

Media Release

For Immediate Release

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St. Marys Riverkeeper Opposes Mining Operation on Trail Ridge

St. Marys Riverkeeper (Riverkeeper) is a 501(c)3 private environmental advocacy organization formed in 2016 charged with protecting the St. Marys River. Riverkeeper represents the four counties (Camden and Charlton in Georgia and Nassau and Baker in Florida) and many communities sharing stewardship responsibilities for the St Marys River. The St. Marys River is the focus of the organization's work to improve water quality in areas designated as swimmable and fishable; ensure the river thrives for future generations through resiliency projects and community partnerships; promote low-impact development in a fast-growing area; seek solutions to water quality issues; and advocate against industrial threats.

The St. Marys River forms the border between Southeast Georgia and Northeast Florida. Arising from the Okefenokee Swamp, the river flows 130 miles to the Atlantic Ocean emptying at Cumberland Island National Seashore. Bookended by two national treasures, our St. Marys River is pristine from Swamp to Sea, but a river is only as healthy as its headwaters and tributaries.

St. Marys Riverkeeper opposes the Mining Land Use Plan Permit submitted by Twin Pines Minerals, LLC (TPM) for Saunders Demonstration Mine in Charlton County, application number SAS-2018-00554-SP-HAR, on the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp and St. Marys River. The company has failed to present compelling evidence that its operation will not irrevocably harm the region's delicate ecosystem. The St. Marys River watershed is too important to risk for experimental and untested mining methods.

Riverkeeper's concerns include but are not limited to: water level monitoring, process water management, water withdrawal, and reclamation plan. To read all of Riverkeeper's concerns, see our Public Comment on our website or attached to this email.

TPM has a poor record for environmental stewardship in Georgia and Florida all initiating legal action against the company during the past six years. While processing tailings at two of the four Chemours titanium mines on Trail Ridge in north Florida, TPM spilled wastewater during Hurricane Irma. Because of that and other infractions, TPM is still under a Florida Consent Order. As a result of their prior experience, there is an expectation for a Land Use Plan that provides an outline of handling environmental catastrophes such as spills, berm breaches, or and other adverse effects. In Georgia, a Clean Water Act civil suit brought against Twin Pines-affiliated companies of Georgia Renewable Power, LLC and Greenfuels Energy LLC in 2019, resulted in a \$625,000 settlement for the plaintiffs. Toxins were being illegally discharged into the air and streams resulting in fish kills and compromising wetlands.

On November 22, 2022, the Secretary of the Interior wrote a letter urging the Georgia EPD to protect the Okefenokee Swamp and stated that "The Department will exercise its own authorities to protect the swamp ecosystem and will continue to urge our State and Federal partners to take steps under their own authorities to do the same." The U.S. EPA and Fish and Wildlife Service have also filed letters of opposition. The evidence and the number of organizations and people in opposition indicate Georgia EPD should reject all state applications from TPM and fulfill their mission to protect and restore Georgia's environment by taking the lead in ensuring clean air, water, and land.

St. Marys Riverkeeper is a nonprofit environmental organization devoted to protecting and enriching the St. Marys River through water quality monitoring, education, and advocacy.