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OHM Statement on Senate Bill 132

On March 21, the House Rules Committee of the Georgia Legislature substituted language in Senate Bill (SB) 132 that would impose a statewide moratorium on new dragline mining permit applications to the Georgia EPD for three years.

OHM is supportive of a moratorium on mining to protect the Okefenokee Swamp. However, we do not believe that SB132’s moratorium would be a meaningful moratorium with lasting benefits. We are concerned about two key bill provisions in particular:

* First, the moratorium would only prohibit new applications for dragline mining, a type of mining that is not currently utilized by any company in Georgia. Twin Pines has a pending application with GA EPD for a dragline mining permit on Trail Ridge. But even if the bill passes and the moratorium is implemented, it would not affect Twin Pines’ current application for dragline mining or limit other types of mining by Twin Pines or other companies.

* Second, the bill contains a loophole that could allow Twin Pines to avoid the moratorium altogether. Despite a three-year moratorium on new dragline permit applications, the bill would allow for modifications to existing permits or permit applications submitted or granted before June 30, 2024. Therefore, even if SB132 passes, this dangerous loophole could allow them to amend their permit or permit application to include the entire 8,000 acres the company plans to mine.

For more than five years, OHM has worked in good faith with hundreds of community members and coalition partners to prevent mining from harming our Okefenokee Swamp. In response to Twin Pines’ mining application, concerned citizens from across the country have voiced support for a permanent legislative solution, like the one proposed in HB71. Because of this unprecedented enthusiasm, legislators and environmental groups have felt tremendous pressure to act. SB132 is a short-sighted, watered-down bill that is an attempt to trick the public. The swamp is not safe and will not be, even if SB132 passes.

OHM opposes SB132 because it is a meaningless moratorium that will not result in permanent or long-term protections for the Okefenokee Swamp against mining.