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EPD should reject permit to mine near Okefenokee

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On behalf of the generation of individuals and families today and tomorrow, we urge the state EPD to reject the permit request now before it to allow a mining operation in close proximity to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. No risky man-made endeavor should be allowed anywhere near this vastly diverse 630 square mile wetland.

The life or death of the permit request, batted back and forth among various government agencies, is now in the hands of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division in Atlanta. We ask that it tread carefully here, very carefully.

The focus of concern is the permit request submitted by Twin Pines Minerals. Arguing that its process will be harmless to the environment, the Alabama company wants to mine for titanium. Its president, Steve Ingle, says the operation would benefit Charlton County by providing much needed jobs for its residents. And that is in addition to the tax revenue it will generate for the community and the state.

Science indicates otherwise. In fact, not one, not two, but some 40 scientists have warned against approving the mining operation. Opponents include two expert hydrologists with the University of Georgia. They say what the company is planning will have a negative effect on the water level of the world-famous swamp. Water flow is the lifeblood of the Okefenokee. Tamper with it and more than the level will be adversely impacted.

The Okefenokee Swamp is a national treasure protected for decades by state and federal governments on behalf of — and at the expense of — the taxpayers of this great state and nation. Why do anything that could potentially upend what public dollars have successfully sheltered from intrusion all these years? To do so would be reckless.

Other criticisms have been lobbed at this permit request, including a claim of a lack of need for the mineral to be mined. Frankly, we know little about that and will forego comment. We do know, however, that it says more than a mouthful when dozens of scientists go on record as fearing the consequences of the potential environmental degradation a mining operation could cause.

It is more than enough reason to join scientists, government officials and spiritual leaders in pleading for the rejection of this permit request.