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Tribune & Georgian

Chairman calls for special grand jury

Commissioner's declaration comes days after grand jury subpoenas Spaceport Camden records



Scott J. Bryan
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Days after a Camden County grand jury subpoenaed Spaceport Camden records, Camden County Board of Commissioners Chairman Ben Casey said he's asked for a special grand jury to investigate the county's controversial \$12 million aerospace economic development project.

According to documents obtained by the Tribune & Georgian, the grand jury subpoena for "production of evidence" included a demand for records related to spaceport-related vendors, contracts, invoices, payments, deliverables, activity reports and communications between Spaceport Camden administrators and vendors.

The documents were required to be delivered to the Camden County Superior Court Grand Jury at noon Wednesday. The Clerk of Superior Court received the subpoena March 8, and on March 9, it was signed by Camden County Board of Commissioners' county clerk, Katie Bishop.

What do you think?
What do you think about Camden County Board of Commissioner Chairman Ben Casey's call for a special grand jury to investigate Spaceport Camden? Email Letters to the Editor to publisher@tribune-georgian.com. Letters must include the writer's name, address and daytime phone number.

See **JURY**, page 7A

RIVER TOUR

St. Marys Riverkeeper hosts educational tour

Sam Rowland
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St. Marys Riverkeeper recently invited 11 guests out to the Trader's Hill Boat Ramp in Folkston, Ga., for a two-hour motorboat tour of the St. Marys River to teach people about its unique nature, its relationship to the Okefenokee Swamp, and the risks they say the Twin Pines Minerals titanium mine proposal poses to both.

It was a beautiful, partly-cloudy day on the St. Marys River. It was pleasantly warm, and the water and winds

See **TOUR**, page 7A

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Cumberland Island National Seashore to add 137 acres

Sam Rowland
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The National Park Service was given \$8.7 million by Congress to buy the Nature Conservancy's 137.3 acres of land on Cumberland Island. This item was requested by U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., and U.S. Rep. Buddy Carter, R-Ga., as part of the 2023 Omnibus Appropriations Act from December.

The Nature Conservancy is an international environmentalist nonprofit formed in 1951. According to Anne

Flinn, its director of land protection in Georgia, between 1997-99, the Nature Conservancy bought almost 1,108 acres of private land on Cumberland Island in four phases. The original intent was to sell it all to the National Park Service.

Phases one through three went as planned, and 934 acres were transferred to the park service. But, according to Flinn, Congress didn't allocate enough funds in its 1999 appropriations to purchase all

See **ISLAND**, page 7A



Submitted photo
The National Park Service was awarded \$8.7 million from Congress to add 137.3 acres to the Cumberland Island National Seashore.

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INSIDE TODAY

What's going on in Camden?
Check out page 3A to learn about free and charitable upcoming events throughout Camden County.

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MIKE WILKIE

St. Marys City Council, Post #3

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ARREST REPORT

The following felony arrests were compiled from incident reports, jail records, warrants or affidavits obtained from Camden County and state law enforcement agencies from March 7-13. All persons are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

■ Jeffery Scott Cook, 38, of St. Augustine, Fla., was arrested March 7 by the Camden County Sheriff's Office and charged with theft by conversion.

■ Taea Jadesha Joyner, 24, of St. Marys, was arrested March 8 by the St. Marys Police Department and charged with cruelty to child-second-degree-criminal negligence/cause excessive physical/mental pain and

criminal damage to property-second degree.

■ Andrew David Wall, 22, of Woodbine, was arrested March 8 by the Kingsland Police Department and charged with possession of methamphetamine and probation violation.

■ Randall Douglas Creel, 50, of Folkston, was arrested March 10 by the Camden County Sheriff's Office and charged with theft by taking.

■ Amanda Knox, 39, of Homeland, was arrested March 10 by the Camden County Sheriff's Office and charged with probation violation.

■ Amanda Rene Bailey, 37, of Jacksonville, Fla., was arrested March 9 by the Camden County Sheriff's

Office and charged with fugitive from justice.

