GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
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The Okefenokee Needs Our Voice

GAFW is excited to announce we, along with many of our partner organizations, have joined the **Okefenokee Protection Alliance**.

GAFW agrees "to make meaningful contributions to OPA's efforts to protect the Okefenokee Swamp and its rivers from any action that jeopardizes the wildlife, wilderness values, or ecological and hydrological integrity of the swamp through physical or legislative changes."

The Okefenokee Needs Our Voice! Please take advantage of this opportunity to save the wild heart of Georgia – the Okefenokee Swamp!

On January 19, 2023, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division released Twin Pines Minerals LLC's draft Mining Land Use Plan (Draft Plan) and opened the 60-day public commenting period – allowing concerned citizens and Swamp advocates to voice their concerns and opposition to Twin Pines' mining proposal. Additionally, Georgia EPD is allowing comments through two scheduled virtual public meetings on February 21 and 23 at 6 PM EST.

Please register for one of the two meetings here. *There is a capacity of 1,000 people per meeting, and it is expected that they will both reach capacity.*

More information on the Draft Plan can be found **here**. Please submit your comments on the Draft Plan and your support for the Okefenokee Swamp via **email**.

Or via mail to:

Land Protection Branch
4244 International Parkway, Atlanta Tradeport, Suite 104
Atlanta, GA 30354

Need help crafting your comments?

Please see the Okefenokee Protection Alliance's Okefenokee Talking Points **here** or more information below.

Additionally, you can request an Okefenokee Toolkit from OPA partners, **the Georgia Water Coalition**.

The Okefenokee Protection Alliance is a coalition of more than 40 conservation organizations representing millions of members that have joined forces to save the swamp from the proposed Twin Pines Minerals LLC strip mine and other threats that jeopardize the integrity of the Okefenokee Swamp. (You can research OPA's list of **partners** on their website.)

The Alabama-based mining company is attempting to operate an 8,000-acre heavy mineral sand mine at the doorstep of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, a project that would devastate the ecological health of this iconic natural treasure.

The Okefenokee Swamp holds significant economic, ecological, cultural, and historical value to local communities — and this globally treasured resource should be protected from any mining activity. Local residents depend heavily on the Okefenokee Swamp for jobs, food, and quality of life, and visitors from across the world visit the refuge for recreation, birding, camping, and solace.

At more than 400,000 acres, the Okefenokee Swamp is a National Wilderness Area, the largest National Wildlife Refuge in the eastern United States, a Gold-tier International Dark Sky Park, and a National Natural Landmark, a designation reserved for "the best examples of biological and geological features" in the country.

Trail Ridge, the site of Twin Pines' proposed mining operation, is not only ecologically important in and of itself, but also serves as scaffolding for the health of the Okefenokee Swamp. The proposed mine would destroy hundreds of acres of wetlands and uplands, integral to maintaining surface water and groundwater hydrology in this area. Additionally, mining on Trail Ridge would destroy important wildlife habitats.

Twin Pines' proposed mining project has drawn an unprecedented level of opposition. So far, more than 100,000 people from all 50 states and 36 countries have voiced their opposition to the mine. It is critical that those who care about the Okefenokee step up once again and let the EPD know that jeopardizing the Okefenokee is not acceptable.

It is not just environmental, and conservation organizations who are opposed to Twin Pines' risky mining project— local communities, former federal and state officials from both sides of the aisle, independent experts and scientists, and faith leaders have spoken out in favor of protecting the iconic Okefenokee Swamp. A September 2022 poll shows that 72% of Georgians oppose the proposal to mine next to the Okefenokee due to the Swamp's cultural and natural importance.

