

Friends of Perdido Bay

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TIDINGS

The Newsletter of Friends of Perdido Bay

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www.friendsofperdidobay.com

Thank you

Our members are critical for this environmental group's existence. I am sure that there are many people in our community who wish we would go away. But we will continue to persist. It is because of you. Even though the papermill is still discharging in our bay, they do not have a valid permit to do so. IP's permit expired in 2015 and the Consent Order in 2019. Why don't they get a new permit? They can't. We have the data to show that they are harming the bay. So, we are going to continue to be a force for the good of our bay thanks to you.

Corruption

Friends of Perdido Bay went to Earth Day in Pensacola this year. The weather is always pleasant, and it is a good chance to speak with people. This year our theme was "Why did DEP allow IP to kill Perdido Bay?" We were referring to the fact that DEP is allowing IP to dump smokestack chemicals into our bay. This has obviously impacted our bay. Of course, DEP is claiming that IP's water treatment system and wetlands treat the effluent, but only some chemicals are treated. Others, like heavy metals pass through unchanged. And in 2021, we did find higher amounts of barium and arsenic in the sediments of Upper Perdido Bay. We are going to test the sediments again

soon. But there were other chemicals, such as acetaldehyde, chloroform and even dioxin, which disappeared from the air emissions. Are they now being dumped in the wetlands? One very obvious chemical, sulfur dioxide, is no longer being put in the air but rather in the water. Hence, we no longer smell the paper mill.

The overwhelming response of the people we spoke to at Earth Day to our question about why DEP allowed IP to kill Perdido Bay said it was *corruption*. A few said that, at least the air was cleaner. I had to agree with them that cleaner air was a good thing, especially since more and more subdivisions are being built closer to the mill. But the answer of corruption made me stop and think – at what level? National, local? No one elaborated. I started to think back about our fight over the years. How some of the local attorneys like Mike Papantonio, had done TV ads to keep the papermill out of Escambia Bay. It would have been easy for the papermill, then owned by Champion, to just build a pipeline across Hwy 29 and let the effluent flow downhill into Escambia Bay. That was what we wanted in 1999. But corruption can take many forms, especially since large amounts of money are required to get elected. In spite of the pollution, the papermill provides jobs and income for the local community and the local treegrowers have depended on the mill for a long time. But this is no reason to kill a bay.

An Old Mill

The International Paper Mill in Cantonment, Florida is symbolic of manufacturing in the U.S. The mill was built in Cantonment, Florida in 1941 by the Pace Brothers of Santa Rosa County. It was called the Florida Pulp and Paper Company. The city of Pensacola bought 800 acres of land north of Pensacola which it would then lease to the The Florida Pulp and Paper Company for ninety-nine years. They built the mill as “an aid to forest development”. Remember in those days, much of the great forests of the South, comprised of the long-leaf pine, had been clear cut. The old pilings in the water at Millview in Upper Perdido Bay are relics of the clear-cutting days in the late 1880’s when five sawmills cut the long-leaf pine logs into boards and sent them down to the port of Pensacola on a local railroad. This was the heyday of the port of Pensacola (before pickleball). In 1940, the mill cost \$3,750,000 to build and part of the money came from a Reconstruction (Civil War) Finance Loan. That mill would produce 25,000 tons of bleached sulfate pulp a year using the Kraft process. The Kraft process was developed in

Germany in 1879 for use with sappy pines trees. It was a chemical process which used sodium hydroxide and sulfur to breakdown the trees into fibers to make paper. To make this process cost effective, it recycled most of the chemicals used in the process but required a lot of water to wash the chemicals out of the fibers.

