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# Tidings

The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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Jackie Lane -Editor

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## **Thank you for your support**

I know this is the start of every newsletter. But I can not stress how much your memberships and donations mean to Friends of Perdido Bay and to Perdido Bay. Your memberships pay for the small amount of testing which is critical to show the pollution in Perdido Bay. The state has turned over all of its water quality testing to the counties. Escambia County goes out once a month and collects water quality data. Water quality data may show where problems exist, but maybe not. A once-a-month snapshot of existing conditions doesn't capture spills, or continuous, low level, chronic conditions. The monthly water quality data may not even sample for the right parameter. Rather Escambia County should do biological sampling, especially on the bottom. The presence of, or lack of life, says a lot about the health of water bodies; more so than just taking water quality data. I believe there is a lot of effort and money spent on not looking at the correct parameters. The politicians are let off the hook. The environmental departments say - "nothing wrong here", when actually there is. This is what Friends of Perdido Bay does. We fill in the gaps where our government really doesn't want to look to see the pollution. It is your dues which do this. Thank you.

## **It is Becoming Clear**

Not Perdido Bay. All summer Perdido Bay has been extremely turbid. I think I know why. It is the 8,000 + pounds of solids which IP is permitted to dump every day into the wetlands and then into Perdido Bay. Paper mills are notorious for dumping of their solids into the environment. No need to have landfills when you can just dump your solids into the nearest body of water and turn it into a landfill. Paper companies have gotten away with this filthy habit for years. They have convincing environmental regulators that these solids, which are very slow to degrade, are just food for fish. The paper industry even did some science to back up their claim that these sludges do not impact the environment. The paper industry has a research arm call NCASI. The letters stand for "National Council for Air and Stream Improvement". You would think that this Council would be all about cleaning up our waterbodies. It is just the opposite. This council

justifies the pollution from papermills. In the 1980's , they published a scientific paper entitled "Fate of the Biosolids in the Chowan River". According to NCASI, these biosolids were not harmful. They were just food for the fish and added to the productivity of a stream. I don't know if EPA or any of the other environmental agencies challenged the industry on this but it was some of the worst science I have seen.

The paper industry has never really liked to deal with their sludges. For one thing, it adds an expense. Before the paper industry installed treatment in the 1970's, they just let everything flow out into the environment. I have read stories about Perdido Bay residents having to take showers after swimming in the bay to wash off the brown stain and fine wood particles on their skin. We still take showers. Once the paper industry installed settling ponds, they would have to dredge out these ponds and take the solids to a landfill. But there was always some solids which were fine and did not settle. Landfills are a real headache to the paper industry and the leachate from landfills has to be returned to the treatment ponds for further treatment. (Or so they say). Their land fills have to be permitted and the ground water has to be tested. IP turned the management of their landfill over to another company. So how much better would it be, if you could save the expense of dredging and hauling all those solids to a landfill? And what chemicals are found in these sludges? We know from our studies that dioxins, furans, PCB's and heavy metals are just some of the chemicals found in the sludges.

When Friends of Perdido challenged the permit with the Consent Order in 2006, we asked these questions. Where are these solids going? Were they going to settle out in Perdido Bay? What chemicals did they contain? Were they going to use up oxygen and harm the environment? At the hearing, IP was supposed to demonstrate that these solids were not going to harm the environment - neither the wetlands they were discharging into or Perdido Bay. To make matters worse, the Florida DEP had allowed IP to increase the amount of solids over the last permit which had been issued in 1983. The new permit, finally issued in 2010, allowed IP to discharge an average of 8,000 pounds of solids/day up to a maximum 16,000 pounds of solids/day. This was an increase over the old permit of almost 3,000 pounds of solids per day. We questioned, "Why this increase"? DEP said that because IP was increasing production, the limits based on best available technology, allowed them to increase their solids limits in the permit.

IP's experts all testified that these solids were going to be captured by the plants in the wetlands; there wouldn't be any noticeable increased solids going to Perdido Bay; the mill's discharges were not going to harm either the wetlands or Perdido Bay. But to make sure that there was not going to be any harm to the wetlands or Perdido Bay, IP was supposed to do biological studies of the wetlands and Perdido Bay. IP did do a biological study of the wetlands. IP's consultant, Dr. Wayne Nutter, did a pretty thorough study of the wetlands from 2012 to 2019. He produced a yearly report, all of which I have read. Dr. Nutter's group also did plankton sampling at five stations in Upper Perdido Bay. **But there was NO biological sampling of Perdido Bay**. I wonder why? Well we know why. The biological sampling which Friends of Perdido Bay did in the Upper Bay in 2018 at two stations which had been "trend" stations over the years for DEP, showed a very degraded bay. The wondrous renewal which was supposed to occur in Perdido Bay after the wetlands went into operation, never happened. If anything Perdido Bay is worse. Of

course the local politicians who claim that there is nothing wrong with Perdido Bay, could do a biological survey themselves. Or IP could do a biological survey to counter our survey. But if honest, the study would show the damage and degradation.