■ Otis Jamal Clemons, 30, of St. Marys, was arrested March 11 by the St. Marys Police Department and charged with two counts of possession of a schedule IV controlled substance and possession of a schedule II controlled substance, and one count apiece of purchase, possess or have control of any controlled substance in schedule III, IV or V and manufacturing/deliver/distribute/administer/sell/possess with intent to distribute controlled substance.

■ Robert Price, 34, of Gainesville, was arrested March 11 by the Kingsland Police Department and charged with probation vio-

lation.

■ Amanda Sheffield, 40, of Kingsland, was arrested March 11 by the Kingsland Police Department and charged with probation violation.

■ Zarion Christopher Smith, 40, of St. Marys, was arrested March 11 by the St. Marys Police and charged with two counts of possession of a schedule IV controlled substance and possession of a schedule II controlled substance, and one count apiece of purchase, possess or have control of any controlled substance in schedule III, IV or V and manufacturing/deliver/distribute/administer/sell/possess with intent to distribute controlled substance.

■ Gregory Allan Crews, 53, of Woodbine, was arrested March 12 by the Kingsland Police Department and charged with two counts of terroristic threats and acts.

■ Patricia Wiggins Martin, 50, of St. Marys, was arrested March 13 by the Camden County Sheriff's

Office and charged with transactions in controlled substance or marijuana in or within 1,000 feet of school.

■ Denim Quarterman, 17, of Florida, was arrested March 13 by the St. Marys Police Department and charged with theft by bringing stolen property into state.

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Lawmakers debate mining near Okefenokee Swamp

Dave Williams

Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA – It was jobs versus protecting a national environmental treasure Tuesday when a Georgia House subcommittee held a two-hour hearing on a proposed titanium mine near the Okefenokee Swamp.

Environmental advocates urged lawmakers to pass legislation banning surface mining along Trail Ridge near the Okefenokee. That's where Alabama-based Twin Pines Minerals is seeking state permits to mine titanium oxide.

House Bill 71 failed to make last week's Crossover Day deadline for bills to pass at least one legislative chamber to remain alive for this year's General Assembly session. However, the measure boasts 91 cosponsors among the 180 House members and could be resurrected by being attached to another bill that is still before the legislature.

Rep. Darlene Taylor, R-Thomasville, the bill's chief sponsor, urged her colleagues on the House Natural Resources & Environment's Resource Management Subcommittee to give the measure a chance.

"The Okefenokee is one of the largest remaining intact freshwater ecosystems in the world," she said. "It cannot be replaced. A miscalculation cannot be corrected."

Rhett Jackson, a professor of hydrology and water resources at the University of Georgia, said the proposed mine would remove enough water from the drought-sensitive swamp to render it more susceptible to wildfires.



Submitted photo

Lawmakers are debating a bill that could ban surface mining near the Okefenokee Swamp.

Other supporters touted the Okefenokee's economic benefits as a popular tourist attraction. Michael Lusk, refuge manager at the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, said the swamp draws about 400,000 visitors a year, is responsible for 955 jobs, and generates \$24 million in annual economic impact.

The bill's opponents said the mine, too, would provide an economic boost to an economically distressed area of the state. Twin Pines CEO Steve Ingle, in video testimony, said the mine would create 100 to 200 full-time jobs.

"Our county greatly needs large quantities of high-paying jobs," said Drew Jones, a Charlton County commissioner. The commission has passed a resolution supporting the project.

Ingle said Twin Pines has pledged to restore the site with indigenous pines after the mining activity is completed.

"There's no way we'd do anything to expose us to

regulatory action or put our investment at risk," he said.

The bill's opponents also brought a hydrologist, Sorab Panjaj, who told the subcommittee the amount of water the mine would remove from the swamp would be negligible and do no environmental harm.

Bill Sapp, a senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center and chairman of the Okefenokee Protection Alliance, said it's the General Assembly's duty to "protect and preserve" the Okefenokee and not leave it to the discretion of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), which is currently reviewing Twin Pines' mining land use plan for the project.

But Lewis Jones, a lawyer representing Twin Pines, said it's the EPD's job to evaluate permit applications and approve them only if a project will not harm the environment.

"This rigorous process is only going to result in a permit if it can be shown mining can be done safely," he said.



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Submissions

Readers may submit items of community interest, such as upcoming events and engagements, for publication at no charge. High resolution photos also can be submitted.

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