

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1011

December 20, 2021

Michael Connor
Assistant Secretary
Army for Civil Works
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314

Dear Assistant Secretary Connor:

I am writing to ask the Army Corps (Corps) to reconsider the October 14, 2020 jurisdictional determination issued to Twin Pines Minerals, LLC. Since 2018, Twin Pines, an Alabama-based mining company, has been seeking permission to operate a heavy-mineral sand mine adjacent to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The October 2020 jurisdictional determination removed federal protections from nearly 400 acres of wetlands next to the refuge, where the mine is proposed, for the first time in decades.

Established in 1937, the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is one of the largest remaining intact freshwater ecosystems in the world, one of America's most pristine and biodiverse areas with over a thousand species, and the largest National Wildlife Refuge in the eastern United States. The Okefenokee Swamp is a National Park Service-designated National Natural Landmark, a designation awarded to "the best examples of biological and geological features" in the country. Internationally, the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is a "Wetland of International Importance" under the United Nations Ramsar Convention and a candidate for designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is also critically important to Georgia's economy and its communities. With around 600,000 annual visits, the Refuge's visitation numbers are comparable to other iconic national parks like Big Bend, Redwood, and Denali. These visits support over 750 jobs, \$17.2 million in annual employment income, \$5.4 million in annual tax revenue, and \$64.7 million in annual economic output per year, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The cultural and historic resources of the Okefenokee are significant, with Native American heritage spanning thousands of years. In fact, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation is currently working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recommend the Okefenokee Swamp to the National Register as a Traditional Cultural Property based on its associations with the cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

The Twin Pines proposed mine threatens the environmental, cultural, and economic integrity of the Okefenokee. Independent experts have expressed concerns that the mining process and accompanying groundwater withdrawals could substantially alter the swamp's hydrology and release toxic contaminants into the swamp and nearby rivers.

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Due to these risks, the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Georgia Department of Natural Resources all have expressed serious concerns about the mine, as did elected officials from downstream communities in Georgia and Florida. The proposal also garnered more than one hundred thousand individual comments to state and federal officials.

Due to the unique and irreplaceable nature of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, its significance to Georgia and the Nation, and recent federal court rulings invalidating the Navigable Waters Protection Rule, I urge your agency to reconsider the October 2020 jurisdictional determination. By bringing this project back within federal review, the Corps will ensure that the Okefenokee Refuge receives the protection it deserves.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

CC:
David Cooper
Chief Counsel
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Debra Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior