



Okefenokee no-mining agreement celebrated

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The Ramsar Administrative Authority in the United States, the Office of International Affairs of the

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, passed on to the Bureau this press release which reports progress in sorting out the proposed titanium-mining dispute near the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, a Ramsar site in the southern state of Georgia.

The press release was issued by Resolve: Center for Environmental and Public Policy Dispute Resolution, Washington, D.C. (<http://www.resolve.org/>).

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Okefenokee No-Mining Agreement Celebrated But Funds Needed to Make it a Reality

FOLKSTON, Ga., Feb. 5- Public officials and members of a group formed last year to study a proposed DuPont titanium mine near the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge today celebrated the signing of a pact that could eliminate the prospect of mining in the area.

The agreement resulted from nearly eighteen months of discussion between representatives of environmental groups, county and local governments, Native Americans, landowners, DuPont and others. The plan signed today will require public and private funds that will be used to permanently retire mineral rights, add acreage to the Refuge, establish an education and research center and provide local governments with economic development support. The funding required to retire the mineral rights and acquire land for the Refuge will be determined more precisely after an independent appraisal under federal appraisal guidelines.

The dispute began in early 1997 when environmental groups and US Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt opposed DuPont's plan to mine titanium ore on some 38,000 acres near the eastern edge of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. They said that surface-mining operations along the Trail Ridge would harm the area's delicate ecosystems, disrupting the flow of underground water on which they depend. Titanium ore is used to make titanium dioxide, a white pigment used in the paper, coatings and plastic industries.

DuPont countered that its activities would not harm the Okefenokee, citing more than 40 years of safe mining operations along the Trail Ridge in Florida, about 40 miles from the proposed Georgia mine. When the controversy escalated, DuPont voluntarily halted all activities related to the project and called for the formation of the study group, known as a "collaborative process."

"On August 5, 1997, I said a common-sense solution was possible with reasonable cooperation from the parties involved. Today's ceremony is a testament to that cooperation," said U.S. Representative Saxby Chambliss, whose district includes the Okefenokee. "I support this proposal, but it's far from a done deal. To make it work, we'll need a coordinated federal, state, and private partnership funding effort for years to come."

"The collaborative process required members to put aside their fears and suspicions and work together," said Suzanne Orenstein, vice president of RESOLVE, the Washington-based firm that moderated the long-running series of meetings. "Thanks to the best efforts of the members, this agreement is now possible. The follow-through to implement the agreement will be equally challenging, but we now have the positive working relationships we need to succeed."

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