

# Union County Prohibits Mining Permits

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Christopher Curry has written an article in the [Gainesville Sun](#) about the moratorium on mining permit applications in Union County on Tues, April 18, 2016.



Union

County mining moratorium approved

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The Union County Commission unanimously approved a one-year

moratorium on mining applications Monday evening, a move commissioners hope will let them catch their breath and take an unrushed look at a proposal for a large phosphate mine spanning several thousand acres in this county and Bradford.

The Union County Commission decided to go the route of a moratorium on mining applications in response to public opposition to plans for a phosphate mine spanning several thousand acres in Union and Bradford counties. The New River, a tributary of the Lower Santa Fe and the dividing line between the counties, runs through the area of timberland, pasture and woods eyed for mining.

The proposed mine has become a hot button issue for the rural county of about 15,000. Supporters say it will bring needed jobs and economic development. Opponents say it will not bear the promised economic fruit for the community and will damage the environment.

The crowd at the Hal Y Maine's Community Center on the shore of Lake Butler was smaller than prior meetings on the mine but erupted in cheers after the vote.

Union commissioners have said the moratorium's one-year temporary halt on applications will give them time to review and potentially revise the bare-bones language on mining rules and regulations in the county Comprehensive Plan. Some of the opponents of the mine want the County Commission to use the temporary halt on any applications to significantly reduce the areas of the county where the Comprehensive Plan now allows mining with a special-use permit.

Monday, Richard Touchstone was one resident speaking against the mine proposal. Touchstone, a farmer whose family has lived in Union County for more than 100 years, said he was worried about the potential impact on the New River and the environment in the

community where his children and grandchildren live. "If it is such a good thing why are so many people against it?" he asked

Four families – Hazen, Howard, Shadd and Pritchett – who own several thousand acres in Union

and Bradford counties are behind the mining proposal. They have formed a partnership, HPS Enterprises, and plan to mine some 7,400 acres combined in Union and Bradford, stripping away trees, vegetation, sand and clay to dig 35 to 40 feet below the surface to extract phosphate.

The landowners and their representatives say the mine will employ new techniques for the industry that do not include slurry pumping system to move mined phosphate to the plant where the phosphate is separated from sand and clay. They say that will cut water use in half compared to traditional mining techniques. In public presentations, they have also said they will not have on site clay settling ponds and will begin reclamation of land back to agricultural uses within 90 days of that area being mined.

At this point, none of the techniques are in use at a mine and opponents, who are concerned about the impact on the environment and the New River, are skeptical whether they would become reality at this site.

After Monday's vote, the conversation will shift toward Bradford County. The Bradford County Commission is scheduled to have a workshop to discuss the mine and hear public feedback at 6:30 p.m. April 29 in the commission chambers at the Bradford County Courthouse, 945 Temple Ave. in Starke. Bradford County Attorney Will Sexton said Monday that, at this point, HPS Enterprises has not applied for any county permits for the mining project.

There is an active permit application to the Florida Department

of Environmental Protection for an environmental resource permit for an area in Bradford County eyed for the mining. Those types of permits are generally required for activities such as filling and dredging and the construction of stormwater management systems. Specific details on the HPS permit application were not available from DEP on Monday.