

# **TOKEN FINES FOR UNPERMITTED WELLS**

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## COULD THIS BE NEW RIVER?

Christopher Curry has written an article in the [Gainesville Sun](#) today, March 16, 2016 about the contested phosphate mine in Union and Bradford Counties. It is seen that the phosphate company has operated illegally and received a token fine. It is our understanding that the land size is now 11,000 acres instead of 7,400 as reported in this article.

The company has also been the recipient of a legal order from Suwannee River Water Management District to stop illegal wetland draining and destruction.

This phosphate mine, if allowed to progress, is an immediate and unparalleled threat to the well-being of the Santa Fe River. The proposed mine straddles New River very near its confluence with the Santa Fe. Any contamination in New River would

immediately enter the Santa Fe. It is obvious that the entire segment of the New River within the proposed phosphate area is designated critical habitat for the Oval Pigtoe mussel.



## **Phosphate contractor fined \$400 for unpermitted wells**

By Chris Curry

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The Suwannee River Water Management District has imposed a modest fine on a well construction subcontractor working with a partnership behind controversial plans for a phosphate mine covering several thousand acres in Bradford and Union counties.

A compliance agreement obtained through a public records request shows that the district penalized a Lakeland-based well contractor named Thomas Burke \$400 for building 38 groundwater monitoring wells across several thousand acres in Union and Bradford counties eyed for mining without first obtaining a well construction permit.

The district, which has the legal authority to fine up to \$10,000 per offense per day for violations of state law governing well construction, tacked on an additional \$54 to

cover staff expenses.

The district's compliance agreement noted that Burke has completed "corrective actions" that included retroactively obtaining permits for the wells. In an email, district spokeswoman Abby Johnson wrote that because Burke had no prior enforcement actions against him, the district imposed a \$100 penalty for each of the four permits he should have obtained in advance.

Amanda Wettstein, a spokeswoman for HPS Enterprises, the partnership formed by the four area families behind the phosphate mining proposal, said Burke mistakenly thought he had completed the required paperwork for permits and has "now taken care of the situation." She said the wells were for monitoring groundwater flows and levels, not for pumping.

Becky Parker, a Union County resident with the group Citizens Against Phosphate Mining in Union and Bradford Counties, said for local residents concerned about the potential environmental harm from the mine, the situation shows work is already being done without "one single permit."

Four area families – Hazen, Pritchett, Howard and Shadd – seek to mine phosphate on some 7,400 acres of agricultural land they own in southeastern Union and southwestern Bradford. The New River, a tributary of the Lower Santa Fe River, runs through the area.

Residents who have organized in opposition to the plan hope to get the Union County Commission to place a yearlong moratorium on mining applications while looking at the county's mining regulations. Serving in their dual role as the county's advisory planning board, the Union County Commission has already unanimously recommended moving forward with the moratorium.

Their first vote as the County Commission is scheduled for March 21 in Lake Butler. The commissions of Lake Butler, Worthington Springs and Raiford have each voted to support the moratorium.