

Fight phosphate rezoning

January 3, 2017



After mining, the land can never be the same. Even the natural drainages are altered.

The Sarasota [Herald Tribune](#) has published this article on phosphate mining. This permit request was slated to be heard at the end of last summer, but was suddenly withdrawn by Mosaic when their disastrous sinkhole and the secrecy that accompanied it was revealed.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

Glenn Compton: Fight phosphate rezoning

Tuesday

Posted Jan 3, 2017 at 6:00 AM

By Glenn Compton, Guest Columnist

The costs of the phosphate industry are steep – pollution, destruction of wetlands and other natural resources, and contamination of surface waters – and are borne by the communities that have the misfortune to neighbor them.

Despite this inherent inequity, Mosaic Fertilizer LLC is now requesting that Manatee County rezone 3,500 acres to expand a phosphate strip mine in eastern Manatee County, known as the Wingate East Mine.

This land is home to wildlife like the wood stork, Eastern indigo snake, crested caracara, Florida scrub jay, bald eagle, gopher tortoise, Florida sandhill crane, gopher frog, Sherman's fox squirrel, Florida burrowing owl, Southeastern American kestrel, Florida mouse, snowy egret, little blue heron, tricolor heron, white ibis, and American alligator. The strip mine will ruin this habitat forever.

There is also concern that future phosphate mine discharges will degrade the Myakka River, generate low dissolved oxygen levels and significantly increase pollutant levels, as phosphate mining activities have the potential to adversely impact downstream waters.

Then there's the matter of leaky phosphogypsum stacks. The phosphate industry has had over 50 years to figure out a way to dispose of its radioactive gypsum wastes, but instead it stores

the waste – 1 billion tons and counting – in stacks throughout Florida. These stacks have been known to breach and create sinkholes, threatening surface waters and the Floridan aquifer. More phosphate mining will result in even more phosphogypsum being created and dumped in Florida.

The phosphate industry's legacy in Florida is appalling and shameful. Approximately 40 percent of the mined-out lands have been left in toxic-waste clay settling areas, according to a report by the Florida Industrial and Phosphate Research Institute.

Since the onset of phosphate mining in 1888, 126,000 acres of toxic slime ponds (clay settling areas) have been constructed throughout Florida. Slime ponds pose a significant threat to water quality and marine life. Nearly 81,000 acres of these slime ponds remain unclaimed, according to a report from the state Department of Environmental Protection's Nonmandatory Land Reclamation program.

Florida has the largest contiguous mined-out area in the United States; hundreds of thousands of acres of land have been disturbed. Damage from the phosphate industry is not limited to Florida and other states that allow mining and processing of phosphate. Fertilizers and phosphates are a major culprit in water pollution nationwide.

The phosphate industry should not be permitted to externalize the costs of its operation in the form of adverse health effects, loss of valuable habitat, restricted future land-use options, reduced water supplies or actual destruction of our drinking water supply.

Unless the public demands action, our land and water resources will continue to be seriously damaged or destroyed, and our health and that of future generations will continue to be placed

in jeopardy.

Mosaic wants to risk the well-being of our drinking water supplies and the health of our environment so that it may profit from its destructive practices. Tell the Manatee County Commission on Jan. 26 to stand up to Mosaic and to deny the request to rezone this land.

Glenn Compton of Nokomis is chairman of [ManaSota-88 Inc.](#), a regional environmental- and health-advocacy organization.