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Tidings The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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Jackie Lane -Editor

Welcome to Friends of Perdido Bay

One of our members paid for a mass mailing to be sent out to waterfront owners on Perdido Bay to inform everyone and to recruit more members. It has worked. If you have not sent in your membership form and dues, please do so. We will put you on our mailing list and you will receive a newsletter every other month. This fight has been going on for 35 years. The environmental agencies and local governments keep allowing the paper mill to operate in spite of the fact that the paper mill, now operated by International Paper, can not get a permit to operate. Their discharges have been killing Perdido Bay. Studies done by Friends of Perdido Bay have shown this. A judge, in 1987, said the papermill needed time to clean-up. International Paper has had more than enough time and more than enough tax-breaks.

This member, a third-generation Innerarity Point resident, saw how beautiful and productive Perdido Bay could be when IP blew up in January 2017. For two weeks, Perdido Bay did not have papermill effluent. It immediately came back to life. Life will return immediately when IP's discharges cease. We will continue to fight for this.

The Paper mill's Discharges Killed the Oyster Fishery in Upper Perdido Bay

This was the conclusion of a historical ecological study done by the University of West Florida's biology and history departments. But the story is a little more complex and interesting. Using interviews and going through historical documents, the researchers found that the presence of an oyster fishery in Upper Perdido Bay depended a lot, on the presence of Gulf of Mexico salt water. Oysters can not grow in absolutely fresh water. Occasionally, salt water entered the bay intermittently and oysters would grow. If no saltwater, Perdido Bay was a fresh water pond with water lillies. The UWF researchers showed a slide of water lillies growing in Upper Perdido Bay.

The first permanent connection to salt water came when the Intracoastal Waterway opened between Pensacola and Mobile in 1934. This is a fascinating story of the building of

the inland waterway. The planning for this waterway started in the 1800's but it took a long time to appropriate all the money for the canal. The Rivers and Harbor Act of 1930 authorized \$600,000 to build the segment between Pensacola and Mobile. It was completed in 1934 for \$443,000 (underbudget). Read a History of IntraCoastal canal:
:http://libraryarchives.metro.net/DPGTL/us-army-corps/1983-history-of-the-gulf-intracoastal-waterway%20(1).pdf

The mouth of Perdido Bay was permanently opened in 1953. Previously, it was a very shallow, treacherous opening which few navigators wanted to use. The mouth continuously moved with storms and currents. As the legend goes, Spanish explorers could see a body of water behind a sand bar but could not find a way in. They named the Bay "Lost Bay" or Perdido Bay. On some early maps, Perdido Bay isn't even shown. In 1906, several men dug a ditch through the dunes at a point three miles to the east of where Alabama Point is today. There was no Ono Island or Alabama Point. Then a huge hurricane hit the area in September 1906, the mouth moved again to the place where it is today. Florida and Alabama settled a border dispute when both states agreed to make the state line where the old mouth of Perdido Bay had been (at the Flora-Bama). (This information is from the historical marker at Perdido Pass)

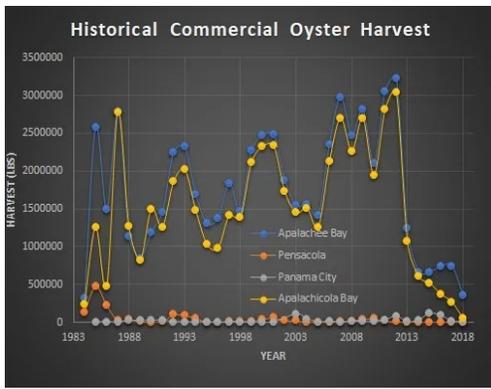
In spite of the lack of a permanent opening to the Gulf of Mexico, enough salt water was able to enter Perdido Bay to allow oysters to grow in Upper Perdido Bay at an early date. A map of the oyster bars in the northern Gulf of Mexico shows oysters in Upper Perdido Bay in 1884. (There are also oyster bars in Upper Escambia Bay). The literature had reports of people harvesting oysters in Upper Perdido Bay. There had been a fishery. But people began complaining that, when the paper mill started up in 1941, oysters began dying. I don't know when the last oysters disappeared but when I moved to Upper Perdido Bay in 1975, there were no oysters growing on cement groins which my father-in-law built in the 1960's.

When I moved here, it seemed strange to me that there were no oysters. Oysters live in brackish water areas (like the upper bay). Several people suggested that there were no hard surfaces for oysters to settle on. But I can find plenty of hard surfaces - the pilings of the Perdido Bay bridge to Lillian, the sea plane ramps at Bronson Field, and the groins my father-in-law built into Upper Perdido Bay. None had oysters. A few places in the lower bay have oysters. Some people in the lower bay have put out cages with oyster spat and the oysters have done O.K. While juvenile and adult oysters may not be killed by paper mill effluent, it is the larval oysters which appear to be particularly sensitive to paper mill effluent. Where larval oysters can not live, oysters will not be recruited. This is a huge economic loss as one whole fishery has been eliminated by the discharges from the paper industry.

