

Twin Pines Minerals resubmits application for mining near Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

BY MARLA OGLETREE

In February, Twin Pines Minerals (TPM) pulled its mining application, but has recently resubmitted a new 219-page proposal in hopes to receive a permit for a “demonstration project.”

The new proposal states the company plans to scale back on the amount of acreage to be mined in the first phase, decreasing from 2,414 acres to 898 acres. The longterm plan is to mine 12,000 acres near the refuge.

“Calling it a demonstration project at 900 acres seems like a big deal,” stated Ricky Leroux, Sierra Club Communications Coordinator.

Even with the decrease in size, wildlife and river organizations are not convinced the demonstration will prove the mining will not harm the swamp. The national non-profit American Rivers added the Okefenokee and St. Marys River to the Top 10 Most Endangered Rivers list due to the potential damage from mining.

“The major issue right now is that Twin Pines has not supplied enough information for the Army Corps of Engineers to make a decision,” stated Bill Sapp, Senior Attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, “The controversy surrounding the application is whether to require the Environmental Impact Statement.”

Residents and wildlife organizations feel the company is using the re-submittal as a backdoor to avoid providing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

On January 1, 1970, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was passed

making the EIS necessary for major environmental projects – such as mining. The statement also plays a large roll in decision-making.

“This law made all agencies consider dire effects on the environment,” said Sam Collier, Okefenokee Issues Leader for the Sierra Club, “We need to be absolutely sure it doesn’t harm the swamp.”

The common issue with the proposed mining is the lack of information given by TPM.

In a letter published in the *Herald* in September of 2019, Steve Ingle, president of Twin Pines Minerals, stated, “I have come to realize that regardless of what science says, people are going to accuse us, or the Corps, of putting the swamp in danger. Frankly, I’m tired of talk. We’ve stepped up and are proving our case. For those who are so sure we’re going to harm the swamp, it’s time to step up and prove it.”

However, Sapp says, “In this type of situation, the burden of proof falls on the applicant to prove the mining will not damage the Okefenokee. We just don’t think the Corps has enough information.”

Also in February, the company released a statement stating the studies have shown the Okefenokee would remain safe through the mining process.

The release said, “Top scientific experts have completed comprehensive studies to confirm the viability of Twin Pines’ plans. One such expert is Dr. Robert Holt, nationally recognized hydrologist and professor of geology and geological engineering at the University of Mississippi. He

recently completed a set of groundwater models that showed the proposed mine area is conducive to Twin Pines’ innovative dragline mining plan and will meet the strictest environmental regulations.”

The findings of these reports were sent to the Army Corps of Engineers and Georgia Environmental Protection Division. However, fellow experts are not certain the reports are so straightforward.

“The company’s attempt at a hydrology study has been criticized by experts as unclear, incomplete, and problematic,” stated Sapp, “When you’re dealing with a natural resource so precious to Georgians and the rest of the country, you have to be extra careful.”

The company plans to re-spread the sifted soil at the conclusion of the project. Ingle has also stated TPM will replant long-leaf pines (trees native to the Okefenokee) in an effort to help heal the mined property and in the long-run leave it healthier than when they first began. But even with this promise, many feel too much still hangs in the balance.

“If the mining dries out the peat, even a little bit, the fires are going to be terrible,” shared Collier, “Our stance is they should go through the full EIS. It seems like a no-brainer.”

The comment period for this application, originally set for Monday, April 13, has been extended to Tuesday, May 28. A virtual public meeting will also be held Wednesday, May 13 from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. The meeting will consist of a formal presentation



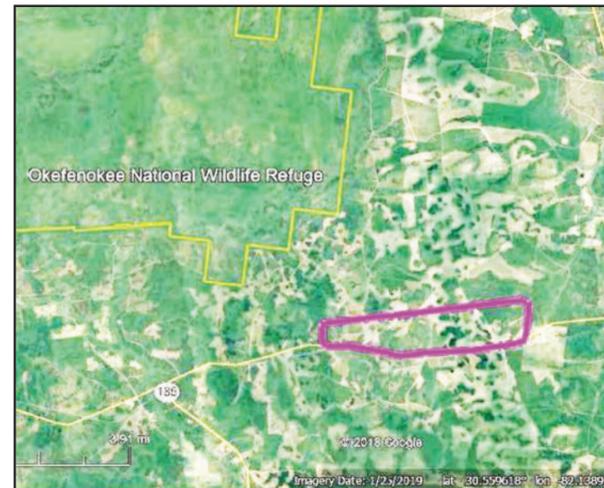
PICTURED IS THE MINE SITE FOR TWIN PINES.

followed by a question and answer session. The meeting will be recorded and published to the Savannah District public website.

