



To: Governor Brian Kemp
Senator Raphael Warnock
Senator Jon Ossoff
Charlton County Commissioners:
Mr. James E. Everett
Mrs. Alpha Benefield
Mr. Jesse Crews
Mr. Drew Jones
Mr. Lucas "Luke" Gowen

As religious leaders representing a variety of faith traditions and backgrounds, we share a commitment to be good stewards of Creation. Our sacred texts and faith traditions call us to protect the natural resources which have been gifted to us and to love our neighbor by addressing the environmental injustices that impact our communities. When Creation is disrupted by development and industry, both the land itself and the communities who depend on it suffer. As people of faith, our call to seek justice requires us to engage in faithful environmental action.

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge has deep roots in Georgia's culture and is one of the state's Seven Natural Wonders. For generations, Georgians have depended on—and profited from—its continued health. The refuge is in the country's top ten in terms of economic output and has garnered international attention, with the swamp projected to become a World Heritage Site. Furthermore, as the swamp is unique to the environment, it is a uniquely holy and sacred space. It is one of the state's Seven Natural Wonders only because it is one of God's own Natural Wonders and a truly unique expression of God reflected in the natural world.

Unfortunately, the Okefenokee is unsafe and threatened by industry, with Twin Pines Minerals seeking to develop a titanium mine atop the earthen dam that holds the swamp in place. Twin Pines plans to mine roughly 8,000 acres near the refuge's eastern boundary and their operations will eventually come within 400-feet of the swamp. Decades ago, the DuPont Corporation tried to establish a similar mine, to no avail. Since that project was shelved, tourism has steadily increased, and the refuge now records 600,000 annual visits and supports hundreds of jobs. The Okefenokee is also renowned for its biological diversity and provides unmeasured natural value for Georgia as it shelters and supports thousands of species in its cypress forests, pine islands, lily ponds, and blackwater channels. Should mining proceed, the refuge—and the benefits it provides to people and wildlife—could be destroyed, according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Georgia Interfaith Power & Light engages communities of faith in stewardship of Creation as direct expression of our faithfulness and as a religious response to global climate change, resource depletion, environmental injustice, pollution, and other disruptions in Creation.

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division now holds the only permits required for this project to move forward. This project has been uniformly opposed by Georgians, as well as the larger American public. Tens of thousands of people voiced their alarm during recent comment periods. Together, representing faith communities across Georgia, we join our voices in opposition to the titanium mining which would damage Creation and put at risk the wildlife and communities who depend on the swamp's unspoiled habitats.

As people of faith, our values call us to seek justice for our neighbors and care for the Earth. The proposed desecration of the Okefenokee Swamp cannot be permitted. Our faith inspires us to boldly proclaim our opposition to this project as we advocate for just policies and practices that allow for all of Creation to thrive. Stand with us to protect God's Creation by protecting the Okefenokee Swamp and by calling for the rejection of any permits that would allow mining less than three miles from the boundary of the Okefenokee Swamp and refuge.

Signed,

Codi Norred, Executive Director, Georgia Interfaith Power & Light
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Pastor Andrew Thompson, Union City Church
Anton Flores-Maisonet, Friend-in-Residence, Atlanta Friends Meeting
Pastor Antwon Nixon, Mt. Carmel Baptist Church
Rabbi Ari Kaiman, Shearith Israel
Rabbi Ariel Wolpe, Ma" a lot
Rev. Beverly Marshall-Goodell, retired, Smyrna First UMC
Rev. Blair Setnor, Decatur First UMC
Brad Biggerstaff, Local Pastor, United Methodist Church
Rabbi Bradley Levenberg, Temple Sinai
Rev. Brendolyn Boseman, Hudson Memorial CME Church
Brenna Lakeson, Local Minister, Central Outreach & Advocacy Center
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