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Tidings

 The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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Jackie Lane -Editor

Postscript to Last Month's Newsletter about Post Civil War Perdido Bay.

Dr. John Vaughan, who is Dean emeritus from Auburn University's Veterinarian School and a member of Friends of Perdido Bay, send some additional information regarding historical events at the time (1874) the article (a piece entitled "The New South") in the last newsletter, was written. I am going to quote Dr. Vaughan directly.

"The exploitation of regional woodlands by northern industrialists coincided with a lot of other "atrocities" that occurred during the "Reconstruction", that period after the Civil War that James McPherson, prize-winning historian called the "Gotterdammerung" (editor's note: I may have misspelled this) of the South. From 1865 to 1877, the South was occupied by Federal troops and under martial law. The Radical Republican Congress, under the first Andrew Johnson, was ineffective. Then U.S. Grant, who was corrupted by Congress, had radical cronies who dominated both state and local governments and bankrupted at least nine formerly Confederate states. As Coulter, a U of Ga. historian said, the South lost the war and then had to pay for it. During the time that Michigan industrialists purchased 250,000 acres of virgin (heavily longleaf) pine timber for \$.10 per acre (the going rate would have been \$2.00 + and acre), the Governor was a turncoat scalawag and the legislature was completely Radical Republican, heavily illiterate blacks, and many folks indicated for crimes ranging from felony to murder. It wasn't until 1874 (when the article was written) that the responsible (and literate) voices regained some say in State government, and not until 1877 that President Rutherford B. Hayes (from Ohio) removed the federal troops and allowed the South to commence to rebuild the destruction left by the war. Maybe, that's why there was (is) a sign on the wall of the Elberta Town Center office that reads, "We don't care how it's done in Michigan!" "

Dr. Vaughan goes on to explain that he has no prejudices against the North but he only wanted to set the record straight. I certainly agree with him that the South was exploited after the Civil War and maybe still is. I think the pollution of Perdido Bay by the paper mill is an example of exploitation. International Paper, its stockholders, and the people who sell timber and chemicals to the mill are all doing fine and in a sense exploiting the local population by dumping

this pollution. Instead of dumping millions of tons of chemicals and pollution into the local air and water and adversely affecting the health of locals, International Paper could almost completely close their processes and emit very little. But it chooses not to, because it costs money. It is cheaper for them to pollute, blackmail local politicians with the “the job” promise, and spread enough false information to keep people mis-informed. The local media, chambers of commerce and industrial consultants are all on the business bandwagon.

The “The New South” article from Harper’s New Monthly Magazine is, I believe, an example of slanted journalism. If you were a Northerner (the Harper’s New Monthly Magazine was published in New York) and read the entire article on the South in 1874, you would have had this glowing picture (complete with flowery language) of how the South was flourishing. The truth was probably very different with many, many people suffering. But who is to know.

More Distortions

Several reports which have been published recently by environmental agency scientists, are also full of distortions (false information or lies). The environmental agencies (EPA and FLDEP) have become very politicized. Honest scientists who know the truth and can not lie, have been replaced with administrators who either don’t know the truth, or know the truth and want to keep their jobs. One report put out by Florida’s DEP, said that there were never any grass beds in the upper or middle bay, ever. This is an obvious lie. For years there were small grass beds in upper Perdido Bay. One grass bed, off the Alabama shore just south of the mouth of Perdido River, was large and flourishing. It was home to lots of shrimp and crabs. The fronds of the grass bed plants measured about 16". This grass bed disappeared in 2000 along with all other vegetation in the upper and mid bay when International paper took over the mill. I don’t know what happened to all the grass beds, but I think chemicals were dumped (spilled) to control vegetation. Maybe this chemical is still being used. Today, I know of a small and unhealthy grass bed just inside the mouth of Herron Bayou (in the Upper bay) in water which is less than one foot deep. I believe the flow from the bayou helps to dilute water from Perdido Bay sufficiently to just maintain this grass bed. The grass bed is unhealthy because the plants are stunted and fronds have lots of growth on them, thus blocking the light to the fronds. It is interesting that just round the corner in bay water which is about the same depth, there are no grasses.

Why would Florida DEP be making these false statements? I think DEP officials, who are under the thumb of the politicians, are trying to reset the historical “background” conditions of Perdido Bay. If any of you who are out there remember a nicer, cleaner Perdido Bay, would you please move or die. If they just wait long enough, no one will remember what a clean bay looks like.

If you remember any grass beds growing at your beach in Perdido Bay, please let us know. You can write a short note to us at the address on the front.

Another example of a lie being perpetuated by an environmental agency is EPA’s statement which found no nutrient problems in Perdido Bay. In a recent Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) determination, EPA said that nutrient levels in Perdido Bay were fine. Either EPA isn’t looking at the data or they are ignoring the data. Recent data taken by ECUA’s and IP’s consultants in Upper Perdido Bay show that there is a real problem. There are blooms of

phytoplankton which exceed the already lax standards which have been set for Perdido Bay. Fortunately, according to IP's consultants, these are not blooms of toxic algae. But nevertheless, pea green, turbid water is not healthy. The reason that EPA and Florida went to all the trouble to establish nutrient limits was to try and prevent pea green water. The "lie" in this TMDL report will not be corrected for five more years. By that time, maybe, the problem will be gone.

