

April 17, 2023

To: Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners
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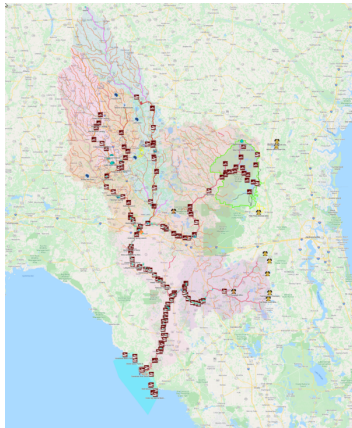


Re: **No phosphate mine waste into recreational lakes, and more transparency**

Dear Chair, Commissioners, and Coordinator,



Five years ago County Commissioners and interested citizens got some good changes to the last mining permit renewal by Nutrien. Some further steps can be taken on transparency and on keeping mining waste out of recreational lakes where it would affect the economy, the viability of local businesses, wildlife, and the creeks and the Suwannee River. Those and other requests are summarized at the end of this letter.



Five years ago (2018)

Back in January 2018, PCS, recently become Nutrien through merger with Agrium, agreed to several things, including: <https://wwals.net/?p=41356>

- “Board Member Harrell Tyree then asked PCS point blank, “Will you file reports [of permit actions] in writing?” PCS rushed to say yes, yes, they would do that. County Attorney Cliff Adams made a note of that.”
- Getting the consultant’s final report in electronic form.
- Getting access to PCS’ water quality monitoring data, through [FDEP’s online Electronic Document Management System \(OCULUS\)](#).

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WWALS is an IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity est. June 2012

WWALS Watershed Coalition advocates for conservation and stewardship of the Withlacoochee, Willacoochee, Alapaha, Little, Santa Fe, and Suwannee River watersheds in south Georgia and north Florida through education, awareness, environmental monitoring, and citizen activities.

Suwannee RIVERKEEPER® is a program and a paid staff position of WWALS.

Further agreement back in January 2018: <https://wwals.net/?p=42975>

- Issue 1- Nutrien agreed to supply the county with copies of the final design of the CTC gyp stack.
- Issue 2- Nutrien agreed to train a small group of county staff to navigate the DEP Oculus website to download the water quality information.
- They also agreed to send a paper report with the water quality information to the county monthly if the county found the Oculus site too cumbersome.

Under section D

1. Nutrien agreed to include PDFs of maps made in Auto Cad.
2. See Issue 2.
3. All tables **within the Hamilton County Annual Report will contain footnotes to denote flow conditions where applicable.**



Five years later (2023)

Did county staff get trained to navigate Oculus to find and evaluate Nutrien's water quality data?

And did county staff request a monthly report instead or in addition to Oculus?

Reports need to be online

It appears that all of Nutrien's reports to the Planning and Zoning Board (PNZ) are in electronic form, as requested back in 2018. <https://wwals.net/?p=61688>

Although after getting the first 100 pages via email, I had to go to Jasper to get the rest on a USB stick. <https://wwals.net/?p=61706> While Jasper is not far for most people in Hamilton County, Nutrien's mining operations are of interest to people farther away, such as in Union and Bradford Counties, where HPS II recently withdrew its phosphate mining application, yet many people expect to see a new application later. It is also interesting as a precedent for other phosphate mines in Florida and elsewhere.

So I request again that Hamilton County put Nutrien's reports online on the county's website. Or, even better, Hamilton BOCC can require Nutrien to put the reports on Nutrien's own website at Nutrien's expense.

Independent third-party water quality monitoring

Back in 2018 I asked whether it would be possible for some independent third party water quality monitoring at water ponds on the mine site. PCS answered that it would be difficult due to the whole site being a hard hat area, and certification being required, but they would inquire. <https://wwals.net/?p=41356> I never heard an answer.

I ask again for independent third-party monitoring of water ponds on the mine site.

And this time I also ask for something that does not require hard hats: independent third-party monitoring of any creeks coming out of active or reclaimed mining areas, including but not limited to Swift Creek, Camp Branch, Long Branch, Roaring Creek, Hogans Branch, and of the Suwannee River both upstream, for example at Roline Boat Ramp, and downstream, for example at Suwannee Springs Launch.

