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Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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www.friendsofperdidobay.com

Thank you for your support and welcome to our new members

We can't say "Thank you" enough. Some of you have been members since we first started in 1988. Others have just joined. Our paid-up members number about 160. Your continual support has allowed us to do limited testing. This is important since our environmental agencies have all but quit testing our bay for anything which might point the finger at the paper mill. Friends of Perdido Bay's last big study in the Fall of 2018 showed just how little life there was in Upper Perdido Bay. It was immediately sent to the Florida DEP. We don't want the Florida DEP to issue a "new" permit for International Paper saying there is "good" diversity in the little wetland lakes (which IP uses to deposit their solids) and in Upper Perdido Bay. These kinds of false information won't fly. So here we are blocking another permit which, I am sure, the Florida DEP would love to issue. So thank you again.

EXPIRED!

The last permit was issued to International Paper in March 2010. Permits normally are only good for five years, so IP's permit has technically expired. The Florida DEP also issued a Consent Order which expired in March 2019. The EPA doesn't recognize Consent Orders so I was curious about how EPA listed the status of the International Paper permit. According to the response I got from my Freedom of Information Act request from the EPA, **the federal permit for IP has expired**. Of course this has never seemed to bother them in the past. The Florida DEP used all kinds of crazy (and illegal) technicalities to extend the permit. A similar situation existed in 1994 when the old owners of the mill (Champion) couldn't meet the federal and state standards and their permit had expired. The state DEP finally said the state permit (1987) had been administratively continued. Then after a lot of behind the scenes shenanigans the federal permit was put back until 1983, the date of the last legal permit for the paper mill. So the mill had operated from 1987 or 1983 until 2010 on an expired permit.

When International Paper took over the mill from Champion in 2000, the permit was transferred to International Paper. The rules (Clean Water Act) specifically says an

expired permit can not be transferred, but who follows rules? Certainly not the environmental agencies. It has been clear to us since the early 1990's, that the environmental agencies were protecting the paper mill and not Perdido Bay. The environmental agencies were there to give the impression to the public, that Perdido Bay was being protected; that it was safe to swim and fish in Perdido Bay. This was false.

I tell this story to people and they say well, it could be worse. Perdido Bay could be dead or worse yet we could all be dead from swimming and eating the fish out of Perdido Bay. Maybe. But today as I look out on the bay, I don't see any fish jumping. I don't see any minnows swimming in the shallows. I don't see any osprey diving for fish. I see no shrimp, no clams, no crabs. Upper Perdido Bay is pretty much a lifeless bay. However the bay looks better. When there is no rain, the bay is clear. There is less foam and a few grassbeds are beginning to appear (with no life). I have no idea if it is safe to swim in the bay or not this summer.

Increasing Production

The paper mill which dumps into our bay has been operating since 1942. At that time, there were two mills, the Alabama Pulp and Paper and the Florida Pulp and Paper on the site of the present IP mill. According to many of the old timers, the mill was a haven in hard times. It provided employment during the World War II. But more than that, it was the center of life in the community. Birthday parties, Christmas parties and a host of other community events were centered around the mill. There was a Harvester Village where people who worked at the mill lived. There was a baseball team of mill employees. When St. Regis purchased the mill in the 1950's, the production was 700 tons of brown pulp a day. There was no treatment. It was just dumped into Elevenmile Creek, a small crystal clear spring-fed creek with a white sandy bottom. We have pictures of the Zelius Family having a picnic along the banks of this creek in the late 1930's. My late husband remembers a restaurant which served chicken dinners on Sundays starting up along the shores of the creek. The mill's dumping took all that away. Soon the property owners along the creek complained so attorneys for the mill paid the property owners very small amounts of money for pollution easements. In the heyday of local paper making, the mill employed 2,500 people.

Perdido Bay residents, especially those in Alabama, continued to complain about the pollution in Perdido Bay. JoAnne Allen, the Gamble family were leaders in trying to get their state officials to do something about the pollution of Perdido Bay. On April 7, 1969, the Southeast Region of the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration was asked by Alabama's Director of Water Pollution Control Commission to evaluate the water quality and waste sources into Perdido Bay. From September 9-17, 1969, the University of West Florida led by Dr. Tom Hopkins and his students did a detailed study of the bay and its major tributaries. Their findings are presented in a report dated January 1970 and are of no surprise. The St. Regis Paper company was discharging 27 million gallons of waste a day from making 1200 tons per day of pulp. As the report stated, "The inadequately treated waste effluent from the St. Regis Paper Company is the major cause of the low dissolved oxygen, unsightly foam, excessive sludge deposits, and increased lignin in Perdido Bay and River." Elevenmile Creek was completely degraded and did not meet Florida's criteria for industrial use, which would latter be changed to Class III, swimmable and fishable. The recommendations the report made were: 1. St Regis remove 90% or greater of their carbonaceous material so that their BOD numbers did not exceed 8,800 pounds per day and their total organic carbon not exceed 2,610 pounds per day; 2. St Regis Paper Company remove the foam causing constituents from its effluent; 3. St. Regis reduce the color of its effluent to levels similar to the Perdido River; 4. St Regis make a feasibility study, due January 1, 1971, of going to a closed-loop system; 5. All waste abatement systems be in operation by January 1, 1973.

