

RESOLUTION NO. 2021-20

RESOLUTION IN OPPOSITION OF STRIP MINING NEAR THE OKEFENOKEE SWAMP

WHEREAS, the Okefenokee Swamp is a unique natural, cultural, and economic treasure known worldwide and is the headwaters of the St. Marys River and the Suwannee River; and

WHEREAS, approximately 85% of the Okefenokee Swamp is in the Suwannee River Basin and the Suwannee River and is frequented by citizens of Valdosta who value the both of these natural resources for water quality and habitat protection; and

WHEREAS, the Valdosta Mayor and Council have demonstrated their commitment toward water quality and waterway recreation and cleanliness by spending approximately \$100 million on sanitary sewer system improvements and by participating in many paddles and cleanups on local rivers and creeks; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council have further demonstrated their commitment to water quality and waterway recreation by passing Resolutions on April 5, 2018 which supported the Withlacoochee and Little River Water Trail and the Alapaha River Water Trail, both organized by WWALS Watershed Coalition, Inc. (WWALS); 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 they have no experience in titanium mining; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

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; and

WHEREAS, strip mining, which 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, TPM is still under a Florida Consent Order for a range of infractions at Chemours mine sites in north Florida, including letting wastewater escape, not doing required water quality testing, and not doing required reporting; and

WHEREAS, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA-EPD) has five permit applications from TPM related to the proposed mine, for which the GA-EPD is attempting to do the kind of extensive review that the Army Corps usually does; 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.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Valdosta Mayor and Council:

1. Oppose the Twin Pines Minerals LLC (TPM) strip mine near the Okefenokee Swamp, as well as any other strip mine permit applications within ten miles of the Swamp.
2. Request the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to reverse their decision to abandon 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 to implement a moratorium on all mining permits until the legal ramifications become clear of the District Court overruling of the 2020 Clean Water Act changes.
4. Request the Georgia Environmental Protection Division to reject the TPM permit applications.
5. 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.
6. 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.

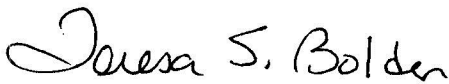
PASSED AND ADOPTED BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL OF VALDOSTA, GEORGIA, this the 11th day of November, 2021.

CITY OF VALDOSTA, GEORGIA



Scott James Matheson
Mayor

Attest:



Teresa S. Bolden
City Clerk