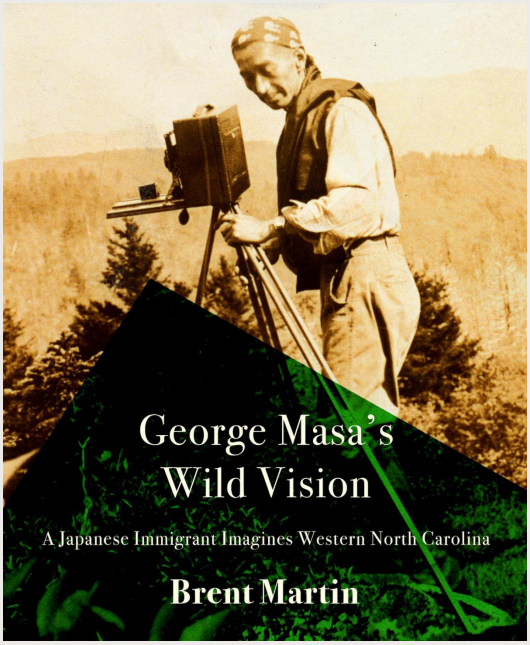
It is critical that all those who value the Okefenokee make their opposition to the proposed mine known now during the comment period. Please show your support for the Okefenokee today!

More information about the concerted efforts to protect the Okefenokee can be found here.

Follow the Okefenokee Protection Alliance on **Facebook** and on **Instagram**.

Accolades

GAFW congratulates advisor Brent Martin and long-time member Janisse Ray on their recent literary awards.



Brent Martin's latest book, *George Masa's Wild Vision,* won the **Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award** and is a finalist for the **2023 Reed Environmental Writing Award**. Learn more about the book and purchase a copy **here**.

Southern Literary Review named Janisse Ray's *Wild Spectacle: Seeking Wonders in a World Beyond Humans* the 2022 Book of the Year. Read the announcement **here.** Additionally, the title earned Columbus State University's **Jordan Literary Prize**. Purchase a copy **here**.

Donate to GAFW Today

Upcoming GAFW Outings

Monday, February 6 - **Len Foote Hike Inn OVERNIGHT** Hike ~5 miles to the sustainable and comfortable State Park facility nestled in the Chattahoochee National Forest and enjoy home-cooked meals, hot showers, fresh linens, an evening presentation, and an educational hike out the next day. Discounted rates for Georgia ForestWatch Members!

Saturday, March 18 - St. Patrick's Day Celebration - Fannin Brewing Company.

Details will be posted soon.

Saturday, October 14 - Save the Date! GAFW Annual Retreat at Red Top Mountain.

Interested in leading a hike or other outing for GAFW? We are searching for additional leaders who are willing to share their favorite parts of the forest. Let us know at **outreach@gafw.org**.

GAFW Outings on Meetup

If this email was forwarded to you, **please register here** to receive GAFW updates.

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Thank You

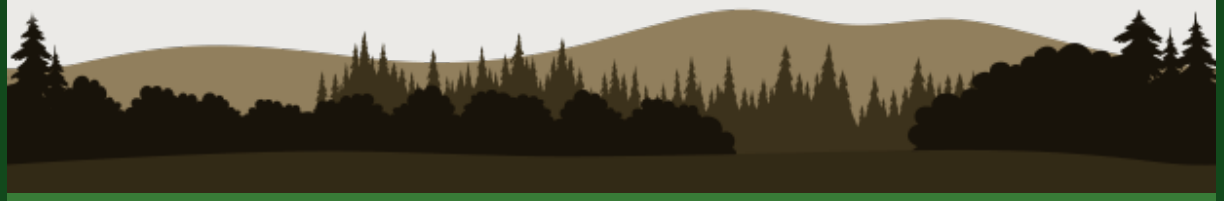
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

Please support our mission by ensuring your **membership is up to date** and providing **additional support** as you are able.

On behalf of our entire national forests in our beautiful state, we thank you for your support.

Our Mission

Our mission is to enhance the health of over 867,000 acres of Georgia's national forest by protecting our forests and streams, advocating for natural processes, and identifying opportunities to improve forest management. Visit **Georgia ForestWatch** (GAFW) to learn more.



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