

2020's Worst Offenses Against GEORGIA'S WATER

OKEFENOKEE SWAMP

Federal Rule Change Opens Door to Mine Threatening One of Georgia's Natural Wonders

INTRODUCTION:

For nearly two years Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, an Alabama-based mining company, has petitioned the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to secure federal permits allowing the company to destroy extensive wetlands and streams on a 12,000-acre site near the Okefenokee Swamp. The Clean Water Act required such action. During this process, Twin Pines, federal and state agencies, citizens and other stakeholders had the opportunity to submit information and opinions to the Corps in support of or in opposition to the proposed mining operation. Tens of thousands of citizens did so, voicing legitimate concerns about the titanium mine's potential impacts on the Okefenokee. But earlier this year when changes to the Clean Water Act went into effect, those voices were effectively muted. The rule changes removed from federal protection 376 acres of wetlands on the proposed mining site and eliminated the need for Twin Pines to secure federal permits. Now, only Georgia leaders have the ability to stop this dangerous proposal or ensure that if mining takes place, it will be done without harming one of Georgia's seven natural wonders.

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, 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 flora and fauna, with more than 600 species of plants and 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

