

**Friends of Perdido Bay**

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Tidings The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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Thank you for your support

I know we start every newsletter with this. Thank you. But it is genuine. Our entire funding comes from you, our supporters. We receive no government grants or help from other groups. It is not that we haven't tried to get grants, but none have come our way. When we were first founded in 1988, we did get a big grant from the EPA to start a citizen monitoring program and do several other things. It was a lot of work, and I felt like it didn't directly help our 'clean-up of Perdido Bay'. So being independent of government funding has given us an independence which is good. We can do what we want and do the research which we think is relevant to our cause. I will report our latest findings in an article below. Thank you for your support.

YUCK

While the environmental agencies are reporting that everything is rosy. No unsightly algae blooms or eutrophication and low dissolved oxygen to report (thanks to the effects of the chemical, chlorine dioxide as reported in the last newsletter). But there are few fish, at least in the Upper Perdido Bay. Our recent testing found out why. An analysis of the phytoplankton blooming in Upper Perdido Bay in June, 2025 found that about 95% of the phytoplankton belonged to a very undesirable group – blue green algae. Phytoplankton are

the top (or bottom) of the food chain. If the phytoplankton are not nutritious or maybe even toxic, the rest of the animals which depend on healthy phytoplankton are not going to be present. This includes populations of herbivorous fish. If you do a chlorophyll analysis, you will find chlorophyll. But it belongs to the wrong group.

Humans are suffering from a similar problem, according to nutritionists. We eat too much processed foods. Blue green algae are like ultra processed food. Blue green algae also produce toxins which can kill a food chain. The major genus of blue green algae is Microcystis which is normally found in fresh water but can tolerate brackish water. It can be toxic and has been blamed for wildlife kills in freshwater lakes in Florida. It is possible that this blue green algae may be coming down Elevenmile Creek and blooming in the Upper Bay. But the numbers of this blue green algae far and away exceeded the next most abundant phytoplankton. There were very low numbers of healthy phytoplankton such as diatoms.

Friends of Perdido Bay did more phytoplankton testing in early September when there had been little rainfall. Samples were taken in Lillian, Alabama and in the Upper Bay. We will give you the results of that sampling in the next newsletter. So, in spite of a rosy picture, things aren't so rosy. Just why blue green algae and not healthy algae are blooming in Upper Perdido Bay is not clear. Perhaps, the effects of herbicidal chlorate suppress the healthy algae and allow only the blue green algae to bloom. As I wrote in the past newsletters, the growth of algae on rocks and other hard substrates in upper Perdido Bay is also suppressed.

Just a Matter of Time

International Paper continues to close their old mills. The latest closure was the mill in Savannah GA. Goggle must know what I want to hear because that news was the first to pop up in my news feed. These old mills are slowly being phased out. One pulping line was shut down at IP's Cantonment mill in 2024 and in time, I am sure the mill will finally shut down entirely. I noticed as I drove North on US 29 several weeks ago, that there are a lot of timber properties for sale. Of course there will be a demand for timber at West Fraser saw mill which is north of the papermill, but that demand can not match the demand which IP had in its heyday. IP was producing 2300 tons per day of pulp which created a demand of approximately 7,000 tons per day of pine chips and trees. That is a lot of pine chips.

I often wondered why the mill stayed open as long as it did. They were the sole discharger in a little bay which was pristine until the papermill started dumping in 1942. It seemed illogical to continue dumping and causing damage to the bay. The allowable discharge of up to 10,000 pounds per day of biosolids which contained dioxins and heavy metals was way more than our bay could tolerate. Although the paper mill hired consultants who just ignored the huge amount of material that decayed at a slow rate, the culprit was obvious – the paper mill. The environmental agencies were rendered helpless. Why would the paper mill stay in our bay? It was a bad business decision. Or was it.

I think the decision was made sometime between 2000 and 2007. IP had just bought the mill from Champion. They closed the older mill in Mobile and decided to convert the Pensacola mill from bleached white paper to linear board. It was a good decision because Amazon and mail order was taking off. The powerful timber interests from St. Joe Paper and local growers needed to have a market for all the trees which were grown in North Florida. In 2007, IP poured \$145 million into the Pensacola mill, making it a premier facility. Production at the mill jumped from 1500 tons of bleach pulp a day to 2300 tons of a mix of bleached and unbleached pulp a day. This was obviously going to have a big impact on Perdido Bay. BUT, the solution which was being pushed by Jeb Bush and his Secretary of DEP, David Struhs, was getting out of Elevenmile Creek and going to a land disposal – called a wetland treatment. It really didn't matter if it was going to work or not, because the hype would make it work. And the pesky citizens would hopefully be gone.

To make the plan more palatable to IP, which must have had its doubts, was the failed class-action lawsuit. This lawsuit which was filled in 2000 and finally dismissed in 2006, gave IP immunity for its damages. With this immunity, especially close to the discharge near Ramsey Beach, IP built the wetlands. It was a joint venture between IP and ECUA. Reportedly, IP spent \$85 million on the project. They have continuously monitored the wetland project since they began their discharge in 2012.

But IP has yet to get a permit. The idea was for the wetland discharge to remove nutrients and improve life in Perdido Bay. That has yet to happen. In 2018 and again in 2021, Friends of Perdido Bay did surveys of benthic and fish life in Upper PERDIDO Bay. The surveys showed that life had not improved in the upper bay. In fact, it was probably worse.

So what does IP think about their decision to go to a wetland treatment. I asked them in August 2024 if they thought that spending the money to build a wetland was a waste of their money. Here is their response ala Whitney Fike.

“We recognize that healthy, sustainable watersheds are essential to our community and that we have an important role to play. The Pensacola Mill’s NPDES permit was issued in 2010. The Pensacola Mill submitted a complete renewal application in Sept. 2014, thereby administratively extending our permit coverage and compliance requirements. We continue to work toward a permanent solution with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).

Our efforts during the past decade have not been a waste of money. Since 2010, we have restored nearly 3,000 acres into wetlands and a conservation easement. This area plays and will continue to play a pivotal role in the healthy watershed now and for years to come.

You may also find the following facts both interesting and helpful in your research.

The mill has undertaken extensive, ongoing monitoring, in coordination with the FDEP that demonstrates the wetlands are biologically rich and diverse.

This monitoring has also shown that the overall health of Lower Elevenmile Creek and Upper Perdido Bay have improved since the start of our wetland restoration

Annual monitoring of bird populations indicates the wetlands support a high diversity of breeding and migratory bird species. In total, 230 species have been reported within the wetlands since 2012. In 2024, new and existing rookeries were again present in the wetland and include cattle egrets, white ibis, great egrets, little blue herons, snowy egrets, great blue herons and green heron.

In addition to the wetlands, the site includes a nearly 1,300-acre conservation area, which is actively managed to restore, enhance and maintain habitat types considered by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory to be imperiled. Because of the continued land management efforts, the conservation area now supports numerous documented populations of state threatened or endangered plant species, primarily including pitcher plants and the spoonleaf sundew.

We are actively working with the state of Florida to ensure the health of our waterways. This includes our work toward a permanent solution with the FDEP.”

Thank you IP.

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 \$30.00 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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