Fast forward today, the paper mill is still making paper using the Kraft process but production has jumped significantly from 25,000 tons per year to 2500 tons per day before the cut back in 2023. This is a remarkable achievement except for the pollution control. In 1941, I am sure there were few people who considered pollution control. In the early 1970's the mill now owned by St.Regis, was forced to think about pollution control in a series of local conferences convened by the state environmental agencies. That was when the mill installed treatment ponds to enhance breakdown of organic matter. Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) and Total Suspended Solids (TSS) were the parameters of interest. But the small creek, Elevenmile, and the small bay, Perdido Bay, into which the papermill discharged simply could not handle this pollution load. It takes three times as much timber to make a ton of pulp, so 2500 tons a day of pulp would be 7500 tons of logs. While the oxygen consuming properties may have been better, the foam and dark water became nuisances. The resin acids from the pine trees combined with the sodium hydroxide of the pulping process to make soap. Any adjatation of the water would produce foam. In the 1970's citizens on Perdido Bay were writing letters complaining about foam that was 15 to 20" deep. St. Regis denied that they were the cause of the foam. And so it went.

As the environmental laws became tougher, the environmental agencies kept pushing closed-loop technologies. Zero discharge is required of any new paper mill built today. But will it happen? Have there been any new paper mills built? Most new paper mills which are being built today, are using recycled fiber and not making virgin fiber from pine trees. International Paper has closed several of its old mills including the Savannah, GA mill. In 2023, IP closed one of its two paper making machines in Pensacola. Rather than build new mills, IP is upgrading several of its existing mills in Brandon, Ms and one in Selma, Al and has bought a mill in Washington. It is extremely expensive to build new mills and even the upgrades are expensive (\$225 M in MS). International Paper's CEO Andy Silverhill has been trying to increase profitability; rather than keeping smaller or aging mills alive, production is being compressed into fewer, lower cost facilities. I will predict that when International Paprr's Selma AL or the Brandon, MS upgrades come on line in 2027, the Pensacola mill will close. It is too bad but the Pensacola mill is OLD and was built long before pollution was even considered a problem.

An Ally

In 2018, the local Bay Area Resource Council in Pensacola became the Pensacola Perdido Bay Estuarine Program. It used some of the money from the 2010 oil spill to get started and now is funded from the state legislature. Friends of Perdido Bay has been working with the group from the beginning. Matter of fact, we are one of their sponsors (a small one compared to IP). Its focus is to restore and educate. It does not go after pollutors, that's our job. But its focus complements and adds to helping the environment. On Perdido Bay several of its programs have been implemented. One being the restoration

and planting of seagrasses at Robertson Island. This is one of the shoal islands near the mouth of Perdido Pass. This project was promoted by Orange Beach and is very popular with boaters. On weekends, you can see boaters heading for that spot on the beach where you can park your boat and sit in the water. It is a very popular thing to do. Fortunately this part of the bay is not nearly as polluted (or maybe after all those people and all the pee it is) as the upper bay.

Another project is the living shoreline project. Six Perdido Bay residents (I am not sure where) have signed up to have their beaches made into "Living shorelines". Instead of just seawalls or riprap, the beach is designed to promote life and habitat. Small concrete enclosures are put in the water for habitat and shoreline reeds are planted.

Another project which the Estuarine Program is involved in along with other government agencies, is aerial mapping of seagrasses. In the most recent survey, 4,880 acres of seagrasses were located with 683 acres of seagrasses being located in Perdido and Wolf Bay. A water quality monitoring program has been set up with one station each in Upper and mid-bay, and two stations in the lower bay. A program to determine the source of fecal contamination is planned for Elevenmile Creek and Bayou Marcus in the Perdido Bay watershed. Many times the high coliform counts which are found in our watersheds are not caused by humans but by animal fecal contamination. Thanks to Whitney Scheffel, the senior scientists of the program, for providing this information.

The Pensacola Perdido Bay Estuarine Program has been nominated to become a National Estuarine program. This means that it will receive more funding and have more impact. Just a few more steps must be passed for the estuarine program to become a national program

Friends of Perdido Bay's Monitoring Programs

We also continue to do phytoplankton monitoring in the Upper and Mid Bay. Our last samples in April 2026 showed a poor quality of phytoplankton, comprised mainly of blue-green algae with very few diatoms. We continue to also monitor for nutrients, chlorophyll a, and coliform bacteria. We will give those results 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 \$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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