

The House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment offers the following substitute to HR 438:

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

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

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

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

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

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

32 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:
33 (1) **Creation of House study committee.** There is created the House Study Committee
34 on the Okefenokee Swamp.

35 (2) **Members and officers.** The committee shall be composed of seven members of the
36 House of Representatives, consisting of the Chairperson of the House Committee on
37 Natural Resources and the Environment, the member representing District 174, and five
38 members to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Speaker
39 shall designate a member of the committee as chairperson of the committee.

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

43 (4) **Meetings.** The chairperson shall call all meetings of the committee. There shall be
44 no more than five meetings. The committee may conduct such meetings at such places
45 and at such times as it may deem necessary or convenient to enable it to exercise fully
46 and effectively its powers, perform its duties, and accomplish the objectives and purposes
47 of this resolution. At least one of the committee's meetings shall include a visit to the
48 Okefenokee.

49 (5) **Allowances and funding.** The legislative members of the committee shall receive
50 the allowances provided for in Code Section 28-1-8 of the Official Code of Georgia
51 Annotated. The allowances authorized by this resolution shall not be received by any
52 member of the committee for more than five days unless additional days are authorized.
53 Funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this resolution shall come from funds
54 appropriated to the House of Representatives.

55 (6) **Report.**

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

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

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

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

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