

Mine Poses Threat to River, Aquifer

August 6, 2017



The scene above illustrates what mining does to the earth. No matter what anyone says, this cannot be restored. Photo by Jim Tatum

Today, August 6, 2017, Nathan Crabbe of the [Gainesville Sun](#) has written an excellent editorial condemning the proposed phosphate mine in Union and Bradford Counties. The proposal is by HPS II Enterprises of Brooker, a new company with no experience in mining, and which has already proven to cut corners and flout the rules. They were cited for three violations in 2016. This bodes ill for an industry fraught with inherent dangers and risks such as phosphate mining.

It sometime happens in the phosphate industry that companies choose to commit violations because the fines are often less than the profits gained from the infraction. Mosaic was recently fined almost two billion dollars, but no matter what the fine, the environment cannot be restored nor animals brought back to life.

Three environmental groups, OSFR, St Johns Suwannee North Florida Sierra Club, and Citizens Against Phosphate Mining, are all actively fighting this threat.

Thanks to Nathan Crabbe and the *Gainesville Sun* for telling the truth about this disaster in the waiting.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

Mine poses threat to river, aquifer

The Gainesville Sun editorial board

A massive phosphate mine proposed in Bradford and Union counties would transform the landscape and potentially threaten water resources above and below ground.

The mine, proposed by a partnership of four families in those counties known as HPS II Enterprises, received significant attention and concern last year. But the plan has been flying under the radar since, in part due to a moratorium on mining applications enacted by Union County commissioners as they work on stronger land-use regulations.

But the Bradford County Commission is about to again consider the proposal, starting with a decision that could come Aug. 17

on hiring a consultant to advise about its regulations and the permit. Residents across the region need to start paying attention, as the mine has potential impacts beyond the counties in which it would be located.

Alachua County Environmental Protection Director Chris Bird has called the mine the biggest threat to the Santa Fe River that he has seen in his 30-some years with the county. The mine has been proposed on more than 10,000 acres straddling the New River, a tributary of the Santa Fe.

Phosphate mining is an environmentally destructive practice that requires removing enormous amounts of soil and using immense amounts of water. Wetlands and geologic features formed over millennia would be forever altered or wiped away, with unknown consequences to the aquifer that feeds our region's natural springs and provides its drinking water.

Alachua County residents should be concerned about the downstream impact on the Santa Fe and its springs, which are already impaired despite state designations requiring their protection. Thankfully groups such as the Alachua County Commission, Citizens Against Phosphate Mining and Our Santa Fe River have been raising concerns about the project.

Mine backers say they would employ new techniques that require less water than traditional mining and speed the reclamation of mined land backed into other uses. But already HPS II has given cause for concern due to administrative actions taken by water regulators over its failure to obtain the proper permits for altering wetlands and installing wells.

Environmental worries are further raised by problems with phosphate mines elsewhere in Florida. The world's largest phosphate mining company, Mosaic, agreed in 2015 to pay \$2 billion to settle a federal lawsuit over its mishandling of

hazardous waste in Florida and elsewhere. Last year, a giant sinkhole open at its Polk County site that polluted groundwater with radioactive waste.

Our region's springs and other natural resources face enough threats without creating huge new ones. The region would be better served by protecting and restoring these resources to attract ecotourism, rather than allowing a mine that would provide narrow economic benefits.

Union County commissioners did the right thing in implementing a moratorium, but now need to put strong regulations in place. Bradford County would be well served by taking similar actions, or at the very least hiring outside help to ensure they fully know their options and the mine's impact before moving ahead with considering its approval.