

Duette mine to become park?

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Herald Staff Writer

EAST MANATEE — It will take until the end of 2009 for a phosphate company to restore 70 acres it mined near Bunker Hill Road in Duette.

Duette residents are hopeful the property, which once echoed with the sound of Mosaic Co.'s giant excavators ripping ore from the earth, can eventually offer recreational opportunities, including fishing and boating on a man-made lake and picnicking.

The tract, which Mosaic still intends to donate to Duette residents for a park, is north of State Road 62, west of State Road 39 and just to the east of the new section of Bunker Hill Road, said Diana Youmans, a Mosaic spokeswoman, on Monday.

"It's something we need, would take care of and enjoy," John O'Connor, vice president of the Duette Community Association, said Monday. "It's a question of

PARK TO 6A

TODAY'S FORECAST, 8A

Scattered
T-storms
High 90,
Low 74



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PARK FROM 1A

opportunity. The opportunity is there for us to benefit from a mining operation and provide recreation for our residents."

Another aspect that seems to be going in Duette's favor is that reclamation lakes have not produced fish that are poisoned from radiation or pose any significant health risks, said Brian Birky, public and environmental health

research director for the Florida Institute of Phosphate Research, on Monday.

The institute, a non-industry-funded organization, sampled bass, bluegill, tilapia, shellcracker, speckled perch and catfish from 10 mined and unmined lakes in 2002 and discovered that the levels of radioactivity in fish flesh were no different, regardless of source lakes, Birky said Monday.

"The only difference we found was the level of mercury was higher in natural lakes," he added.

Lake Manatee, an unmined, man-made impound, was one of the unmined lakes used for comparison, Birky said.

"The mercury levels in fish from Lake Manatee were among the highest, second only to Lake Walk-in-Water, an unmined, natural lake in Polk County," he continued.

Although the phosphate-mining process does release radiation, Birky said the dose from visiting such a park in Duette would be extremely small if the reclamation is done correctly.

If people spent time at the park every day for a year, then the radiation levels wouldn't equal that of one chest X-ray, Birky said.

The biggest issue facing the citizens of Duette seems to be

who will pay for the desired boat docks, baseball, basketball and softball fields and restrooms for the proposed Bunker Hill Park.

The mining company has only committed to donating the reclaimed land, Youmans said.

"I think the county is big on parks," Felicia Tappan, president of the Duette Community Association, said Monday. "Whether they are willing to

budget this different issue be a county have the re on."

Jill Steve the Duette's committee, county office two weeks.

"We really they will say "This is a infancy."