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Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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www.friendsofperdidobay.com

Welcome to a New Year and Thank you for your support

As we begin a new year, we have high hopes that something good will happen this year. We are seeing some changes from previous years in Alabama's attitude toward protecting their bay they share with Florida. We also want to thank all our members who have stuck with us through all these years. You have faithfully sent in your dues for many years and those dues have been able to keep this organization running. We have been able to do a limited amount of testing which demonstrates how poor the water and the life in the bay are. At one time, Friends of Perdido Bay believed that the paper mill, now owned by IP, would clean up. We no longer believe this. IP's sole reason for doing business is to make money for their shareholders and that does not jive with being a good steward of the environment. Unfortunately. We will continue to press for a clean bay so stay tuned.

Globalization is not helping the U.S. or Perdido Bay

Our global economy has produced some good things and some bad things. Notably, many products in the U.S. are a lot cheaper because they are produced overseas where labor is cheaper and there are few environmental rules. The air pollution in Asia is the worst I have seen. Lax environmental regulation coupled with low cost labor, new more efficient factories, and a strong dollar have allowed foreign-made products to be relatively cheap in the U.S. And we have responded by buying, as my children say, "all that cheap crap from China". Globalization has also helped U.S. agriculture. America's farmers (some really big ones) are very efficient. With their big John Deere tractors, relatively flat, good farmland and chemicals (including seed with chemicals), American farmers are efficient and able to outproduce most foreign countries efficiently.

At one time I grew pecans. When the Chinese began to take a liking to our pecans which were not grown in many places in the world, the price of the pecan went from \$.50 per pound in shell to \$2.60 per pound in shell. That is when I started making some money. The grower made money, but the retailer of pecans saw the price of pecans skyrocket and in the U.S., people stopped using pecans. Pecans had priced themselves

out of the domestic market because the Chinese were eating them. People like Jake Renfroe in Pensacola have suffered.

Beside the American farmer, American businesses which bought and sold the cheap products manufactured overseas, prospered. As long as the American public has enough money to buy the cheap foreign products, things are O.K. It is when the public can no longer afford or perceives they can not afford to buy the cheap products, then our economy will suffer. That of course has already happened with millions of laid off American workers in cities which used to have heavy industry.

To get back to Perdido Bay, IP competes in a global economy. Recently I read that the Chinese are not buying paper diapers like they used to. So the price of bleached, fluff pulp in the global market has declined. So what would you do if you were IP? Would you continue to make bleach fluff pulp for diapers in the U.S. where energy, chemical, fiber and labor costs are higher? Or would you transfer your production to Russia where you can make bleach, fluff pulp at a cheaper price? You would go to Russia. You are also selling your stock on Wall Street and millions of investors, including investment accounts in the U.S., are depending on those “good” earnings. So IP is continually trying to bring value to their investors by cutting costs. Perdido Bay property owners are caught in this big squeeze and there doesn't seem to be anything we can do about it, except maybe keep our environmental agencies from issuing more permits to pollute Perdido Bay. And this is also why there have been no new papermills built in the U.S. since the early 1980's.

The Pensacola& Perdido Bay Estuary Program

Yes, there is such a thing and it is off and running. The bylaws have been adopted. Chairs have been elected to certain committees and the Executive Director selection is down to the top candidates. So there is progress. The main guidance of the Program comes from the Policy Board which is composed of elected officials from Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties Florida and Baldwin County, Alabama. Commissioners Doug Underhill from Escambia County, Bob Cole from Santa Rosa County and Skip Gruber from Baldwin County are among several of the members of the Policy Board. There is a Technical Advisory Committee which is open to almost anyone who has some sort of technical ability. I have decided to join the technical advisory committee. An Educational Committee has also been established which includes the extension services from the various counties. The monthly meetings have been held on the third Wednesday of each month in various locations in each of the counties beginning at 1:30 PM. If you want to get notices of these meetings contact Matt Posner at [<mjposner@myescambia.com>](mailto:mjposner@myescambia.com) to get on the e-mail list. The next meeting is scheduled for February 20, 2019 but I don't know where yet.

Since there have only been two to three meetings, it is difficult to say if this group will make any difference in the pollution of Perdido Bay. Certainly, over the years we have attended various management meetings with little success in cleaning up Perdido Bay. While the citizens who attended these meetings always seemed to have a very good idea of what was wrong with the bay (the paper mill), our elected officials always tried to look the other way and cast the blame elsewhere - septic tanks, dirt roads.

