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Tidings

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MEETING ON ECUA PERMIT - JULY 12TH FROM 2:30 TO 4:30 AT DEP

DEP is planning on have an informational meeting on the proposed new permit for the Bayou Marcus wastewater treatment on **Thursday July 12th from 2:30 PM to 4:30 PM in room 502 at 160 Governmental Center** on Government Street in downtown Pensacola. The purpose of the meeting is to gather information on ECUA's draft wastewater permit for Bayou Marcus Wastewater Treatment Plant. DEP is proposing to allow up to 10 Million Gallons per Day (MGD) of treated waste to be discharged to wetlands surrounding Upper Perdido Bay. Friends of Perdido Bay's position on this is that 10 MGD is just too much. DEP is preparing to list Upper Perdido Bay as impaired due to nutrients, specifically too much chlorophyll. Apparently blooms of microscopic algae have been occurring somewhere in Upper Perdido Bay and this is violating the chlorophyll limit. Right now the Bayou Marcus wastewater plant is discharging approximately 6 MGD. From our water testing we know that ECUA's discharge is adding nutrients to Upper Perdido Bay at 6 MGD. This is where the permit ought to be capped - at 6 MGD. No more. The environmental agencies just handing out permits willy-nilly, without any knowledge, as to how the limits that they are setting might impact the environment, is wrong. The least DEP can do is have ECUA do a wasteload allocation study to determine how much nutrients can be added without causing algae blooms. The big elephant in the room is the IP paper mill which discharges 25 MGD to wetlands surrounding Upper Perdido Bay. This discharge also has nutrients -lots of them.

It is interesting following a permit through the years and seeing just what happens and how decisions are made. It is also a little frustrating. In the late 1970's, an environmental study was commissioned by Escambia County to look at the sources of pollution. Recommendations were made. One of the recommendations was that all package sewage treatment plants which were located in the watershed of upper Perdido Bay be closed and the Avondale sewage plant which was discharging 700,000 gallons of wastewater a day to Bayou Marcus also be closed. Upper Perdido Bay was known to have environmental problems (mostly caused by the paper mill). Emerald Coast Utilities Authority (ECUA) had not yet been formed and most of the siting of package wastewater

plants was the responsibility of Escambia County. Developments which were built in lowlands had to have package wastewater plants because septic tanks were not permitted (at least most of the time).

Escambia County entered the 20th century in the early 1980's when the ECUA (it used to be called Escambia County Utilities Authority) was formed by an act of the Florida legislature. Our old disgraced legislator, W.D. Childers, was a big help in getting this legislation passed as was my late father-in-law, Henry Lane, who was then a county commissioner. ECUA closed many of these poorly performing package sewage treatment plants and sent the sewage to one of several wastewater treatment plants - downtown, Avondale, Warrington on Bayou Chico, Cantonment on Elevenmile Creek. These plants did a reasonable job of treating the sewage (at least to secondary standards). The only old package sewage plant still operating is the Innerarity Island plant which ECUA has refused to take over because the whole sewage system is in bad repair. This is costing the homeowners on Innerarity a lot of money in special fees to correct.

Over the years, ECUA has done a creditable job of treating sewage. There have been a few issues now and then, but over all, the job was good. The “downtown” plant which was built in 1930's had been renewed and remodeled several times. It treated about 15 million gallons a day of sewage to a very good level. Most of this sewage flowed down hill to this plant which discharged the waste to Pensacola Bay. The one bad thing about this plant was the odor. According to the downtown crowd, this was stopping the growth of downtown. ECUA tried to correct the odor problem. They stopped burning the sludge at the downtown plant and began selling treated sludge to farmers for fertilizer. This helped somewhat, but the odor was still there and on some days was pretty bad. A drive to move the downtown plant to a different spot began in earnest. Engineering studies were done which indicated the cost was too great. The local news paper, Pensacola News Journal, would run stories from time to time about spills of sludge into Pensacola Bay. The downtown sewer plant, although it didn't look bad, was getting a bad rap. It had to go; it was keeping downtown from developing. Then came Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and FEMA money. That moved the “downtown” plant and the 15 million gallons a day up to a site along the Escambia River. It is now called the Central Reclamation Facility. It costs ECUA and their ratepayers \$46,000 a month to pump this sewage “up-the hill”.

The big advantage with locating a sewage plant in this spot was that some of the effluent could be used for “industrial reuse”. Gulf Power uses ECUA's effluent in their cooling towers, much of which evaporates (Note: not sure how much. DEP has not responded to my inquiry). The pipe from the Central Reclamation Facility up to IP can carry approximately 8 MGD. Right now IP “reuses 5 MGD” and 2 MGD more go around the mill into the IP wetlands. In the meantime, ECUA has closed many of its smaller wastewater treatment plants. The Warrington Plant closed. The Cantonment Plant closed. This leaves only the Bayou Marcus and the Central Reclamation Facilities to treat waste in Escambia County.