And how about the wetlands which were supposed to make IP's toxic effluent magically better. They, themselves, were harmed. Dr. Nutter found, throughout the nine year study, that most of the trees had died. This was in spite of the fact that over 100,000 trees had been planted on hammocks to avoid the inundation problem. The trees were replaced with cattails. The freshwater fish in the wetlands disappeared as did all the endangered pitcher plants and other species of carnivorous plants. Other types of animals replaced those that disappeared, but it certainly was not the same wetland. It is hard to verify the damage that IP's effluent caused in the wetland because in April 2020, the wetland was burned. We don't know who burnt the wetland but the fire was not accidental. All the trees which had died, can not really be verified.

Since the fire, Perdido Bay has been incredibly turbid. Yes, it appears that the wetland was helping to filter the solids out of the water. The solids which were being trapped by the plants and deposited in the wetlands are now flowing out into Perdido Bay. Who is testing to see what chemicals these solids contain? No one. The sludges which were trapped in the wetland lakes, Friends of Perdido Bay tested in 2018. The sediments contained dioxins, furans, PCBs and heavy metals. The results are on our website. These same toxic sludges are now flowing out into the bay, unimpeded. Settling where ever. The whole bay is now a dump for the solids. No need to worry about filling a landfill when you can fill a bay and even the Gulf of Mexico. And our environmental agencies are doing nothing. Our local politicians are ignoring the problem. Is it safe to swim in Perdido Bay or eat the fish from the bay? Who knows. But people on Perdido Bay should be alarmed and mad.

One of the "improvements" which was mandated by the 2010 Permit and Consent Order turned out to be bitter/ sweet for IP. In 2010, IP went to a new treatment in their ponds called return activated sludge. This treatment method was supposed to jump start the biological treatment in their ponds by adding some old sludge with the organisms in it. But, it was known in the paper industry that this treatment produced sludges which did not settle well. There are chemicals which can be added to help the solids settle, but of course this only increases the amount of waste solids which IP would have to dispose of in their landfill. IP didn't want that. Paper mill sludges are known to be toxic so if you get more sludges in your final effluent, it is going to be toxic. And that is why IP's effluent has been toxic since they began the activated sludge process.

An interesting side note to this story is that this activated sludge process was being recommended by Linda Young and the NRDC. Neil McCubbin, an expert in paper mill wastewater technology, who was hired by Levin for the 2006 lawsuit, recommended using return activated sludge as a way of improving IP's effluent and reducing the nutrients. It was incorporated into the 2006 permit which finally went into effect in 2010. Recently, we have been in contact with Neil McCubbin. He was disappointed to hear that IP's effluent was toxic, but he said the return activated sludge method which IP installed was not correct. He said that IP does things on the "cheap" and it did not work. He didn't have many nice things to say about IP. He said that IP thinks it is their right to pollute and that rather than clean up, IP will go the political route. Well, they have and Perdido Bay residents are paying the price.

This whole thing is ironic. In the early 2000's when this deal of IP partnering with ECUA was proposed, David Struhs was Jeb Bush's Secretary of the Florida DEP. Originally, at the urging of DEP, ECUA was going to build a wastewater treatment plant at IP using low cost loans. But that deal fell through as many on the ECUA's board were uncomfortable with the arrangement. In 2004, IP was still producing white paper and threatening to close. Many in Pensacola were probably worried that IP really would close. That is when the deal which we now have, was hatched and David Struhs was guiding it through. In 2004, David Struhs, who is the son-in-law of Andrew Card, George Bush's chief of staff, resigned from being Secretary of Florida's DEP to take the job of Vice-President of Environmental Affairs at International Paper. He was the one who guided the conversion of the treatment ponds to activated sludge and the creation of the wetland. David Struhs left IP in 2012 and went to work for Domtar Paper in Charlotte, NC. It is tempting to think that when IP realized their effluent was going to be continuously toxic from 2012 onwards, David Struhs was no longer welcome.

Currently, IP is using 5 million gallons a day of ECUA treated water in their process and blaming ECUA for the toxicity. This is nonsense, as IP's effluent had been toxic off and on for many years before taking ECUA's water. It also looks like IP no longer wants to use the wetland or ECUA's water. We will see. But in the end we hope Perdido Bay gets better.

**Let us know if you have had any bad experience swimming in Perdido Bay this summer.**

I am afraid to swim in the bay anymore. Several times this summer that I have tried swimming, my skin has become hot and I later have a funny taste in my mouth. There is some chemical in the water, beside lye, which is causing this. Please write to us, at the above address, about your experience or your neighbor's experience with swimming. This is very important.

**The Hearing on the Consent Order is beginning November 2, 2020**

You can follow the action by going to <https://www.doah.state.fl.us/ALJ/> Go to case search. The case number is 20-003305.

<p><b>Membership and Renewals</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>Membership is \$20.00 per <b>year per voting member</b>. To join or renew, fill out the coupon to the right and mail with your check to the address on the front.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> New</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Renewal</p> <p>Amt. Enclosed\$ _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Name</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Address</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Phone (_____) _____</p> <p>e-mail _____</p>
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