

Company getting pressure to pledge against mining near swamp

By Ty Tagami
Capitol Beat News Service

People who want to protect the Okefenokee delivered a petition with 26,000 signatures Wednesday to a company they fear might mine near the swamp, asking for a permanent pledge not to.

Last year, conservationists assembled about \$60 million to buy a stretch of land adjacent to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge that was owned by a company with plans to harvest titanium dioxide, a mineral used to whiten everything from

toothpaste to snacks. The Conservation Fund may have neutralized one threat by acquiring Twin Pines Minerals' land, but environmentalists say it was not the only property on Trail Ridge that could invite mining.

They have been targeting Chemours, which mines materials such as titanium dioxide to feed its global chemicals business and is active in the region.

"We know that interest in mining Trail Ridge persists even though the Okefenokee Swamp is too precious to risk for an abundant mineral that

is used to make paint, toothpaste and Oreo filling white," Jennette Gayer, director of Environment Georgia, said in a statement Wednesday.

Her group and others delivered their petition to Chemours on Wednesday, Earth Day.

The company seemed unmoved.

A spokeswoman said a prior Chemours statement on the topic still stands.

In that 2022 statement, the company said it was committed to responsible mining with "thorough planning and design" to protect sen-

sitive features, such as wetlands and groundwater. It said Chemours had no plans to mine on Trail Ridge because it had mineral flowing from enough other sites in Georgia and Florida to satisfy demand "well into the 2030s."

The statement also said Chemours had no intention of doing business with Twin Pines for five or 10 years, which became moot after the purchase by conservationists last year.

That absence of a new commitment disappointed Josh Marks, president of Georgians for the Okefenokee.

"What has been so frustrating is that they want to preserve the option to extract and process minerals from the Okefenokee for toothpaste and junk food," he said by email.

He pointed to a 2024 article in The Current in which the owner of other land near the Okefenokee supported the idea of Chemours mining nearby.

Marks said Chemours' 2022 statement about safely mining is outdated given a study last year by the University of Georgia. Researchers there found more evidence that

the Okefenokee is linked to an underlying aquifer and that drawing water from the aquifer would effectively draw water from the swamp.

Twin Pines Minerals had contended that its plans to draw an average of 1.4 million gallons of water a day from the aquifer would not harm the swamp.

Environmentalists say lowering the aquifer would wreak havoc on a rich ecosystem that is among the best preserved blackwater wetlands in the world and home to endangered and threatened species.

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Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)

Seeking Forgiveness With Grace

Forgiving others for perceived wrongdoing against us can sometimes be a difficult undertaking. Something we often find harder, however, is seeking forgiveness from others. This can be tough for many reasons, ranging from a fear we will not receive forgiveness from someone we value our relationship with to feelings that someone is not deserving of our apologies to begin with. In seeking forgiveness, we must first make attempts to rectify our wrongdoings with sincere intention. We must also seek to understand the effect of our actions in these cases, ultimately striving to become better individuals in owning up to a mistake and learning from it. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ emphasizes the necessity of this, essentially telling his disciples that they must forgo even the presentation of a gift at the altar (a significant ritual in Jewish tradition during His time) in order to seek out the forgiveness of someone they have wronged. Notably, Christ points out one way in which the Lord is served through our service to others, and that service, here, is simply acknowledging and reconciling a wrong with those we affect. We are absolutely taught to forgive, though we also must remember to seek forgiveness with grace, as Christ teaches.

-James Stone

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