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# Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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[www.friendsofperdidobay.com](http://www.friendsofperdidobay.com)

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## **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT**

Friends of Perdido Bay is very grateful for your support. Your support means that we can continue publishing this newsletter, do limited testing, run ads in the Lillian newspaper, and support our website. You hear very little news about Perdido Bay, but we can all see what the bay is like. Do you see shrimpers any more? How about people floundering at night? It is really a shame what has happened to our bay. The environmental agencies have allowed this to happen and our job is to continue to bring this to the attention of the authorities. It may make them squirm a bit, but it should. Thank you, again.

## **A DREAM COME TRUE**

I could hardly believe the article in the newspaper - "Elevenmile Creek Restoration was chosen as the number one project for use of Escambia County's RESTORE money". RESTORE money is the money from the fines the federal government levied against BP for the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The fine was \$20.8 billion. Shortly after the spill, Congress passed a law saying that the federal fines should go to areas most impacted by the spill. The law was called the RESTORE Act; hence the money from fines is referred to as RESTORE money. Each county or area impacted by the oil spill and slated to receive funds from the federal government, set up different criteria for spending this money. Some counties in Florida and else where hired consulting firms to select projects for spending the money. Baldwin County, Alabama which was severely impacted by the oil spill, has chosen to rebuild the Gulf State Park Convention Center and Lodge which was destroyed by Hurricane Ivan. Escambia County Florida set up a committee of environmental groups to set criteria for ranking the projects which were submitted. Friends of Perdido Bay was one of those groups which attended lots of meetings. Keith Wilkins, who had been environmental director of Escambia County, organized the environmental groups. The environmental groups elected a chairman, who sat on a

committee of government officials, who oversaw the whole process. This government committee, which was called the RESTORE Advisory Committee, would meet monthly (I am not really sure about this frequency) to get public comments and seek projects for Escambia County. There were hundreds of projects proposed, from historic and social projects to economic enhancement projects. In the end, it was decided to give projects which improved water quality the heaviest weight. According to Chips Kirschenfeld, who is now acting director of Escambia County Environmental Programs, the RESTORE Advisory Committee voted and ranked all 124 projects which were submitted using the scoring criteria developed by the RESTORE committee. The Escambia County Commissioners have the final say over which projects to fund.

The proposal to restore some of the floodplains to Elevenmile Creek was proposed by Chris Curb in the Escambia County Engineering Department. I had stopped attending the RESTORE meetings because they seemed to drag on endlessly. The Eleven Mile Creek project had not been proposed when I stopped attending.

The impetus for this project is interesting. In April 2014, when Escambia County experienced a record rainfall of 26" in 24 hours, many areas flooded. One of those areas were the subdivisions located along Eleven Mile Creek. According to the grant proposal, 160 homes flooded in the subdivisions of Bristol Park, Bristol Creek and Ashbury Hills. Many of the homes in these subdivisions are located in the flood plain of Eleven Mile Creek. The grant proposal does not give a reason for this flooding, only inferring that lack of flood plain and storage capacity of storm water in Eleven Mile Creek were the culprits. The details of the project include: purchasing 27 homes from homeowners who were flooded, rehabilitating three subdivisions' stormwater ponds, and creating 20 acres of floodplain giving 200 acre-feet of additional storage capacity. The county has already gotten \$4,642,035 from a special federal program called Hazard Mitigation Grant Project to purchase the 27 residences at fair market value. The County is now seeking \$12,929,905 of RESTORE money to complete the restoration of the floodplain on Eleven Mile Creek.

I do not have any problem with the county using RESTORE money to enhance the floodplain of Eleven Mile Creek. But to infer that in spending this money, flooding along Eleven Mile Creek will cease is, erroneous. The reason Eleven Mile Creek flooded is because International Paper's 10 + acres of uncovered treatment ponds overflowed. IP and the previous owners of the paper mill have known that even a 2" rainfall would increase the effluent discharge to over 50 million gallons a day. Just think of the enormous amount of water a 26" rainfall will produce. While IP is technically discharging their effluent to the wetlands, their stormwater can still be discharged to Eleven Mile Creek. And it does enter Eleven Mile Creek. The effluent from their treatment ponds will also flow into Eleven Mile Creek when the flow from the treatment ponds exceeds the capacity of the pipeline (37 Million Gallons a Day). This is what occurred last December and the reason we saw lots of foam around the first of the year.

Eleven Mile Creek residences which flooded after the April 2014 storm have an on-going lawsuit against IP for damages. The lawsuit is in federal court, and I was not able to get any information from the law firms about the law suit. This was not the first time these residences flooded. During another hurricane (maybe George), homes along Eleven Mile Creek were flooded by paper mill effluent. IP built a bigger stormwater retention pond, but it is not adequate for these heavy rains we have been experiencing lately. Even with increased flood capacity in Eleven Mile Creek, many of those home are still at risk from flooding from the paper mill. Today, without IP effluent in the creek most of the time, Eleven Mile is a clear, very small stream. If you go up and look at Eleven Mile from the 297A bridge, you can see the flow is very small without IP effluent. It is a very pretty stream. It is doubtful, with that small flow, that any homes along Eleven Mile Creek would have flooded if IP and their big ponds had not been at the top of the hill.

