Florida. In addition to supporting local economies, each year the swamp also provides ecological services like storm protection, water quality, commercial fishing habitat and carbon storage that are worth as much as \$125,000,000.

THE DIRT:

In the 1990s when DuPont proposed mining along Trail Ridge, the sand ridge bordering the swamp on the east, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt urged DuPont to abandon its plans, telling reporters:

