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Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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www.friendsofperdidobay.com

THANK YOU AND WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

I guess I can't say it enough - Thank you all for your support all these years. Without your support through dues and donations, Friends of Perdido Bay would not exist today. It is very important that we remain active and vigilant because our bay is being destroyed by a paper mill which is going to try and get another permit to pollute our bay.

Also welcome to our new members. We might not send you a personal welcome, but we are very glad you have joined us. We have been in continuous existence since 1988 and as long as everyone is out there to support us, we will not go away.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM FRIENDS!

AN OVERVIEW

As has been written many times in this newsletter, Perdido Bay is a small, lovely bay with low development along most of the shoreline except the southern end near the Gulf. Approximately 70% of the Bay's watershed is forested which makes stormwater runoff and non-permitted sources of pollution small contributors to the bay's pollution. However, there is one big contributor to the bay's pollution - the paper mill. And this contribution is huge. Although the paper mill, now owned by International Paper, stopped directly discharging into the bay back in 2012, Perdido Bay still receives approximately 27 million gallons a day of this effluent. The effluent, after approximately a 12-hour trip through wetlands, enters the northern end of Perdido Bay near to its old discharge site, Elevenmile Creek. In 2010, when the permit with a Consent Order were granted to IP, IP was producing approximately 1600 tons per day of bleached paper.

Once they got their permit with a Consent Order, IP quickly increased their production. Currently IP produces 2500 tons of paper pulp a day - 2,000 tons of unbleached pulp and 500 tons of bleached pulp. This increased production has not been good for the bay. It is very obvious to many of us that this effluent is toxic to many forms of life in the bay. Since 1995 when the paper mill went to bleaching with chlorine dioxide, the effluent has herbicidal properties. Grassbeds which used to exist in the bay have all disappeared. Many schools of anchovies and menhaden which we used to see in the summer, are no longer present. These fish live on phytoplankton (small one cell floating plants) which no longer thrive in the bay due to the herbicidal effects of the effluent. The bay's potential as a nursery area for sport fish has been decimated.

International Paper's permit which was issued in 2010, supposedly expired in 2015. Permits are only good for five years. But as in previous years, the paper mill was allowed to operate on expired permits by both Florida's DEP and the EPA. Because IP could not (and still can't) get a valid permit to discharge to Perdido Bay, the environmental agencies had to give IP a permit based on a promise to meet water quality standards **in the future**. This promise to meet water quality standards **in the future** was basically spelled out in a document called a Consent Order. The Consent Order is still in effect and does not expire until 2019. So IP is operating on a Consent Order and an expired permit.

The Consent Order basically was an agreement between IP and the environmental agencies to: 1. Get out of the creek in which they were discharging (Elevenmile) and 2. Build a pipeline to a new discharge site, the Rainwater wetlands. At the time this "plan" was proposed (2000s), it was believed that, IP could apply and get "alternative water quality standards" for their discharge to the wetlands. The Consent Order allows IP until 2019 to try and get "alternative standards" for their discharge to the wetlands. But of course, I am sure the paper mills folks and their allies, the timber growers and the chemical people who sell the millions of pounds of chemicals to the paper mills, hoped that any opposition to IP permits would have long since disappeared. The environmental agency could just rubber stamp any permit, and the paper mill would then have legal authority to pollute our bay with impunity. This is why we have stuck around so long. To stop this process of just giving the paper mill permits to pollute.

As of the date of this newsletter, IP has applied for their new permit. The DEP is now under pressure to issue the new permit. But it is going to have trouble doing so. For one thing, there is no current data to show that IP's effluent is not harming Perdido Bay. The last study (2007) which was done, definitely showed the damage the effluent was having on the bay. Friends of Perdido Bay will fund our own study to show that the effluent has damaged the bay, if necessary. For another thing, the toxic effluent has killed most of the trees in the wetlands. The Florida DEP might be able to issue a few specific alternative criteria but DEP will have a hard time justifying an effluent which has killed most of the trees in the wetland. So we think our case against the papermill is

very strong. We again will challenge any attempt by the environmental agencies to issue another flawed permit. So stay tuned and thank you for your support.

