

http://www.thebradentontimes.com/news/2011/06/22/environment/piney_point_1966_2011_a_retrospective/

Piney Point 1966-2011: A Retrospective

Published Wednesday, June 22, 2011 2:05 am

by John Rehill <mailto:news@thebradentontimes.com>

MANATEE COUNTY -- As investigators continue to attempt to reconstruct exactly what happened that caused the leaks atop lined gypsum stacks at Piney Point, we take a look at the long and troubled history of the abandoned phosphate mine that has plagued the local ecosystem for decades.

1966- Borden Chemical Company constructs Piney Point phosphate plant; four owners since then.

May 14, 1970- Death of A Bay, St. Petersburg Independent: "BRADENTON-- The specialists agreed yesterday - Bishop Harbor's illness is terminal . . . The fluorides are the final executioners for harbor life. For once the plant life is gone, with it goes the breeding grounds for new generations of marine life. And Bishop Harbor was a nursery for marine life, a mother for Tampa Bay's fish."

Feb. 1984- Fluoride tainted pasture grass may harm cattle, Tampa Tribune: "The fluoride pollution problem was first detected in the 1960's and subsequently reduced. But reports of fluorosis popped up again in the 1970's when phosphate fertilizer plants dramatically increased production."

1989- 23,000-gallon leak of sulfuric acid from a holding tank, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of people, including Port Manatee workers.

1991- Three employees were killed in accidents, and two air releases of sulfur dioxide and sulfur trioxide, creating an acid cloud, made more than 30 people in the vicinity sick. (Bradenton Herald 6/23/92)

June, 1992- FBI seize records at Piney Point parent company in Mulberry

1993- Mulberry Corporation purchases Piney Point facility from Royster Phosphates, Inc. after Royster declares bankruptcy.

Jan. 30, 2001- Mulberry Corp. contacts DEP to say that financial difficulties will prevent it from assuring environmental security at its Polk County and Piney Point plants; abandons plants 48 hours later.

Piney Point aerial photo, Florida DEP

Feb. 7, 2001- EPA jumps in on emergency basis to run operations for two weeks.

Feb. 8, 2001- Mulberry Corporation files for bankruptcy.

Feb. 21, 2001- DEP takes over with initial \$4 million in state emergency funds, most of which is needed to pay the electric bill to keep water pumps and water treatment devices working.

Nov. 2001- DEP authorizes emergency discharges into Bishop Harbor following Tropical Storm Gabrielle; 10 million gallons of partially treated wastewater released to prevent total collapse of dikes.

Jan. 2002- Agency on Bay Management forms task force to develop alternatives to discharging partially treated wastewater from site.

July 2003- State Rep. Alexander, "We could end up with a multimillion dollar cleanup cost that may well end up on the taxpayers," he said. "There's the potential that some of the companies could not close the stacks they have, and we'd be in a mess."

Feb. 2004- State stops the dumping of waste-water from Piney Point phosphate plant into Tampa Bay over a four year period. In all 1.1 billion gallons of water laden with high levels of nitrogen and ammonia was discharged into Bishop Harbor creating a algae bloom, that presented a danger to aquatic life.

2005-2009 – \$140 million project is undertaken to reclaim the abandoned mine for “beneficial use.” Gypsum stack dikes were lined with 80 millimeter high-density plastic so that dredged material and spoilage from expansions and maintenance at Port Manatee could be disposed of.

May 11 2011- Reported leaks from ruptures atop a lined gypsum stack where the owner HRK Holdings LLC allowed Port Manatee's dredging material to be placed. The ruptures leaked millions of gallons a day for weeks.

May 29 2011- State officials at The Department of Environmental Protection allowed discharges, from the giant gypsum stack, to guarantee structural integrity. The runoff, contaminated with the heavy metal, cadmium, as well as high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen, made its way to Bishop Harbor, part of the Terra Ceia Aquatic Buffer Preserve.

Sources: St. Petersburg Evening Independent; Tampa Tribune; St. Pete Times; The Bradenton Herald; Florida DEP