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Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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Jackie Lane -Editor

We Got It! We Got it!

When Friends of Perdido Bay first started out, we were really ignorant of the enormity of the fight. When asked at a meeting once who we thought the involved parties were, we answered “us and the paper mill and maybe ECUA”. But over the years we have learned that there were a lot more players - big ones. To begin with, a Champion spokesperson told me that “their suppliers” would protect them from us and any government regulators. I envisioned local repair people, maybe a few chemical suppliers, etc. I did not envision the whole timber industry, the chemical industry, national schools of forestry, shareholders and of course, all the bought-off politicians.

The paper making business is not a high profit business. Recently, IP’s CEO was bragging about having a profit margin of 24%, the best in the business. International Paper reported that their operating earnings increased 42% despite a 1.75% decline in net sales. Their second quarter profit fell 38%. So in spite of falling profits, how do increase earnings? (Read between the lines) You reduce costs. Besides restructuring and getting bigger, you decrease the amount of money spent on environmental control. When you have compliant regulatory agencies (state and federal), you can do such things. I was complaining, recently, to a local DEP person about how IP’s solids were being spread all over the bay, how the bay was extremely turbid. “They should be using polymers to help the solids settle,” the spokesperson said. They are not. Once they get the solids to settle then they have to dispose of them. That costs money. So, whatever it takes to make a profit in a market that is declining, that is what you have to do. It is almost anti-American to suggest that IP loose money just so that they can comply with the law and protect Perdido Bay. It seems like this is the way capitalism works in this country - one person’s loss is another person’s gain.

But there is much more than just the paper industry involved. There is the whole economy of North Florida and Alabama. Silviculture, or the growing of trees, is a big business in North Florida. John Pace, the founder of the paper mill in Cantonment Florida, knew that if you were going to grow trees as a cash crop, you had to have a market for those trees. And paper mills were a big segment of the market. John Pace was a forester before he was a papermaker. Sustainability is the big issue. The August/September 2014 issue of a business magazine, *850 Business Magazine of Northwest Florida* details just how big and important growing trees is to the North Florida economy. In 2011 (latest available figures) for Florida as a whole, there were 17 million acres of timberlands which supported \$13.95 billion in revenues and employed 76,000 workers. Much of that in North Florida. The pulp and paper industry in Florida accounted for 75% of those jobs.

Besides providing wood, forests have a high intangible value in the protection of water resources, wildlife production and carbon sequestration. A study done by the University of Florida and the Nature Conservancy estimated that the intangible value of a forest is \$5,030 per acre. I don't think anyone would argue that forests are much better than parking lots or even fields of corn. Many foresters whom I have talked to, have even argued that the soils of North Florida are not suitable for any other crop. The soils are just too sandy to sustain row crops without massive irrigation systems. Even growing livestock on pasture is difficult on the sandy soils. And so the economy of this area is tied to the growing of trees.

One paper maker in North Florida, the St Joe Company, decided to leave paper making and go into land development. The St. Joe Company was started by a DuPont family member, Edward Ball in 1936. At one point the company owned nearly all the land between Fort Walton Beach and Tallahassee, FL, approximately one million acres. Much of this land was acquired for a few dollars per acre. Soon, a paper mill was built in the town of Port St. Joe. Much of the virgin long leaf pines from the surrounding forests were logged for paper making, and replaced with slash pine plantations. The paper mill operated, making container board for boxes, until 1996 when it was sold to another paper maker. That paper maker closed for good in 1998. A smelly polluting paper mill which emitted dioxin was not conducive to selling coastal properties along the beachfront. I remember getting a call from a woman down at Mexico Beach, FL (just down the beach from the St. Joe Paper mill) in the early 1980's about sand dollars with diseases and lesions. This was a sign of dioxin pollution, although I was unaware of it at the time. Through the years, the St. Joe company sold tracts of land to the air force and to the state of Florida in fairly profitable business deals. Before the St. Joe Company sold much of its land to the AgReserves, a subsidiary of the Mormon church in 2013, it owned 567,000 acres and was Florida's second largest land owner. In November 2013, AgReserves, a subsidiary of the Mormon Church, bought 383,000 acres from St. Joe. AgReserves has said it will continue to manage the property as timberland.

