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Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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www.friendsofperdidobay.com

Getting Away from Using Paper

My children are always reminding me that fighting a paper company and then writing a newsletter on paper is an oxymoron. They are right. So we want to know how many of you want your newsletter e-mailed instead of mailed on paper. Some people may want both. If you want your newsletter emailed, please fill out the form below with a current, correct email address and mail it to the address above along with your mailing label so we know who you are. Also need a current phone number. If you would like to

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keep every thing the same, just do nothing.

Do Not Care

The letter we mailed to the Florida state representatives explaining how IP could have a permit but still be harming Perdido Bay, got no response from our representatives. I can only surmise that they do not care. In the same light, several Escambia County Commissioners have been publically defending IP in social media without a shed of evidence that they saying is correct. Commissioner Underhill has gone so far as to drink the water out of the bay to show that it is not toxic. He is lucky he did not get a *Vibrio* infection, but only studies can demonstrate how the health of Perdido Bay has been affected by the paper mill. There is only one study which has been done in Florida on life in Perdido Bay since the Dr. Livingston's studies ended in 2007. That is the study which Friends of Perdido Bay commissioned to be done in the Fall of 2018 by the biological

consulting firm, Cardno.. In that study, four stations were sampled, two in Upper Perdido Bay and one each in Tee and Wicker Lakes. At these stations, the biologists found very little life; so little life that they couldn't even do a statistical analysis. A fish trawl was also done. A lot of little fish were found but they were all of one species. These studies demonstrated what poor diversity and quality of life exists in Upper Perdido Bay. Of course those of us who have lived here have seen the bay deteriorate. But it takes studies to demonstrate this; not drinking the water.

Political Orphans

We have known for a long time that we didn't have much political clout. George McPherson once remarked to me that it didn't matter what political party was in power, people on Perdido Bay didn't get anywhere. George was a resident of Perdido Beach, AL and helped fight for a cleaner bay for years. When he was 95 he moved back with his children. It has been amazing that politics can have such an impact. There have been plenty of state biologists who recognized the problem but couldn't do anything because they were thwarted from above. One consultant told me after studying Perdido Bay, it was the worse case of pollution that he had ever seen. Who is behind these politically powerful people? Labor Unions, timber interests and maybe Wall Street.

The IP mill in Cantonment, FL is a unionized mill with 400 + good paying unionized jobs. The unions have always been supportive of the Democratic Party and the Democratic Party depends on unions for their support. In recent years with the loss of industrial jobs, union membership has dwindled and every union job matters to the Democratic Party. I hate to go against an industry which is unionize. In many ways it seem unpatriotic. Yet I think IP has used its unionized labor force to get concessions which it probably could not have gotten otherwise. I look at the various lawsuits we have had on Perdido Bay which produced basically no improvement and only a small amount of money. These lawsuits were run by Democratic lawyers.

The timber interests are another big political force and they tend to be Republican. Years ago, paper mills owned much of the forests from which they got their raw material. But over the years, production at the paper mills has expanded and individuals began to grow trees for the paper mills. They call it silvaculture and it provides a very nice income for many people, especially in North Florida and South Alabama. Since silvaculture or tree growing is a form of agriculture, many tree growers are granted special reduced property taxes, called agricultural exemptions. With an agricultural exemption, a tree grower will pay about 10% of what a normal property owner will pay. In many cases these tree growers will rent their tree farms out to hunt clubs and actually make money on their property and recoup any money they pay in property taxes. With low property taxes, you can hold your property for many years until maybe development comes along and you can sell it at much higher value. At least, that is the long term strategy of many timber growers. But of course if there is no local paper mill and no place to sell your timber, it might be hard to convince the local property appraiser that you are actually in the timber business and it isn't just a hobby. So, property owners who want to get an agricultural exemption for timber on their property, need a paper mill.

I was wondering how many people in Escambia County, FL had agricultural exemptions for growing timber. I would have guessed about 60. Through a Freedom of

Information Act request to Escambia County, FL, I found that 1,421 people had agricultural exemptions for tree growing in Escambia County, and 400 of those had houses on them as well. I was amazed, as this is a lot of people paying low property taxes. There were several criteria you had to meet in order to be able to get this exemption; you had to have pine trees growing on your property and be over 40 acres in size, as this is the minimum amount of land the tree harvesting companies will work. It takes about 15 years for pine trees to reach minimum harvest size for pulp wood.

If you talk to Escambia County forester, Kathy Hardin, you will get an even better picture of how important forestry operations are to the local economy. In Escambia County, 56% of the land is forested and forestry operations contributes \$1,113 million to the local economy and provides 5,653 jobs. This is a big chunk of the local economy. I asked her what would happen if the IP mill in Cantonment were to close. She said it would be an economic disaster for the local economy.

In Florida, the Northwest area of the state (our area) ranks second in number of acres of timberlands behind the Northeast section in the latest survey (2014) from the USDA. In the central and south portions of the state, forest land is being replaced with developments. I am sure there are a lot of local timberland owners who are hoping that this will happen here as well. One very large timber land company in North Florida, the St. Joe company, was the largest land owner in the state of Florida at one time. The St. Joe company closed their paper mill in Port St. Joe Florida in 1995 and proceeded to turn themselves into a development company. Things didn't go as planned. In 2014, the St. Joe Company sold most of their timberlands to a subsidiary of the Mormon Church, who is now the largest landowner in Florida.

What is all this leading to? I believe, the IP mill in Cantonment is using more and more recycled cardboard and less and less virgin timber. The fact that we see less foam and smell the paper mill less, I believe, is because they are doing less pulping of virgin timber. I can see the smoke from IP's recovery furnace at my house. This recovery furnace is where the mill recaptures their cooking chemicals from pulping. You used to see the smoke all the time. Now I only see the smoke one or two days a week. The foam on the bay usually follows the next day. This means that they are buying less and less timber from the local timber growers and using more and more recycled fiber. It is probably cheaper to make liner board from recycled fiber than having to pulp virgin timber. As someone told me the other day, if IP buys less and less timber from local producers why should IP stay open? I agree. Let Perdido Bay become the beautiful, productive bay it should be. It would definitely be an economic asset to the local economy.

Our Environmental Agencies Getting Teeth?

International Paper's effluent has been continuously toxic to the water flea since 2012. It was also toxic before that but just intermittently. I have the upmost respect for that flea. It is one tough little bugger. There are many organisms which aren't as hardy, and most of them are not surviving in Perdido Bay anymore. Also I believe that, while certain fish may not get killed by the toxic effluent, they can sense the foul water. The minute IP's effluent was no longer entering the bay after the digester blew up in 2017, the big fish started coming back in. The last redfish I caught in Perdido Bay was in April 2017. It got stuck in a hole as the mill and its effluent started back up.

So the Florida DEP is trying to give IP a new permit. But what can they do about the nine years of toxicity? They can't give IP a permit with those toxicity violations. The DEP's answer to continuous violations - **THE Consent Order**. The papermill in Cantonment Florida has never met standards over the whole time citizens have been doing oversight on the DEP. The papermill has continued to pollute but with permits issued with Consent Orders. These Consent Orders are promises to come into compliance which never happens.

This recent Consent Order for the toxicity is a little different than the past Consent Orders. It does not contain limits like a permit. It is a Consent Order for fines only. For past failures (only since 2015 since the statute of limitations has run out on the failures before that), the Florida DEP is proposing to fine IP \$131,000. IP probably makes this amount of money in two hours. So it is not much of a fine. But there is more. IP must run toxicity tests monthly until they have not failed a test for 12 months. For each failed toxicity test, IP is fined \$10,000. So if IP fails a test for 12 months, that is only \$120,000 a year. Seems like a drop in the bucket or one dead water flea in the bucket. They can continue doing this for three years and then they must shut down. Does this sound tough to you? Well, it must sound tough to IP because they have yet to sign the agreement. To me, this is the litmus test for how tough DEP will get. I think, if the companies resist, DEP will not go to court to enforce the Consent Order. As an ex-secretary of DEP once told me, governmental agencies simply don't have the resources to battle these large companies in court. Teeth cost money.

What is Toxic in IP's effluent?

A recent study of IP's toxicity problem (paid for by IP) showed that the toxicity did not come from copper as was originally thought. Recommendations were for additional evaluations. Perhaps it is the long chain fatty acids and resin acids which are a component of pines trees. These organic chemicals (called refractory organics) are not degraded very well in the wastewater treatment system, especially if you have turned down your aerators, as IP has.

Or it could be the very alkaline water which IP is now discharging to their treatment system. IP is removing their green house gases using sodium hydroxide scrubbers and putting this alkaline discharge in their treatment system. I have measured pH's above 8 at my beach this summer. With this high level of pH, I doubt IP can run this effluent through its wetlands. IP is probably going back into Elevenmile Creek just as the effluent comes out of the pipe. Interestingly, IP is reporting a pH at their discharge point before it enters the 10-mile pipe as 6.3. Oops! The meter must be stuck.

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