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Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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Happy Earth Day

Occasionally we should stop and consider that we are part of a bigger world where collectively our actions do have an impact. The big global issue which is popular now is climate change. Flooding, droughts, bad storms are impacting all people of the world and are attributed to this changing climate. How much of climate change is caused by man's activities is open to debate. The earth is getting warmer. We can measure this. Coral reefs are dying due to increasing temperatures in the oceans. We know that burning of fossil fuels has caused an increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This increase in carbon dioxide has produced noticeable effects on our earth. One of these effects is acidification of the oceans which will have severe effects on many forms of ocean life. Just imagine if you were a snail trying to secrete a shell when the pH is becoming more acidic. It would be tough. Another effect of increasing carbon dioxide is the increase in photosynthesis. With the increasing carbon dioxide plants are growing faster and making more oxygen. This may be a good thing, but who knows.

The point of this article is that we should be thinking of ways to minimize our impact on earth - **live lighter**. Drive less, drive fuel efficient cars, use less air conditioning and heat, install solar, dry clothes in the sun, live in smaller houses, be less consuming over all. If we bought less, then the Chinese would produce less and this would also help the world. The Chinese are huge consumers now and it is not helping the world's environment. Earth Day is one day when we should consider our individual impact and figure out ways to lessen it. See you April 22 at Bayview Park in Pensacola from 10 to 4.

Back in Full Operation

After the explosion at the International Paper mill in Cantonment Florida on Jan 22, 2017, Perdido Bay was beginning to show some life. The water was certainly clearer and on some days I could even say it was beautiful. The black deposits that would cover

the bottom from the industrial production, ceased and the water was less brown. That has all changed again. The mill went back to full production the first week in April. The bay is back to its pitiful state. While the bay was noticeably clearer and less “soupy” while IP was operating at half, I did not see any increase in fish. I did see more people out trying to catch fish but whether or not there were more fish is not known. We are seeing many more small blue crabs. One of our members in the middle bay reported to us that their grandchildren were finding baby clams in the sand which they had not seen for years. I only went swimming once while the mill was in limited production (the water is still cold for me), but did not find any baby clams. One thing I am beginning to see is algae growing on rocks and on sea walls. Whether this algal growth will continue now that the mill is back in full operation is not known. But we will continue watching. Prior to the explosion, it was obvious to me that the mills’s effluents were herbicidal and toxic. Gone were the “good” plankton which are food for anchovies. Schools of mullet were hardly seen in Perdido Bay. Blue crabs were few. It was pretty sad.

Friends of Perdido Bay sampled several places in the bay on January 30, 2017, about a week after the IP explosion. IP had begun to discharge effluent but at very low levels. The oxygen concentration in Eleven Mile Creek, even at 10 feet deep was over 50% saturated. When IP is fully discharging, the oxygen concentration is usually less than 30% saturated at this depth. In the bay just outside the mouth of Tee and Wicker Lakes, the oxygen concentration on the surface was 92% of being fully saturated. At this spot, the mill’s effluent usually depresses the oxygen to 70% saturation. We were unable to get into the little marsh lakes because the tide was low and without the huge flow from the paper mill the entrance into the lakes is very shallow. The large contribution of organic nitrogen into the bay was evident in Elevenmile Creek but not outside the mouth of the lakes in the bay. It was interesting to me that the high levels of organic nitrogen which the mill puts into the bay may not be associated with the suspended solids as I once thought. The total suspended solids measured “not detectable” in Elevenmile Creek. It could be that these solids are so fine that they are not measured as solids, but are rather nearly a very fine colloidal substance. They settle out in the bay and look like black deposits.

The mill’s explosion on January 22, 2017 was two days after President Trump was inaugurated. This may have been a coincidence, but I also learned that the Georgia Pacific mill in Brewton Alabama was shut down about the same time. The Brewton mill discharges to the Escambia River. Two big local paper mills shut down about the same time makes you wonder. IP said that they had been shut down prior to the explosion and this shut down contributed to the explosion with a gas build up. So why were these mills shut down? Were they modifying some of their processes in response to an order from President Trump. We know that in the first few days after taking office, President Trump rescinded many of President Obama’s environmental orders. It is scary to think that we may be subjected to more toxic chemicals with very little oversight by the EPA (See next article on EPA). But we will continue to watch Perdido Bay and see what changes we notice. The bad thing is you can not see, hear or feel many of the toxic chemicals these mills put out. It takes years to determine the risks these chemicals have on people and the environment. I know that these mills will do whatever it takes to make money.

