



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Washington D.C. 20240



January 15, 2025

The Honorable Brian Kemp  
Governor  
206 Washington Street  
Suite 203  
State Capitol  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Governor Kemp:

As I prepare to leave my post, I wanted to send a letter of hope and opportunity for collaborative solutions to conserve Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. In late October of last year, several local community leaders, adjacent landowners, and employees were gracious to include me in their annual meeting. It was readily apparent how strong the existing partnerships are that are fostering common ground to protect one of America's greatest natural treasures. On behalf of the Department of the Interior (Department), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) stands ready to partner with you and the State of Georgia to protect the Okefenokee Swamp ecosystem and Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge from adjacent mining activities that threaten the hydrology of this globally significant wetland system.

In recognition of the outstanding natural resources that contribute to this freshwater ecosystem that deserves protection, and with support from the public and landowners included within the new boundary, the Service recently completed its administrative process to expand the boundary of the refuge. The boundary adjustment enables the Service to work with willing landowners to explore voluntary acquisitions or conservation easements that will provide lasting benefits to wildlife, nearby communities, and the more than 400,000 annual visitors driving a growing ecotourism economy.

I also wish to reiterate that experts have highlighted that the proposed mine significantly risks the ecosystem and cultural values of Okefenokee. The swamp has received numerous designations, including that of national natural landmark by the National Park Service in 1974, wetland of international importance by the Ramsar Wetlands Convention in 1986, and most recently as a UNESCO world heritage site nominee. The swamp is part of the ancestral homeland of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and is recognized as a significant and important traditional cultural place. Current Tribal members recognize that the Trail Ridge landscape feature, which is included within the proposed mining boundary, was likely used as a travel corridor by their ancestors. Past settlements and burial mounds have been documented on other portions of Trail Ridge and are suspected to exist within the project boundary. Mining on the Trail Ridge feature could irrevocably impact these culturally important resources.

During the comment period for the proposed mine permit, the Service submitted a detailed letter providing a science-based assessment of significant threat of mining activity to the refuge hydrology and surrounding wetland ecosystem. Since the Service submitted its comments, new information has come to light regarding violations by Greenfuels Energy, LLC, and its subsidiaries, including Twin Pines Minerals, LLC. Operation failures near Okefenokee—intentional or not—could cause irrevocable harm to the sensitive ecosystem. We cannot afford that risk.

Collectively, the Department, the State of Georgia, and private landowners have the opportunity to stand together to protect this unique swamp ecosystem within Georgia. I urge you to exercise your leadership and authority as the Governor of Georgia to help us achieve a mutually acceptable solution. I understand that you also believe Okefenokee is a treasure for the people of Georgia, our Nation, and the world. The Fish and Wildlife Service remains committed to working with you to ensure that this place is protected for future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martha Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Martha Williams  
Director