If you would like to attend and to receive the meeting link and security code, send an email to: CESAS-SpecialProjects@usace.army.mil with the subject line “RSVP for 13 MAY Public Meeting TPM” and include your full name, email address, and contact phone number with area code.

To submit a question to be answered during the meeting, send an email to CESAS-SpecialProjects@usace.army.mil with the subject line “Question for Public Meeting TPM” and include your full name and contact phone number. Questions will be answered during the Q&A time in the order they are received, with emailed questions answered first – as time allows.

Repeated questions will be combined under the same topic in order to answer as many questions as possible. All questions received by email prior to the meet-



PICTURED IS THE MAP OF THE 12,000 ACRES TPM HOPES TO ONE DAY MINE FOR HEAVY MINERALS.

ing, or in the chat during the meeting, will be incorporated into the public record.

In the meantime, concerned citizens can submit a public comment by emailing CESAS-SpecialProjects@usace.army.mil or by sending a letter to Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, Attention: Ms. Holly Ross, 1104 North Westover Boulevard, Suite 9, Albany, Georgia, 31707.

“If they’re so sure they’re not going to hurt

the swamp, then let’s make sure with the EIS,” said Collier, “We’re not opposed to mining, just make sure it’s safe.”

Do your part for Charlton

Fill out your info for the 2020 Census

Georgia is falling behind as far as submitting census information goes, and it could cost the county gravely.

It’s easy – here’s how: Complete your census questionnaire online at <http://www.2020census.gov> or, if you don’t have internet access, call 844-330-2020 by phone to complete your questionnaire.

Important funding is dependent on this information, so it is up to us to do our part.

MEMBER OF THE GEORGIA PRESS AND NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATIONS



© Charlton County Herald Inc.

BOE convenes for meeting

BY MARLA OGLETREE

The Charlton County Board of Education held its monthly meeting Tuesday, April 14.

During the meeting, Superintendent Dr. John Lairsey shared the financial report, stating the board is 75 percent of the way through the Fiscal Year and in good shape. The board has also covered 62 percent of anticipated expenditures, but the board is also saving money on maintenance with schools closing early. Members of the faculty are monitoring all

buildings to make sure they remain in shape. The board currently has a five million dollar fund balance, which Dr. Lairsey says, “is a healthy balance”.

Also during the meeting, Dr. Lairsey alerted the board on the CARES Act Funding for schools. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act was signed into law by President Donald Trump and will provide funding and flexibilities for states to respond to the COVID-19 emergency

SEE ‘BOE MEETING’ ON 2

FPD releases crash reports for March

The Folkston Police Department released the following motor vehicle crash reports for the dates of March 5 through March 30.

March 5, vehicle one, a 1995 Toyota Supra, driven by William Michael Arnold, was traveling south on GA Highway #121. Vehicle two, a 2018 Ford Explorer, driven by Glenda Gail Todd, was traveling south on GA Highway #121 ahead of the Toyota Supra. The Ford Explorer slowed in order to turn left on Iver N. Allen Road. The Toyota Supra struck Ford Explorer in its rear.

March 8, vehicle two, a 2018 Ford F150, was parked in a parking spot in the Harvey’s parking lot, unoccupied, facing south. Vehicle one, a 2006 Dodge 3500 SLT, driven by Stephen John Grenda, was facing north and began backing south out of its parking spot and struck the Ford F150 in the passenger rear end. Driver, Stephen John Grenda, of the Dodge 3500 SLT then left the scene of the accident.

March 11, vehicle two, a 2019 Dodge Challenger was parked facing north in the D. Ray James Prison Ice Facility parking

lot. Vehicle one, a 2016 Lexus IS 200T, driven by Dominique Lashawn Hughes, began backing south and struck the Dodge Challenger.

March 17, vehicle one, a 1995 Chevrolet Suburban, driven by Jasean Deandre Morris, was parked in front of vehicle two, a 2017 Nissan Altima, facing west. The Nissan Altima was parked facing south. The Chevrolet Suburban began backing and struck the Nissan Altima in the right rear.

March 23, vehicle one, a 2015 Cadillac ATS Luxury, driven by Terry Lee

SEE ‘FPD REPORTS’ ON 2