Wetlands are good at removing nutrients **for a while**. But once the nutrients have stimulated plant growth and been adsorbed on to soil particles, wetlands will begin to export nutrients. The DEP biologists who used to work at DEP and examined all types of pollution, told me that one of the worse cases of pollution came from a wastewater facility that had started to export decaying plants. So wetlands are only a temporary panacea. Perdido Bay residents, especially those who live in Upper Perdido Bay should try and stop this discharge before it goes too far.

The IP Permit.

It seems like the same old story. IP's permit has expired (in 2015) and IP is operating on the "promise" (Consent Order). After Friends of Perdido Bay lost the administrative hearing challenging the permit in 2009, DEP issued the new permit in March 2010. Permits are only good for five years but the Consent Order which was issued with the permit is good until 2019. Consent Orders are agreements between the polluter and the environmental agency to do certain things by certain dates. They usually state somewhere in the Consent Order that the polluter will be in compliance with all environmental rules and statutes at the termination of the Consent Order. The Consent Order stated that IP was supposed to build the pipeline to the wetlands. They did. Then they were supposed to study the wetlands. They did. Then they were supposed to apply for alternative criteria for certain parameters, such as dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity. These are parameters which paper mills have a very hard time meeting because of the high amounts of oxygen consuming materials they discharge to the environment. Things seemed to have stalled at this point. From the results of the studies which IP puts out every year, they probably can get alternative criteria for some of the state limits, but not all. One very important part of the state environmental rules is that the pollution can not do harm to the environment. From the studies which IP has been doing, it looks like the effluent is toxic to the trees in the wetland. Since IP began applying effluent to the wetlands, ninety percent of the trees in the wetlands have died. Even the species of trees which can be constantly flooded, have not survived. Before the IP land was flooded with the effluent, IP planted approximately 2000 trees suitable for constant flooding on little hills. These trees have not survived either. The effluent is toxic to trees and other types of life.

So what will happen in 2019? Good question. I have thought that if Friends of Perdido Bay and other citizens were not present, the state would probably try and sweep the damage and other problems under the rug and just issue the permit. That was what was happening prior to our involvement in 1986. Ever since citizens challenged the permit in 1986, the paper mill has not been able to get a full valid permit. The environmental agencies have been giving the paper mill permits with promises to clean up ever since. The Perdido Bay Environmental Association went to a hearing in 1987. They lost and the judge said the paper mill needed time to figure out what to do. Champion was issued a permit with a Consent Order (promise) to come into compliance with state law in 1994. Champion, the owners of the paper mill at that time, couldn't really figure out what to do. They sold the paper mill to International Paper in 2000. IP bought the mill knowing the permit was a big issue. At the time IP bought the mill, the 1989 permit had expired and been administratively continued. The 1989 permit continued to be

administratively continued until the second hearing which Friends of Perdido Bay lost in 2009. So after 20 years, the paper mill was issued a permit again with a Consent Order (promise) to clean up. The discharge to the wetlands was IP's answer to "cleaning up".

In the meantime the paper mill has expanded its discharges substantially. In 2005 the paper mill was making 1500 tons per day of pulp, one-third of it is bleached. Today, the paper mill is making 2500 tons per day of pulp, one-third of it is bleached. The damage this increased production has had on Perdido Bay, especially the Upper bay is obvious. Because there is no sampling done on the bottom life in Upper Perdido Bay, the environmental agencies have no record of the damage the paper mill is doing to life in the bay. This situation is going to change. Will the environmental agencies try and give IP a permit in 2019? We will see.

Friends of Perdido Bay Funds Sampling of Bottom Life

After the IP explosion in 2016, the bay sprang back to life. Algae immediately started to grow on our seawalls. Small sprimp and crabs followed. Three weeks after the explosion I caught a 20" redfish in my favorite redfishing hole. When the mill started back up two-weeks later, the bay again died. Friends of Perdido Bay took water samples during the shutdown. Now, Friends of Perdido Bay has hired a consulting firm to sample the bottom of the bay and Tee Lake, lest the environmental agencies think that IP's wetlands have "Saved Perdido Bay". The IP wetlands have help in some aspects. The wetlands are removing nutrients and the paper mill sludges are settling out in the wetlands and the little marsh lakes - Tee and Wicker Lakes. But the 12-hour trip through the wetlands has done little to remove the toxicity associated with the effluent. The effluent is still herbicidal and toxic to certain forms of life. This should become evident once the biological sampling has been completed.

The nutrient/toxic algae story which was being told by Livingston and other researchers was just a cover for the toxic chemicals which were being put in the bay, especially after the mill converted to chlorine dioxide bleaching from chlorine. Stay tuned for more news in the next newsletter.

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.

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