

This week, the Okefenokee Protection Alliance introduced [a new website](#) and began urging citizens to write Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, asking him to protect Southeast Georgia's international natural treasure.

“Just as we have reached out to folks to call on the Corps, we are reaching out to folks to call on Governor Kemp because it is not just the Corps that has a say,” says Rena Peck, Executive Director of the Georgia River Network. “We want Governor Kemp to stand with his constituents and all the citizens in Georgia who are concerned about the mine and ask the Corps for an Environmental Impact Statement.”

The Okefenokee has a long history of support from Georgia leaders. A similar proposal to mine near the Swamp in the 1990s was stopped when Gov. Zell Miller and others spoke out against it; in the 1970s, W.S. “Bill” Stuckey, Jr. who represented the 8th District of Georgia in Congress, successfully fought to designate portions of the swamp as a National Wilderness Area.

Stuckey, now a resident of the Georgia coast, said recently, “I’m hopeful that Governor Kemp will step in to protect the Okefenokee Wilderness and stop the mine.”

OPA member organizations and federal agencies have expressed concerns that the mine could alter the hydrology of the area and impair the movement and storage of water within the swamp, the St. Marys and Suwannee rivers and the Floridan Aquifer.

This could lead to an increased risk of uncontrollable wildfires and impact access to the swamp for boating, fishing, birding, hunting and photography. Pollution from the mining operation could also impact the health of groundwater and surface water.

The Floridan Aquifer, which lies beneath the swamp, is the water source for all of south Georgia and most of Florida, and feeds many springs in the region, which are already adversely affected by overpumping. Thus, anything that affects the swamp or the aquifer could have far-reaching consequences.

“As the largest blackwater swamp in the United States, the significance of the Okefenokee can not be overstated,” says Alice Keyes, Vice President of Coastal Conservation for One Hundred Miles. “It is recognized through many designations and determinations, but the characteristics that are worthy of the recognitions and that bolster the local economy continue to be threatened.”

Citing the Okefenokee's status as a Wetland of International Importance and the largest blackwater swamp in the U.S., OPA's member organizations have rallied citizens around the cause of saving the swamp.

Over the course of two recent public comment periods, the Corps received more than 60,000 comments, the vast majority of which urged the Corps to deny a permit to Twin Pines for the controversial and potentially destructive mine.

“Momentum and grassroots opposition continue to build,” adds Hunt.