So the restoration and the purchasing of property along Eleven Mile will benefit mainly IP. It will reduce some of IP's risk of causing flooding downstream when heavy rains occur. According to the RESTORE grant, the creation of wetlands and storage capacity along Eleven Mile Creek will reduce siltation and enhance water quality in Perdido Bay, which may cause our grassbeds to come back. I believe it will reduce siltation but it will not bring back our grass beds. Getting IP effluent out of Perdido Bay will be required for return of our grass beds.

### **DEAD TREES**

The wetlands to which IP is discharging, are being turned into wet cattail prairies. Unfortunate, but true. The latest annual scientific report which IP submitted to DEP in January 2016, summarizes the results of studies in the wetlands from 2008 through 2015. "Increased hydroperiods since 2012 coupled with historic presence of silviculturally established canopy species (i.e. slash and loblolly pine) within the EDS (Effluent Distribution System) has resulted in a large decline in canopy species density and abundance between 2008 and 2015 due to mass tree mortality. It is anticipated that canopy species native to the area and tolerant of long periods of inundation (i.e. bald and pond cypress, swamp tupelo, sweetbay, etc.) will become reestablished within the EDS". I don't think so as long as IP's effluent continues to be applied. The herbicidal and toxic nature of the effluent are being manifested in dying trees; just like the effluent has killed the grassbeds in Perdido Bay. In the report, in 2008, 203 trees per acre were counted. In 2015 only 21 trees per acre were left. That is a 90% reduction. Further even after 4 years, the decline in trees continued. The report mentions that 160,698 canopy and 15,000 subcanopy trees were plant just prior to applying the effluent to the EDS. These trees were planted in mounds to prevent the flooding of roots. These trees also must have died as no mention was made of them. In doing the correlations between the tree mortality and other environmental variables, soil chemistry, surface water quality and hydrology were correlated with the decline. This is consistent with something in the effluent. It certainly is time for the environmental agencies to acknowledge the dangerous

nature of paper mill effluent, especially in places where there is not sufficient dilution, i.e., Perdido Bay. These results should have come as no surprise to the paper mill folks. In the experimental wetland which Champion established in the early 1990's, only 2 % of the planted trees survived. So what ever it is in paper mill effluent, it is still there.

IP's studies also looked at phytoplankton in the Upper part of Perdido Bay. Again, the harmful effect of the effluent on plant life is obvious. In the bay stations which did not receive the full dilution from the Perdido River, the only phytoplankton which would grow was a "blue-green algae". These algae are very tolerant of polluted and toxic conditions. They are not algae which can sustain a good food web. Just inside the mouth of the Perdido River, where dilution is sufficient to prevent some of the harmful effects from the paper mill, a more "normal algae" is found. Any biologist should be able to see these effects, if they look. IP's scientists did not comment on the phytoplankton.

The report was not all dismal. The wetlands served to do what wetlands do best - remove nutrients. The total phosphorous fell 86% as it travel through the wetlands. Total nitrogen declined 81%. These are good values. However it must be remembered that wetlands can also begin exporting nutrients after awhile. The IP researchers did a calculation which showed that the soil still has capacity to absorb phosphorus. This is good. Unlike the IP wetlands, I have begun to wonder about the ECUA wetlands to the south of IP's. Appearance of a lot of vegetation at the mouth of Bayou Marcus, seems to show that nutrients are now being exported from the 900 acres of wetlands there.

Just what IP is going to do about this problem with the complete change in the wetlands is difficult to say. Their permit allows them to go back into Eleven Mile Creek if they harm the wetlands. I wonder if this is the plan with "restoring wetlands in Eleven Mile Creek". In the 2000 time frame, IP and the DEP decided that IP could not get a permit for staying in Eleven Mile Creek. I am sure they probably still can not meet state standards in Eleven Mile Creek. IP's permit expired in March 2015. They had made a timely renewal application in 2014. The spokesman at DEP assures me that DEP has not acted on the permit application and issued a renewal of the permit. SO, we are back to this scenario, IP is operating on an expired permit. Stay tuned for more information.

## HAPPY EARTH DAY

### Membership and Renewals

Tidings is published six times a year by Friends of Perdido Bay and is mailed to members. To keep up with the latest news of happenings on Perdido Bay, become a member or renew your membership. For present members, your date for renewal is printed on your mailing label.

Membership is \$10.00 per **year per voting member**. To join or renew, fill out the coupon to the right and mail with your check to the address on the front.

Friends is a not-for-profit corporation and all contributions are tax-deductible. Funds received are all used for projects to improve Perdido Bay. No money is paid to the Board of Directors, all of whom volunteer their time and effort.

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