These reports are put out by the environmental agencies and put on their web sites. Other people who write summaries about environmental health go to the environmental web sites and accept these false statements as true. And so the lies are repeated time and again. Eventually, the lies become accepted as the truth. It is just like a Champion spokesperson told me, the truth is what people believe to be true. You can repeat a lie enough times to make it a "truth". Makes you kind of wonder, how true the information is you receive. Without getting accurate information, people can not make informed decisions. Maybe, this is one reason people appear to be getting "dumber". There is so much information out there, and much of it is not correct or slanted. This is one reason, I continue to write this newsletter. I try and counter all the misinformation about Perdido Bay.

Increasing Production (or are we using enough trees yet?)

International Paper calls it Project Onyx. Could that be black onyx? International Paper's production limits are set through the air permitting process. International Paper found that by switching to pine, instead of a mixture of pine and hardwood, and changing their end product, they didn't have to cook the wood chips as long. This means they didn't have as much chemicals to recover and they didn't have as much air pollution. They produced less black-liquor per ton of trees processed. Remember, black liquor is that stuff which paper mills burn to recover their cooking chemicals. Until just recently, the paper industry was getting a tax rebate on this black liquor, a real boondoggle to ordinary tax payers like you and me. Well, the paper industry has convinced the EPA that their production ought to be based on amount of black liquor produced rather than on the end product - tons of pulp produced. Their air pollution numbers are more directly correlated with black liquor rather than tons of pulp. The environmental agencies said O.K.. So by letting IP base their production on black liquor rather than pulp, IP is allowed to increase production. But they are still increasing air pollutants! It doesn't really make much sense to me. There is going to be an increase in Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's), nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter. This is going into local air which already just marginally passes the ozone and particulate matter air standards. But please let's not talk about standards, they are just hindering business! To mitigate this increase in air pollutants, IP is going to convert one of its four power boilers from burning a mixture of wood products/coal, fuel oil and used oil to using natural gas and wood products/coal.

Natural gas is a much cleaner burning fuel than coal and wood products (called biomass energy). Much of the mercury which contaminates the local fish comes from the burning of coal. Burning of wood or biomass energy is not good either because this energy source produces dioxin. This is not these same dioxin which was produced by the use of chlorine in the bleaching process, but it is still a dioxin which causes cancer. When Friends of Perdido Bay did our last dioxin test in Perdido Bay sediments in 2004, the type of dioxin from burning of wood was found. The amount of coal allowed to be used in the boiler is limited to 5,000 tons per year, which still seems like a lot to me. They could have converted the boiler to 100% natural gas but decided to include coal/biomass as well. This leaves one boiler still using coal/biomass as the entire source

of fuel. There will be less ash generated from the power boilers which by the way goes to the Escambia County landfill. IP is allowed to dump their ash at the landfill for free. This is another freebie given to the paper mill at the expense of Escambia County taxpayers and ECUA garbage users (Escambia taxpayers again). I don't know why IP does not convert all their power boilers to natural gas. It is certainly a low cost option now and produces far less air pollution and ash than coal.

But in the end, the increase in pulp production at the mill will be substantial. According to the permit which DEP has issued, the mill is currently producing 1,929 air dried tons of pulp per day. This will increase to 2,735 air dried tons of pulp per day. This is going to increase not only air pollution but also water pollution - a lot. They will be using much more water. So be prepared for a lot darker, dirtier and more polluted bay with lots more nutrients. I have asked to be notified when DEP does the permit numbers for the water treatment system. I am sure they will not deny the permit, as this would look bad for attracting business to the state of Florida. Yes, it can get worse for us, but only better for those who grow pine trees for the pulp.

Waiting for The Money

The BP oil spill is a 3-year old disaster. If you live on the Gulf Coast in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi, you were impacted in some way or another. Either environmentally, economically or both, you suffered in some fashion. The government fine on BP is supposed to be huge - billions of dollars. There have been meetings in Florida, and I am sure in other states, on how that money is going to be spent. It is sort of sickening to see all the people with all their hands out. Congress passed a law called RESTORE which is supposed to send 80% of the money from the fine to the Gulf Coast states which were most impacted by the oil spill. In Escambia County, Friends of Perdido Bay has been participating, somewhat, in trying to draw up a list of criteria to be used in judging which projects should get funds from the fine. Whether or not these criteria will be used is difficult to say since it looks like the Escambia County commissioners will be selecting the projects. If you have a pet project, contact the Escambia or Baldwin County Commission and turn in your proposal. Personally, I think it is a waste of time to build an environmental project when you have such bad water quality as you have in Perdido Bay. But Perdido Bay has already received some BP money. A boat ramp is going to be built at the mouth of Herron Bayou, not on the bayou side but on the bay side. The water depth here is about one to two feet and much too shallow to launch anything but a kayak. But it can be counted as a boat ramp and money is money and must be used. Too bad.

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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