But this program may be different. Why? Alabama. I have noticed a big change in Alabama's attitude toward their beautiful but lost bay, Perdido Bay. Alabama looks like it may really care about this bay. A "Letter to the Editor" in the January 23, 2019 edition of the Baldwin County Newspaper written by Commissioner Skip Gruber encourages this group to cooperation to clean up Perdido Bay. The impetus for such encouragement comes from the water quality impacts to Alabama's oyster harvesting season which had to be cancelled because of insufficient oysters. I suspect that not only the oyster harvest, but also the polluted beaches of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores have also attracted attention of the politicians. The water that comes from Perdido Bay turns west and affects the Alabama beaches as well as properties in Perdido Beach in the Alabama intercoastal. This provides a big chunk of Baldwin County's property taxes.

There may also be another reason for Alabama's change of heart. This may be conjecture on my part as I have not had any verification from the Florida DEP, but I think International Paper has gone to using recycled cardboard in their production instead of virgin pine fiber. This would impact the Baldwin County tree growers in a negative way. So IP would no longer have the political protection from Alabama agriculture. Baldwin County would see it in their best economic interest to protect Perdido Bay for recreation and fishery harvest. I hope so. And so do you.

Something Has Changed

As I discussed in the past newsletter, water quality in Perdido Bay has changed. In this early Spring of 2019, we have noticed a proliferation of seagrass beds starting up in the Upper Bay. There may be incipient seagrass beds in the middle and lower bay, but we just haven't looked there yet. To what do I attribute this - lack of bleaching or a change in bleaching chemicals at the paper mill. I have always thought that when the paper industry changed from bleaching using chlorine gas to chlorine dioxide, the herbicidal effects of this chlorine dioxide were obvious in Perdido Bay. The paper industry denied that this was true and the environmental agencies sided with the paper industry, but I thought the herbicidal effects were obvious. This changeover to chlorine dioxide and the immediate impact it had on the research I was doing on Perdido Bay at that time (1995), demonstrate to me just how much of an impact the mill was having on Perdido Bay

Although the grassbeds seems to be flourishing in the bay now, they contain little life. There are few snails, crabs, fish or shrimp. The mussels which had been growing at the base of the black needle rush have also disappeared. So grassbeds appearing is good, but lack of life is not. In January 2017 when IP blew up and had limited discharge to Perdido Bay, in two weeks, the bay immediately recovered. We saw algae, crabs, fish and an abundance of life. It was truly remarkable. Then IP started back up and everything died. We can only hope that Perdido Bay will return to a more lively state and stop being a dumping ground for the toxic wastes of the paper industry.

Beware of Zoning Changes and "Done Deals"

If Perdido Bay ever gets cleaned up, there will be tremendous pressure to increase density of development around the bay. Right now most of the shoreline around the bay is single family residences. Except for Orange Beach, there are very few condos or

apartments; maybe a campground or two. This has allowed us a fairly relaxed and stable lifestyle - traffic isn't too bad, yet. This may change.

Recently one of our members called to ask me to attend a hearing on a request for zoning change on a piece of vacant property along Lillian Hwy. This was vacant land which had been zoned MDR (Medium Density Residential) which allows 10 dwelling units per acre. Most of the residential areas in Florida along Perdido Bay are zoned MDR. The requested zoning change was to increase density to 25 dwelling units per acre and allow mixed use (HDMU). As far as I could see, this zoning change was totally inconsistent with the existing neighborhoods which have a density of maybe 5 units per acre. Consistency with existing neighborhoods is a requirement for any change to the zoning and many of the people who lived in that area, argued that point. Plus there had been very little change to those neighborhoods in years, so no future trends were obvious.

The zoning and planing board ignored the obvious situation and the pleas from surrounding neighbors, and voted to change the zoning to high density. To me this was shocking because it brought back the memories of our zoning fights in the late 1980's. Certain people in Escambia County Florida have resisted having any zoning at all. It is the old attitude -"No body is going to tell me what I can do with my property". As a result of this attitude, there are some very poorly planned neighborhoods in this county and we have terrible sprawl. What was obvious was that the planning board had already made up their minds about this project before any public comment - it was a "done deal". Unfortunately this ruling may set a precedent for future zoning changes in our area. I don't know if the residents will fight this ruling, but it is a blow to stable neighborhoods.

Look for Nature Conservancy's Flori-Bama Paddling Expedition March 10th through 15th on the Perdido River. It is sold out!

Membership and Renewals	<input type="checkbox"/>	New
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Amt. Enclosed\$ _____
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.		Renewal
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