

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-\_\_

A Resolution for the Okefenokee Swamp and against the Twin Pines Minerals strip mine  
by the Board of County Commissioners, Atkinson County, Georgia

*UNFINISHED DRAFT of 2024-02-22; DO NOT REDISTRIBUTE*

**WHEREAS**, Atkinson County values waterways, as evidenced by its Comprehensive Plan, “Goal 1 : NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES –Protect and preserve the unique natural and cultural resources of Atkinson County and the Cities of Pearson and Willacoochee including soils, rivers and lakes;” and

**WHEREAS**, the citizens of Atkinson County value the natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities afforded by the Okefenokee Swamp and the Suwannee River and their watersheds such as fishing, swimming, boating, and birding; and

**WHEREAS**, the Okefenokee Swamp is a unique natural, cultural, and economic treasure known worldwide: the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has identified it as an Aquatic Resource of National Importance, it is a National Natural Landmark and a National Wilderness Area and it has been designated a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty for the conservation of wetlands, and it is frequented by citizens of Atkinson County; and

**WHEREAS**, a bipartisan coalition of members of Congress support a bid by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to move the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge from a tentative list to become a full UNESCO World Heritage Site; and

**WHEREAS**, the Okefenokee Swamp is the headwaters of the St Marys River and of the Suwannee River, famous in song worldwide, around 85% of the Swamp is in the Suwannee River Basin; and

**WHEREAS**, the Suwannee River is frequented by citizens of Atkinson County; and

**WHEREAS**, Twin Pines Minerals LLC (TPM), of Birmingham, Alabama, proposes to strip mine for titanium dioxide on Trail Ridge which is within three miles of the Okefenokee Swamp, and;

**WHEREAS**, upon information and belief, TPM proposes to use drag lines, which is a method never used for such mines on Trail Ridge in Georgia or Florida, and TPM has not met the burden of proof in demonstrating that such a mine would not contaminate the Okefenokee Swamp or the Floridan Aquifer, or possibly even lower the water level in the Swamp or the Aquifer;

**WHEREAS**, lowering the water level in the Okefenokee Swamp would reduce the areas that can be reached by boat both in the Swamp and on the Suwannee River, and it would increase fire risk in and around the Swamp causing a direct health hazard to communities and citizens nearby;

**WHEREAS**, strip mining, which upon information and belief, is very likely to disturb and distribute mercury previously deposited through the air from Coal Power Plants in Georgia, will cause harmful toxicity to wildlife and humans if it gets into the Swamp and the Suwannee River; and

**WHEREAS**, upon information and belief, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA-EPD) is attempting to do the kind of extensive review that the Army Corps usually does, and on February 9, 2024, GA-EPD issued draft permits for the TPM applications related to the proposed mine, for surface mining, water withdrawal, and air quality, all with a 60-day comment period; and

**WHEREAS**, the current TPM permit applications are for a demonstration site, yet they own hundreds more acres they plan to mine ever-closer to the Okefenokee Swamp, as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wrote in 2019, “The initial project location is the farthest that mining activity would be from the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) boundary and the Okefenokee Swamp. Any additional mining that occurs within the 12,000-acre permit area would be closer to the refuge. The northwest boundary of the permit area is within a half mile from the refuge boundary and 400 feet from the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp.”

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Atkinson County Board of Commissioners:

1. Oppose the Twin Pines Minerals LLC (TPM) strip mine near the Okefenokee Swamp, as well as any other strip mine permit applications within fifteen miles of the Swamp.
2. Request the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to resume oversight of the mine site, and to resume permit review including preparation of a full Area-Wide Environmental Impact Statement with public hearings, public comment, and independent third-party review.
3. Request the Georgia Environmental Protection Division or the Georgia legislature to implement a moratorium on all mining permits for five years or until the legal ramifications become clear of the legal cases involving Army Corps oversight of the mine site and similar locations near the Okefenokee Swamp.
4. Request that if the Georgia Environmental Protection Division will not reject the permits, that it should thoroughly review them to at least the same degree and extent as a thorough U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Area-Wide Environmental Impact Statement with public hearings, public comment, and independent third-party review.
5. Request the Georgia legislature to pass appropriate legislation to prevent such strip mines in the future, whether near the Okefenokee Swamp or near any of the blackwater rivers in the Suwannee River Basin in Georgia, including the Suwannee, Alapaha, Alapahoochee, Willacoochee, Withlacoochee, and Little Rivers, as well as the Satilla and St. Marys Rivers.
6. Request the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to move the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge from a tentative list to become a full UNESCO World Heritage Site, and support a bill by a bipartisan coalition of members of Congress in support of that move.

**PASSED AND ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS, ATKINSON COUNTY, GEORGIA**, this 14<sup>th</sup> day of March 2024.

By:

Pake Lill

Attest:

Nina Y. Lott