The St. Joe Company had a lot of political pull in Florida, especially in north Florida. Part of U.S. Highway 98 was moved northward to accommodate a St. Joe coastal development and the use of public funds to expand the Panama City airport are examples of St. Joe's political pull. Along with its land development enterprises, St. Joe continued to grow and sell pine trees for paper making and forest products. I am sure that this is one reason that the International Paper mill in this area and the paper mill in Panama City, Florida remain open in spite of the fact that both are very old and polluting. Both paper mills probably enjoyed the political favors from the St. Joe company because they were markets for its pine wood chips. Currently, the Democratic candidate for Governor of Florida, Charlie Crist, is a St. Joe Board member.

St. Joe still holds 184,000 acres of real estate, most of it as developed or developable land. St. Joe's developments along the coast are well planned. Watercolors is an example of a quaint seaside town. The beaches owned by St. Joe are very beautiful.

Like St. Joe, International Paper Company has sold most of its local real estate holdings to a Real Estate Investment Company, American Timberlands. This company, according to its website, is based in South Carolina and manages timberlands in the southeast for various purposes. Timberlands can be profitable. Most states offer lowered property taxes if you are engaged in agriculture. Growing trees is considered agriculture. If you only have to pay \$1.00 or \$2.00 per acre in property taxes, and you can turn around and rent a large part of the property for hunting for \$10 to \$20 per acre, you are making a nice profit. You should see what they want for hunting tracts - a lot. IP has also sold its land along the Perdido River to the State of Alabama for conservation.

So advocates for keeping paper mills open and operating do not like people who complain about pollution coming from paper mills, like us. We are only trying to protect our property as well, but we don't have the political pull of an economic engine which generates \$13.95 billion in revenues. Like I used to hear when I drove through the smell in Cantonment Florida, "It smells like money to me".

Vote Yes on 1

Florida has a land purchasing program called "Florida Forever". \$300 million is supposed to go into this program every year for restoring sensitive lands, buying lands for conservation, etc. Unfortunately, it must be funded every year by the Florida legislature. That is a problem. Every year, it becomes vulnerable to political maneuvering and the funding has all but dried up. So, on the 2014 November ballot, there is a Florida Water and Land Conservation Amendment which will create a **dedicated** funding source to acquire and restore Florida conservation and recreation lands. If this amendment passes, and we are recommending that it does, 33 percent of the taxes collected on documentary stamps (taxes collected when you buy/sell a house) will be used for buying conservation lands, restoring the Everglades, protecting springs, and all the other necessary things to try and keep Florida beautiful and attractive to its residents and visitors. The

amendment has a 20 year life. So Florida voters, if you don't go and vote for anything else, VOTE YES ON AMENDMENT 1 in November.

Joy Morrill

I met Joy Morrill twice. She was a avid spokesperson for the environment and the beauty of lower Perdido Bay. She was especially appalled by the concrete towers going up on Orange Beach. She wrote lyrically about her childhood, growing up in the warm clear waters of lower Perdido Bay. She was a marine botanist who helped JoAnne Allen understand the scientific complexities of the Bay. She was writing a book about Perdido Bay and its demise. But she died before the book was finished. Today, there is a land trust named for Joy for her work trying to save the beach mouse at Orange Beach. The title of her book is: *Anatomy of a Coast: Living on the Edge in America*. Here is an excerpt from the book:

Revelers in Xanadu: All told, we were few in those days on the Bay, adults and children: a family here, another there; one child, two sisters, three cousins, four; any others miles apart. For children, growing up on Perdido Bay until the mid- to late sixties, was paradise unalloyed. The Bay was the focus of our lives, and we spun out each day's length in boundless joy. Everyday lives, small adventures, even great life dramas go on in a healthy bay, day and night. We had only to race a couple of hundred feet down the hill to the beach to be socked-up, surrounded, knee -deep, neck-deep in it, under it. Perdido Bay was our life; we belonged with it. Its life was ours, and we lived in the midst of its passages, its excitements, its tranquility, its bounty, its sometime rages.

We could swim before we could walk and almost convinced ourselves we belonged in the bay among the other salty, soft, or crusty creatures.....large barnacle larvae, perhaps careering around awhile before choosing a place to settle. We sorely felt our ultimate shortcoming: having to come to the surface too often to breathe.....

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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