

# **Talking Points Against the Proposed PCS Phosphate Open Pit Mining Expansion Permit to Destroy Over 2,400 Acres of NC Wetlands**

## **Background/Overview**

- This is the largest wetland impact and fill proposal in North Carolina history, by far.
- Allowing PCS to destroy the wetlands, streams, tidal creeks and brackish marsh in its preferred alternative will result in significant degradation of the Pamlico River and South Creek. This translates into irreversible damage to the environment as well as to the economically important commercial and recreational fisheries.
- Between the proposed mining that would destroy 2400 acres of wetlands and the more than 1260 acres of wetlands that are currently being impacted, the lower Pamlico watershed will lose 5500 million gallons of floodwater storage capacity (USEPA estimates, 2001). That's three days worth of water storage for the entire flow of the Tar River at Greenville.
- The wetland, stream and buffer impacts are so massive in the company's preferred alternative they have asked the state for relief from certain mitigation requirements.
- The Army Corps of Engineers has stated in the DEIS that there are alternatives that do more to protect the Pamlico River and South Creek and allow PCS to mine profitably.

## **Threat to Fishing Industry**

- This isn't just about harming the environment. This is about harming jobs, culture and a way of life for many of us in Beaufort County.
- In 1996 Beaufort County commercial fisherman generated nearly 5 million dollars. In 2002, that amount declined to \$2.2 million. Much of this decline is due to a diminishing population of commercial fish and water quality and habitat degradation.
- Portions of the area PCS wishes to mine will destroy federally designated Essential Fish Habitat for bluefish, summer flounder, shrimp, red drum, snapper, and grouper.
- In fact, approximately 75% of commercially and recreationally viable fish and shellfish species spend all or a portion of their lives in the estuaries and primary nursery areas, the same type of areas PCS wants to mine.
- PCS' preferred alternative would dig up more than 38,000 feet of streams and 70% of existing stream channels, many of which drain to Primary Nursery Areas.
- The federal and state governments have recognized the importance of protecting all types of wetlands, even those that may be dry on the surface part of the year, to protect water quality, provide flood control, provide habitat for commercial and recreational fish and shellfish species, and to act as a buffer from storm surges.
- Levels of toxic metals, such as cadmium, chromium, zinc, and arsenic are found anywhere from 10 to 500 times greater in PCS reclaimed areas in comparison to a natural site. These metals are highly toxic to aquatic and terrestrial life.

## **PCS Wants us to Rely on Hollow Promises**

- PCS will not be mitigating (or offsetting its impacts to wetlands) in the area immediately surrounding the mine.

- In the DEIS, PCS repeatedly asks to mitigate less than what the Corps and EPA recommends.
- This company does not have a strong track record. PCS has only reclaimed 14% of the greater than 7700 acres it has mined over the last 40 years.
- After its mining damages the Pamlico River and South Creek and its tributaries, PCS will not be able to put things back the way they were. State and federal biologists agree with the Draft EIS, which acknowledges a complete destruction of habitat in the mine areas.

### **What the Corps Should Do**

- PCS should be required to provide adequate buffers between its mine and the Pamlico River, South Creek and its tributaries and permanently protect those buffers for the future.
- No mining or the subsequent reclamation practices should be allowed that could result in the release of cadmium and other toxic substances known to be present in the mine fill into the environment. Furthermore, the state should require extensive, long-term groundwater monitoring to ensure that any toxic release will be identified.

### **Beaufort County's Future**

- PCS will eventually run out of phosphate to mine in Beaufort County. When it does, Beaufort County residents deserve to have the continued benefit of its other economic engines – fishing, tourism, and housing industries preserved.

***\* Created by the Pamlico-Tar River Foundation and the Southern Environmental Law Center.***