



“Titanium is a common mineral, while the Okefenokee is a very uncommon swamp.” The fight ended with DuPont abandoning its plans and the permanent protection of some 16,000 acres of land originally slated for mining.

Fast forward 20 years and the Department of Interior is now greasing the skids for mining by classifying titanium as a “critical mineral” for the country’s economy and security.



In other words, in today’s political climate, don’t look for a white knight from the Interior Department riding in to stop the ill-conceived mining plan.

Meanwhile, the documents Twin Pines submitted to federal and state regulators are sorely lacking in information about how much ground and surface water the mine will use as and how the mining will impact the hydrology of the area as the company digs 5,000 square-foot ditches to an average depth of 50 feet in pursuit of the mineral.

What details are available in the company’s permit applications show that the company would withdraw groundwater from the Floridan aquifer that underlies the swamp—the very same water that helps maintain water levels within the swamp.

During the public comment period that ended in September, more than 20,000 people submitted their views to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). Among the entities providing letters of concern were both state and federal agencies.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) told the Corps, “there is potential for this project as proposed to cause adverse effects to water quality and...wildlife dependent on aquatic systems.”

Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD) wrote, “We feel it is inappropriate and premature to close the project comment window when such notable elements of the environmental documentation for this project have not yet been made available.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expressed concerns about the mining taking place in habitat for the federally protected indigo snake and gopher tortoise.

If permits are approved by the Corps and EPD, it will open 2,424 acres to mining in the near term, but Twin Pines’ long range plans call for mining some 12,000 acres.

WHAT MUST BE DONE:

Because Twin Pines’ applications lack critical information about mining practices, water withdrawals and discharges and hydrological impacts, the Corps must deny the wetlands permit for the project and EPD must deny the surface mining permit and water withdrawal permits. Before moving forward, a thorough study of the project’s impacts, known as an Environmental Impact Statement, must be required.

Top: Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, an Alabama-based mining company, has submitted applications to secure state and federal environmental permits to allow the company to mine for titanium on 2,400 acres of land near the Okefenokee Swamp. Above: The Okefenokee Swamp is North America’s largest blackwater wetland. It is home to more than 400 species of vertebrates, including a large population of American alligators.



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