WHY WE CARE

You may wonder, so what if IP gets a permit? How does it affect us. It affects us because Perdido Bay is a public body of water which is used for recreation. People buy property on the bay so that they can use it for recreation - swimming, fishing, boating. Our property values are higher and we pay higher taxes for the ability to use our waterfront for recreation. Most people did not and do not buy property on bodies of water which are treatment ponds for paper mills. Yet, that is what our bay is. Because of its small size and lack of flushing, paper mill chemicals and waste (27 million gallons a day) flow into our bay and settle out. These chemicals are not flushed into the Gulf of Mexico, but stay in our bay. Many of these chemicals cause oxygen depletion.

According to IP's reports, the IP effluent contains **21,976 pounds per day** of this oxygen consuming material which goes in our bay. According to environmental personnel, EPA has not yet established effluent limits for this oxygen consuming material (called COD for Chemical Oxygen Demand) in paper mill effluent. COD loads correlate with discharges of toxic organic pollutants that are not readily biodegraded. This material which gets into our bay continues to be biodegraded by bacteria. Bacteria grow on this stuff and use up oxygen in the bay. Some of these bacteria are human pathogens and can cause infections in cuts. Friends of Perdido Bay has many cases of documented infections in people who have swum in the bay.

Some of these chemicals are cancer-causing chemicals. Friends of Perdido Bay has measured, as recent as 2014, dioxin and PCB's in the sludges of Perdido Bay. The most likely source of dioxins and PCB's is the paper mill's effluent. Tests of crabs and clams in our bay have shown that these chemicals are taken up by these bottom dwelling animals, as well. The picture must be clear. Paper mill effluent from International Paper has made the bay more dangerous for swimming and eating seafood. This is in addition to the toxicity and killing of sealife.

So why haven't the environmental agencies done anything about this? In one word - Politics. In 1993, when the federal government published the new guidelines for the pulp and paper industry, the federal government was concerned mainly with removing toxic chemicals from the emissions of the paper industry, especially the air. Those were the dioxin days when bleaching with elemental chlorine produced a hazardous chemical - 2,3,7,8 TCDD. This was one form of dioxin which was associated with the bleached paper making. The new 1993 rules were supposed to take care of this emission, mainly by putting material scrubbed off the smokestacks of the papermills into the wastewater treatment system. Supposedly dioxin from the smoke stacks would completely combust during the recycling of lime and then be disposed of in the wastewater treatment system. It seemed to work, although we were never able to obtain "before implementation" and "after implementation" air samples from the mill in Cantonment. The 2,3,7,8 TCDD dioxin that was reported in the Champion/International Paper effluent was reported as not detectable. In 1993, the EPA realized that by

proposing rules to integrate both air limits with water limits, some standards were not going to be met. This is why the conventional paper mill pollutants, such as BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand) and TSS (Total Suspended Solids) were ignored. In the 1990's, toxic chemicals were being addressed by the EPA. However, EPA was also trying to encourage the use of totally chlorine free bleaching to try and eliminate the toxic chlorinated byproducts of paper making. The 1993 rules also stressed the importance of the paper making processes going to a completely closed system where no or very little effluent was released. The 1993 rules stipulate that by 2016, a closed loop system should be achievable. These 1993 rules were formally adopted in 1998, I am sure, because the paper manufactures and chemical industry got concessions from the federal government. Otherwise, these big industries can hold up rules through legal challenges forever.

Fast forward today. The paper industry has **not** implemented 'closed loop' systems, and I doubt that they will. With the election of a new president who is 'rolling back' regulations because jobs are supposedly being lost due to regulation, the emphasis will not be on regulation of any sort. I heard Paul Ryan, Speaker of the House of Representatives, specifically say that the 'poor' paper mills are going to be relieved of regulatory pressure. Whoa is us! Some of the biggest donors to conservative causes are the Koch Brothers who own Georgia Pacific, a large paper maker. So obviously, these paper makers who are massive polluters, have the ear of powerful politicians and will continue to pollute.

But maybe something good will come from all of this. As I look back at our 30-year fight to end the pollution on Perdido Bay, I can't say that the regulatory process has worked to clean up Perdido Bay. Because the local paper mill has such a big economic clout, our economic interests on Perdido Bay have not been considered. If pollution could be put on an economic basis, then perhaps it would be considered in the bottom line. Start charging for this pollution based on carbon or toxic chemicals.

Something to think about for the holidays.



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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