Sometimes it is easier to break a pollution law and pay a fine rather than fix an expensive problem. Without a functional EPA, people are at risk.

The clean-up of properties after the explosion cost IP an estimated \$80 to \$120M, much of which their insurance covered. I do know of one person who suffered severe medical injuries and was hospitalized for several weeks. A check of the Escambia Court records does not show any lawsuits which had been filed because of the explosion. Maybe IP settled out of court or lawsuits were filed in Federal Court due to the lingering health effects or damage. I can imagine that breathing the fumes from the explosion must have been like breathing fumes from “EastOff” oven cleaner - very alkaline pH.

We Need A Functioning EPA

Our congressman from the First District in North Florida, Matt Gaetz, has introduced a bill to abolish the EPA. I am sure the big polluters and their allies are behind this latest move to lessen environmental protection for people and allow more pollution. Matt Gaetz claims that each state can handle environmental protection. The only protection we are going to get from states is more rubber stamping of permits. States are not really equipped to set environmental limits or rules because most do not have research arms or budgets. Further more states, even if they were inclined to do so, do not have the enforcement power of the federal government. And it takes some pretty big enforcement power to challenge these big polluting corporations.

On Perdido Bay, our experience with the EPA enforcement has not been great. For years, I am sure the EPA knew of the damage the paper mill was doing to our bay but looked the other way. The EPA allowed the states to issue the permits and do the enforcement but the EPA had oversight on the state’s activities. Unfortunately, EPA’s oversight of Perdido Bay’s pollution problem was poor, mainly, I think, due to politics.

I am reading a book, although old, highlights the problem with the EPA and current environmental laws. The book is titled “Environmental Policy in the 1990's”. After the great golden era of environmental laws in the 1970's, polluters regrouped. The different trade associations hired lobbyists. PACs and Super PACs were formed to elect politicians who were anti-environment, pro-business, property rights advocates, and very conservative. While the population of the U.S. is generally pro-environment, many of the politicians are not. Regan rolled back environmental rules and Congress began to cut the EPA’s budget. Not only was EPA’s budget being cut, but more EPA programs were being enacted. Superfund, Toxics rules and a variety of other programs were assigned to the EPA. As the duties of the EPA grew, the budget was being cut. The result was an overwhelmed and less effect EPA. In order to prioritize the duties, EPA went to risk assessment. Conventional pollutants, i.e. BOD, TSS, were deemed to no longer be a problem. Little bays, like Perdido Bay, just fell through the cracks of risk assessment. But the problem with risk assessment was “Who’s risk”, the public’s or industry? Too often, as in the case with our last administrative hearing, the government only considers the industry’s side and not the public’s. We need to elect politicians who represent the people and not special interests. In order to have a viable EPA, it must be funded. As important as it is to protect our nation from foreign threats, is to protect our nation from threats of toxic pollution and declining quality of life.

New Developments

The Perdido Bay watershed is changing. Right now we are blessed with having an undeveloped watershed (70% is forested), but as years go by, that is going to change. Baldwin County is especially vulnerable to more growth. It seems like Orange Beach has already maxed out. Or maybe we can fit a few more condos there. But development is moving north. A huge development which I didn't know anything about, but which everyone in Baldwin County must know about, is the OWA complex. This family friendly entertainment complex is being built on 400 acres southeast of Foley on the Baldwin Expressway. It is a joint venture between the City of Foley, and the Poach Creek Indians. It will feature a Marriott Suites, restaurants, and a 21 ride theme park with the world's largest roller coaster. So when you get tired of sitting on the beach you can always venture to the new entertainment complex. There is no mention of a casino, yet. It should open this summer.

Escambia County Florida is also planning big things. With the arrival of Navy Federal Credit Union Center off 9 Mile Road in Beulah which currently employs 4,500 people, Escambia County is planning on developing this area of the County. In 2011 Escambia County passed a Mid-West Sector Development plan which calls for a planned development on 15,000 acres of land, north of I-10, west of Hwy 29, and south of Hwy 196. The plan calls for 23,000 dwelling units with commercial development (up to 60%).

Because this is a "planned development", there will be a town center, where residents can bike or walk to commercial centers with roads, etc. All sounds very planned. I wonder why they didn't put this "planned development" in downtown Pensacola which is trying to promote infill?

A more environmental friendly plan which Escambia County's Parks is planning is the muliti-use kayak/waterboarding park on 40-acres of land bordering Perdido Bay and Herron Bayou. This park will probably open next year. A County boat ramp will also be built on Herron Bayou. This is a beautiful piece of property which was bought with BP funds from a defunct development. It happens to be very close to my property.

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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