

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**

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