There is precedent in the SRWMD Board agenda for August 13, 2019:

<https://wwals.net/?p=49863>

“Staff recommends the Governing Board authorize the Executive Director to modify and extend the current revenue contract with Nestlé Waters North America beginning October 1, 2019 through the end of the existing permit on May 6, 2028, with annual payment to the District of \$70,000 for monitoring of the Withlacoochee River and Madison Blue Spring.”

“Nestlé Waters North America and Packaging Corporation of America will provide \$70,000 and \$16,480, respectively, toward Withlacoochee River monitoring in this JFA.”

If Nestlé and PCA can pay annually to fund water quality monitoring, so can Nutrien. I ask the Hamilton BOCC to require such funding and such monitoring.

Mine expansion plans

What are Nutrien's plans for further expansion of the mine, now that it has already expanded east across Woodpecker Route, almost at the Suwannee River? Does Nutrien plan to expand into Columbia County? For why that would be a bad idea, see: Nutrien (PCS) mining phosphate and water in Hamilton County and soon in Columbia County? 2018-07-11. <https://wwals.net/?p=45040> Mining water withdrawals in Columbia County would affect the Floridan Aquifer under Hamilton County, as would any effects on Falling Creek, Deep Creek, or other creeks that flow into the Suwannee River, along with any mining wastewater that got into those creeks.

Or does Nutrien plan to follow the phosphate deposits north across the state line into Echols County, Georgia? That would also affect Hamilton County, being upstream on the Suwannee River and still above the same Floridan Aquifer.

Will we learn of such mining expansion next year through a permit application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as happened with expansion in 2019? <https://wwals.net/?p=50092>

If Nutrien already has plans to file such an application, let everyone hear about it now.

If Nutrien has no such expansion plans, let them say so in the April 18th Public Hearing.

Summary of requests

1. I request that Hamilton BOCC require Nutrien not to release clay or any other mining effluent into Lake 14 (also known as Proposed SA14), or any other recreational lake, due to potential adverse effects on local businesses such as Bienville Plantation, on bed tax income to the county, on wildlife, and on creeks and the Suwannee River and the Floridan Aquifer.
2. I request that Hamilton County put Nutrien's reports (whether annual, monthly, or other) online on the county's website. Or, even better, Hamilton BOCC can require Nutrien to put the reports on Nutrien's own website at Nutrien's expense.
3. I request that Hamilton BOCC require Nutrien to pay for independent third-party water quality monitoring of lakes inside the mining area or being used for mining waste, as well as of any creeks coming out of active or reclaimed mining areas, including but not limited to Swift Creek, Camp Branch, Long Branch, Roaring Creek, Hogans Branch, and of the Suwannee River both upstream, for example at Roline Boat Ramp, and downstream, for example at Suwannee Springs Launch.
 - a. If such monitoring of lakes is not possible for whatever reasons, monitoring of creeks and the Suwannee River should be possible and required. There is precedent for this request in the \$70,000 and \$16,480 Nestlé and Packaging Corporation of America have been paying annually for Withlacoochee River water quality monitoring.
 - b. Monitoring data should be readily available to all interested parties.

This includes the public: on the web, not just via USB stick.

- c. At minimum monitoring activities should also be audited annually to ensure that quality standards are met. Results should be published on the web, not just via USB stick.
 - d. A quality assurance and control plan for water quality monitoring should be made publicly available: on the web, not just via USB stick.
4. I request that Hamilton BOCC require Nutrien to state its future expansion plans, whether across the Suwannee River into Columbia County, or across the state line into Echols County, Georgia, or elsewhere. If Nutrien has no such plans, let them say so plainly in the Public Hearing.
 5. I request that Hamilton BOCC require Nutrien to explain who will be responsible for gypstacks and reclaimed areas after Nutrien ceases operations.

Thank you for your consideration.

For the rivers and the aquifer,
John S. Quarterman,
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