So how much of this mandate did St. Regis achieve? Not much. Foam had always been a problem, until recently. St. Regis hired a chemists who refuted that the foam came from them. The paper companies were saying in the 1990's that the foam was natural. They did achieve better BOD numbers by adding aeration. The environmental agencies stopped requiring tests for total organic carbon. The last time I checked the total organic carbon in Elevenmile Creek it was running about 8,000 pounds per day. The color can be removed by adding aluminum sulfate (alum), but St. Regis resisted because it settled out in their ponds and required more dredging of their ponds. St. Regis announced in a big ad in the Wall Street Journal that they were going to a closed loop system by running their effluent over activated charcoal but that didn't happen either. In the latest regulations for the paper industry published in 1998, the EPA was still calling for a closed-loop system. Good luck.

In the mean time the mill in Cantonment has increased production from 1200 tons of pulp per day to 1500 tons of pulp per day mostly bleached, to 2500 tons of pulp per day (2/3 unbleached and 1/3 bleached). The environmental agencies placed a limit on the production in the air permit, not in the water permit. In a recent change to allowable production, environmental agencies no longer look at total production but at the amount of material going to the recovery furnace. So if the mill uses more recycled cardboard where they do not create pulp from pine chips, then they can increase cardboard production to what ever they want. I think this is what IP has done. They are using more recycled cardboard to increase their production. I can see the smoke from their recovery furnace at my house. I used to see the smoke flume every day. Now I only see it two or three times a week. This saves IP a lot of energy. The Florida DEP asked IP if they were using recycled cardboard. They said "yes", a small amount. But I think the amount of recycled cardboard IP is using in their production is higher than they are admitting. The bad part - we don't know what chemicals are coming from this use of recycled cardboard. From the lack of life in the bay, it could be bad. So as you can see from the above tale, the paper industry is a poorly regulated industry which has been allowed to pollute and kill many of the water bodies in the U.S. It has made a farce out of environmental regulation. Today they employ 450 people. Is it worth it?

Cozy Relationships

The recent crash of the Ethiopian Airliner due to failure of a sensor on a Boeing 737 MAX jet demonstrates in, an unfortunate way, how dangerous weak regulation is. The public has always assumed that our government agencies are protecting them. Even though we keep hearing complaints about over regulation hurting our economy, we rely on our government to protect our health and welfare. We don't want to eat food contaminated with poisons, or drink water contaminate with chemicals or bacteria. We don't want to swim in water which will make us sick or enter a building which will fall down. There are reasons for rules and we assume that, that is the role of our government. The U.S. is not a third world county where the water is unsafe to drink or the food is unsafe to eat, - or is it?

It seems like the regulatory agencies have been taken over by the regulated community. Lobbyists for big corporations become heads of the different federal agencies or visa versa. A very good example was David Struhs who was Secretary of the Florida DEP and helped guide the plan for IP to go to a wetland, and then became IP's Vice president for the Environment and made sure IP implemented the plan. The plan to go to a wetland was nothing more than a ruse for IP to increase production. Their wetland is a disaster of dead trees.

Environmental rules which are favorable to big business are pushed by the environmental agencies. If a rule might actually cause a problem with the industry, it is usually changed or never implemented. An example was the rule for heavy metals for the paper industry. When the paper industry began using coal, heavy metals became a problem for them to meet the limits. What do you do? You change the rule. The rule for heavy metals is now tied to the pH of the effluent. Paper

mills have alkaline effluents. The more alkaline the effluent, the more heavy metals are allowable, because as the paper industry argued, alkaline effluent “tie up” more of the heavy metals.

It is rather disconcerting when you go to a public hearing on a permit for an industry, to be referred to as a “third party”. I always thought that the government was on the public’s side. No. The regulatory agencies look at you as an intruder. So it is no wonder that mistakes made by industries are overlooked or not caught by regulatory agencies. The public’s health and welfare is no longer the primary objective of our government agencies. It is economics.

Another Environmental Disaster?

On April 9, 2019, the Navy had a meeting in Bellview, FL at St. Anne’s Church. The Navy had found high levels of a chemical called PFAS in wells outside the parameter of Saufley Field and wanted to alert the public. PFAS stands for several perfluoroalkyl substances which are manmade chemicals used in many consumer products - as a fire retardant, in teflon, as a stain resistance and many more. These chemicals may cause cancer and are very slow to degrade. The Navy used a fire fighting foam at Saufley Field which contained PFAS from the 1960's until 2008 when training planes no longer flew out of Saufley. While the EPA does not regulate PFAS in drinking water yet, a health advisory has been issued for these chemicals. Action (identification of sources) should be taken when concentration over 70 parts per trillion (ppt) is found in drinking water. The Navy tested 50 samples around Saufley Field - 9 had no detectable levels of PFAS, 28 had detectable levels up to 70 parts, and 13 had levels ranging from 423 to 9701 ppt. Very high. The Navy can not disclose where those wells were to protect personal privacy, but some of the wells were in the Bay Forest and Ramsey Beach areas on Perdido Bay. I am sure that the ground water is contaminated at other Navy Fields like NAS, but these areas have not yet been tested or the testing not disclosed.

PFAS has been detected in Emerald Coast Utilities drinking water wells as well. We don’t know the levels.

If you are interested in viewing a movie about how Dupont hid the dangers of teflon and PFAS, the Netflix movie “The enemy that we know” is interesting. We have been hard on our world.

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| 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. | <input type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal Amt. Enclosed\$ _____ _____ Name _____ Address _____ Phone (_____) _____ e-mail _____ |
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