

House Resolution 438

By: Representatives Taylor of the 173rd, Stephens of the 164th, Petrea of the 166th, Parrish of the 158th, Buckner of the 137th, and others

A RESOLUTION

- 1 Creating the House Study Committee on the Okefenokee Swamp; and for other purposes.
- 2 WHEREAS, the Okefenokee Swamp is one of the most outstanding examples of an
3 ecologically intact swamp in North America; and
- 4 WHEREAS, at 438,000-acres, the Okefenokee is North America's largest blackwater
5 wetland, sheltering a vast mosaic of pine islands, cypress forests, and blackwater channels;
6 and
- 7 WHEREAS, the Okefenokee remains one of the world's healthiest large-scale freshwater
8 ecosystems, sheltering diverse habitats and an incredible array of wildlife; and
- 9 WHEREAS, the Okefenokee joined the National Wildlife Refuge System of lands in 1937
10 and is the largest refuge in the eastern United States; and
- 11 WHEREAS, the Okefenokee has been designated as a National Natural Landmark and a
12 Wetland of International Importance (RAMSAR) and listed as a tentative UNESCO World
13 Heritage Site; and

14 WHEREAS, plans for heavy mineral sand mining cover an expanse of roughly 8,000-acres
15 next to the Okefenokee refuge; and

16 WHEREAS, the proposed mining would involve digging 50-foot-deep pits next to the
17 Okefenokee, which, when coupled with groundwater withdrawals from the Floridan aquifer,
18 could alter the hydrology of the area and impair the movement and storage of water within
19 the swamp; and

20 WHEREAS, Trail Ridge, the geologic formation that forms the eastern boundary of the
21 swamp, has long been a target of the titanium mining industry; and

22 WHEREAS, titanium is a common mineral that is readily available elsewhere. Though
23 titanium is used in everything from surgical tools to military equipment, mineral commodity
24 experts expect the minerals that might be obtained here to be used for more pedestrian
25 purposes, such as pigment for coloring things white like paint, plastic, and even toothpaste;
26 and

27 WHEREAS, local residents depend heavily on the Okefenokee Swamp for jobs, food, and
28 quality of life, and visitors from across the world visit the refuge for recreation, birding,
29 camping, and solace; and

30 WHEREAS, the proposed mining project has drawn an unprecedented level of opposition,
31 including at least 100,000 comments submitted to the Environmental Protection Division and
32 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in opposition to the mining proposal and in support of the
33 Okefenokee; and

34 WHEREAS, it is critically important that the state understand the area and associated needs
35 in order to thoughtfully plan for the protection and proper usage of the Okefenokee,
36 including, but not limited to, describing the area it encompasses and its inhabitants and
37 history, adequately planning for water and other resource use, establishing security measures,
38 and identifying options and alternatives for construction and industrial development.

39 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

40 (1) **Creation of House study committee.** There is created the House Study Committee
41 on the Okefenokee Swamp.

42 (2) **Members and officers.** The committee shall be composed of five members of the
43 House of Representatives to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of
44 Representatives. The Speaker shall designate a member of the committee as chairperson
45 of the committee.

46 (3) **Powers and duties.** The committee shall undertake a study of the conditions, needs,
47 issues, and problems mentioned above or related thereto and recommend any action or
48 legislation which the committee deems necessary or appropriate.

49 (4) **Meetings.** The chairperson shall call all meetings of the committee, including at
50 least three, and no more than five meetings. The committee may conduct such meetings
51 at such places and at such times as it may deem necessary or convenient to enable it to
52 exercise fully and effectively its powers, perform its duties, and accomplish the objectives
53 and purposes of this resolution. At least one of the committee's meetings shall include
54 a visit to the Okefenokee.

55 (5) **Allowances and funding.** The legislative members of the committee shall receive
56 the allowances provided for in Code Section 28-1-8 of the Official Code of Georgia
57 Annotated. The allowances authorized by this resolution shall not be received by any
58 member of the committee for more than five days unless additional days are authorized.

59 Funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this resolution shall come from funds
60 appropriated to the House of Representatives.

61 **(6) Report.**

62 (A) In the event the committee adopts any specific findings or recommendations that
63 include suggestions for proposed legislation, the chairperson shall file a report of the
64 same prior to the date of abolishment specified in this resolution, subject to
65 subparagraph (C) of this paragraph.

66 (B) In the event the committee adopts a report that does not include suggestions for
67 proposed legislation, the chairperson shall file the report, subject to subparagraph (C)
68 of this paragraph.

69 (C) No report shall be filed unless the same has been approved prior to the date of
70 abolishment specified in this resolution by majority vote of a quorum of the committee.
71 A report so approved shall be signed by the chairperson of the committee and filed with
72 the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

73 (D) In the absence of an approved report, the chairperson may file with the Clerk of the
74 House of Representatives a copy of the minutes of the meetings of the committee in lieu
75 thereof.

76 **(7) Abolishment.** The committee shall stand abolished on December 1, 2023.