

Bradford Commissioners Hear From Alachua Commissioner Hutchinson

July 18, 2019



Kate Ellison addresses the commissioners.

But our [Alachua] County Commission will not allow the Santa Fe River – the sparkling gem that is the best reason to live in North Florida – to be sullied on our watch.

Commissioner Robert Hutchinson

With Commissioner Hutchinson's permission, your historian read the following statement to the Bradford County Commissioners at their meeting tonight, July 18, 2019.

We have said before that property rights might include anything you want, but they do not include putting at risk the Santa Fe River and New River, which belong to the people of Florida and NOT to HPS II Enterprises. This business created to make money for the owners may NOT jeopardize our rivers. It is a fact that all phosphate companies undergo accidents, which include process water spills that kill wildlife, and sinkholes that may pollute the aquifer.

Our own permitting agencies such as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers protect industry at the expense of our water resources. Mining companies may say that they follow the legal aspects of the law, but that does not bring back our ruined rivers.

HPS will not be able to return the Santa Fe and New rivers to their previous states after they pollute them with an accidental spill, which sooner or later is bound to happen.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

We're in a brief window of time that will forever determine the fate of this little piece of paradise. If a few families in Union and Bradford Counties can bully their way into getting a large phosphate mine approved along the New River just upstream from this spot, it will never be the same, and may become unrecognizable.

There will be water quantity impacts as large water withdrawals for the mine continue to suck the upper aquifer dry. There will be water quality impacts as billions of gallons of process water are disposed of with high nutrient loads into an aquatic ecosystem that is already at a tipping point.

The Alachua County Commission, our staff, and advisors know

that this is the most important regional environmental issue of our time. The work we have done – most of it behind the scenes so far – is gearing up for an epic battle with regulatory agencies and local governments.

Advocacy and educational groups – Our Santa Fe River, the HT Odum Springs Institute, the Suwannee-St Johns Sierra Club, and others have laid important groundwork, and they will be asked to step up with even more citizen science and public involvement.

But our County Commission will not allow the Santa Fe River – the sparkling gem that is the best reason to live in North Florida – to be sullied on our watch. The preliminary budget we accept Tuesday (7/9/19) has in it what we need to make this fight real. I'm ready for full immersion, and I hope you are, too.

End of Commissioner Hutchinson's paragraph.

That budget with well over half a million dollars just for HPS II was voted in unanimously Tuesday of last week.