

RESOLUTION
URGING PROTECTION OF OKEFENOKEE SWAMP
CITY OF SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

WHEREAS the Okefenokee Swamp is Georgia's greatest natural wonder, beloved by many generations of Georgians all around the state, including residents of the City of Savannah; and

WHEREAS the Okefenokee is protected by the largest National Wildlife Refuge east of the Mississippi, is home to over 1,000 species of plants and animals, many of which are threatened or endangered, and is an International Dark Sky Park; and

WHEREAS because of these attributes, the Okefenokee receives hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, including many from Savannah, who contribute over \$65 million annually to the local economy, making it a key economic driver for south Georgia; and

WHEREAS it's unparalleled beauty and ecological importance have made the Okefenokee a candidate to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site, reserved for the most incredible natural places on the planet; and

WHEREAS not only is the Okefenokee loved by many generations of Georgians, including Savannah residents, it is also a vital carbon sink due to the swamp's peat soils that sequester over 400 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. Any activity that increases drought in the swamp will release massive amounts of greenhouse gases like methane and CO₂ and accelerate climate change, and will have vital consequences for all people, including Savannah residents who are especially susceptible to increased frequency and intensity of climate change-driven storms due to its coastal exposure; and

WHEREAS the Okefenokee is facing a grave threat in the form of a proposal by Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, an Alabama mining company, to strip mine for titanium along the eastern hydrologic boundary of the swamp; and

WHEREAS leading independent scientific experts from UGA and elsewhere around the United States have stated that the mining proposal poses an existential threat to the Okefenokee in three primary ways: lowering the swamp's water level, making the southeastern portion of the swamp 3 times more likely to suffer drought conditions and experience landscape-level fires, with devastating consequences for the swamp's plants and wildlife; generating saline clouds from wastewater management that could drop over 1.2 tons per day of salt into the swamp, damaging the freshwater ecosystem upon which the swamp and its wildlife depends; and producing noise and light pollution from the mine that will greatly disrupt the visitor experience and damage the sustainable economy that such visitation supports; and

WHEREAS TPM has no experience whatsoever with developing and operating titanium mines, and is proposing the use of mining techniques never before used on this scale; and

WHEREAS Georgia law requires mining projects to be consistent with local land use, protective of adjacent natural resources, and to use sound engineering principles; and

WHEREAS the independent scientific analysis conducted to date confirms that the mining proposal violates such provisions of state law; and

WHEREAS TPM and its executives have been bad actors with a terrible track record in the development of this project and the operations of affiliated projects, including misrepresentation of material facts; violation of Georgia law governing exploratory drilling; and damage to wetlands at its recycling facility in Florida; and

WHEREAS the titanium that TPM seeks is found elsewhere in southeast Georgia and the southeastern U.S., and the largest miner of titanium in North America is on record saying that there is no need to mine for titanium at the Okefenokee due to the plentiful supply elsewhere; and

WHEREAS the State of Georgia, through the Environmental Protection Division of the Department of Natural Resources, has sole and exclusive permitting authority over the TPM project, and in January 2023 released a draft Mining Land Use Plan for the project; and

WHEREAS over 100,000 written comments in opposition to the project were submitted to EPD, and several hundred citizens and experts testified at two public hearings against the project, with only 1 testifying in favor; and

WHEREAS the scientific community has criticized EPD for using faulty data in its analysis of the mine, which they argue has covered up the true threat that the mine poses to the Okefenokee;

WHEREAS for the last two years, members of the Georgia legislature have introduced the Okefenokee Protection Act, which would prohibit the issuance of any future permits for mining on Trail Ridge along the Okefenokee's edge, with the bill obtaining 94 cosponsors in the Georgia House in the 2023 session (including several from the Savannah area), an unprecedented level of bipartisan support for a land protection measure; and

WHEREAS state-wide polling conducted in fall 2022 found that nearly 70% of Georgians wanted Governor Kemp to protect the Okefenokee from mining; and

WHEREAS the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation process will examine external threats like TPM's project, which could jeopardize the Okefenokee's listing;

WHEREAS, the Okefenokee is too important ecologically and economically to the citizens of Savannah, the state, the nation, and the world to be placed at such grave risk, and instead should be protected for the benefit of present and future generations.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Mayor and members of the Savannah City Council request the following actions be taken:

- (1) Governor Kemp should instruct Georgia EPD to DENY all permits for the TPM mining project.
- (2) The Georgia Legislature should pass the Okefenokee Protection Act during the 2024 state legislative session, and Governor Kemp should sign the bill.

RESOLVED this 25th day of January, 2023.

VAN R. JOHNSON, II
MAYOR

ATTEST:

MARK MASSEY
CLERK OF COUNCIL