



provides ecological services like storm protection, water quality, commercial and recreational fishing habitat and carbon storage that are worth as much as \$125,000,000.

### THE DIRT:

When the Trump Administration announced it would repeal and replace a 2015 federal rule defining what streams, rivers, lakes, marshes, wetlands and other water bodies were protected under the Clean Water Act, Georgia Water Coalition members warned of the dangers of weakening those definitions. Now, the new Trump Administration rules, which were supported by Georgia's top legal officials, have come home to roost.

With the rule changes adopted earlier this year, 376 acres of land on the proposed footprint of the Twin Pines mining site that were previously considered "jurisdictional wetlands" are no longer afforded protection under the Clean Water Act.

The federal hurdle removed, if Twin Pines can now secure necessary state permits, mining operations can commence.

That could spell tragedy for the Okefenokee Swamp. The mine is sited along Trail Ridge, a rise of land along the swamp's eastern border that serves as a geological dam, regulating water levels in the swamp. The company plans to dig 5,000 square-foot ditches into the ridge at an average depth of 50 feet in pursuit of titanium and other minerals, and is expected to pump water from the Floridan aquifer—groundwater that likewise helps sustain swamp water levels.

During the now defunct permitting process, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told the Corps, "there is potential for this project as proposed to cause adverse effects to water quality and...wildlife dependent on aquatic systems."

Likewise, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the 402,000-acre Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, has argued that even slightly lowered water levels in the swamp could have irreversible effects and told the Corps that Twin Pines' studies asserting that no harm would befall the Okefenokee were flawed.

Yet like the 60,000 comment letters that the Corps received from citizens opposed to the mine, these voices have been muted by the rule change.

### WHAT MUST BE DONE:

With federal oversight removed, it is now up to the state to protect the Okefenokee from this dangerous mining proposal. As Gov. Zell Miller did in the 1990s when DuPont proposed a similar mine near the Okefenokee, Gov. Brian Kemp must take a stand against the mine. At a minimum, before issuing any state permits to Twin Pines, the state should study the potential cumulative impacts of mining on Trail Ridge to ensure that the Okefenokee is not harmed.

*Top: With changes to the federal Clean Water Act and the removal of federal permitting oversight, Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, is poised to begin digging for titanium if it can secure necessary state environmental permits. Above: A great egret stalks the shallows of the Okefenokee Swamp. The swamp is home to 200 varieties of birds, including federally protected red cockaded woodpeckers and wood storks. Mining along Trail Ridge could impact water levels within the swamp. Photos by Joseph Kelly/Two Nine Productions*



### For More Information Contact:

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