If you did not make it to the meeting on May 3, 2022 to hear the talk by the UWF researchers, you can view the 52 -minute meeting on Facebook at this address - .
<https://www.facebook.com/studio850/videos/531194108577807>. John Singley at Studio 850 video taped the meeting.

Oyster Tales

Perdido Bay is not the only place where oysters have disappeared. Apalachicola Bay, which used to have a huge oyster fishery (3 million pounds a year), has not seen an oyster in 10 years. The decline, after a drought and then a deluge of rain, in 2013, was dramatic (see



graph). Biologists do not know what happened. They had hoped the oysters would come back. But after five years of no recruitment, the state closed the oyster fishery.

This is a huge economic blow to an area which relied on both oysters and shrimp for its economy. Florida expended a lot of its research money on the Apalachicola oyster. People are saying that the oyster disappeared because the flow of the Apalachicola River (fresh water) has decreased in recent years. The Apalachicola River is fed by water from the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers. Atlanta has been withdrawing water from the Chattahoochee. The Supreme Court recently settled the legal fight between Florida, Alabama and Georgia for this water. Florida lost the water wars.

Oysters grow just fine in saltier water. But oyster predators, such as the snail, the oyster drill, also grow fine in saltier water. So, the loss of this huge fishery is still a mystery.

Shellfish Harvests

While oysters and other shellfish may grow in an area, it may not be legal to harvest these shellfish. Several years ago when Perdido Bay had large beds of clams, people used to collect these clams for food. My family tried eating the clams out of Perdido Bay several times - clam chowder and clam spaghetti. We stopped eating them because they didn't taste good. They had a metallic taste. Several years later when we analyzed the clams for metals and dioxin (in 2007), I understood why. The clams had above the safe levels for eating of both dioxin and arsenic. So many people were collecting clams for food, the health departments in Florida and Alabama put up signs saying "collecting shellfish was prohibited".

Perdido Bay is not approved for shellfish harvesting. A body of water must have a "Class II" designation before shellfish can be harvested. The "Class II" designation is given when a waterbody has a low level of bacteria (*E. coli*). Many times after a heavy rainfall, the *E. coli* count will go up as bacteria is washed into the water body from land and septic tanks. The shellfish fishery is usually closed temporarily. Perdido Bay has not been approved for shellfishing mainly because the Health Departments have not done enough tests to determine if the bacteria counts are low enough. Recently, Escambia County has started measuring, monthly, the bacteria *Micrococcus*. Occasionally, this bacteria which lives in saltwater (and *E. coli* doesn't) registers above the safe swimming limit. There doesn't seem to be much of a pattern to the elevated levels.

Allowing shellfish to be harvested is based on bacteria counts and not on what the shellfish may be accumulating. As we found with the clams in Perdido Bay, shellfish may be accumulating other harmful substances which may not be being measured - such as dioxins and heavy metals. If the shellfish are living in an area with a bloom of certain harmful algae, the shellfish may accumulate the algal toxin which may be very deadly. Paralytic shellfish poisoning is an example. So, it is important that oysters and shellfish which are harvested for consumption, live in areas which are pretty clean and not downstream from paper mills which put out toxic chemicals.

A Huge Loss

Not only have oysters disappeared from Perdido Bay, but so have the clams, mussels, shrimp, crabs, and even barnacles. It is a disaster. The disappearance has gotten worse. Why? International Paper changed their processes after the 2017 explosion. They no longer

appear to be capturing their chemicals but rather just dumping them in the bay and down Elevenmile Creek. These chemicals kill larval forms of life and the bay, especially the upper bay, is all but dead.

We Want a Permit With Another Consent Order!

This is a summary of the document International Paper’s attorneys sent to the Florida Department of Protection last December (6 months ago). After thirty-five years of trying, International Paper and before them Champion, can’t seem to get a permit for Perdido Bay. This is in spite of the fact that the Florida DEP has bent over backwards trying to give IP a permit. I once asked the wastewater permit person at DEP what his job was. He answered truthfully - to give the paper mill a permit. He has since retired but was not successful. In 2010, the Florida DEP issued a permit to IP with a Consent Order. The plan then, was for IP to build a pipeline (ECUA actually built the pipeline) to a wetland. Supposedly, this wetland was going to solve IP’s problems which were too many nutrients. Dr. Livingston, the papermill consultant, had done a 17-year study and determined that nutrients caused algae blooms which had killed life in the bay. Unfortunately Dr. Livingston was wrong. Once Dr. Livingston stopped studying Perdido Bay, the toxic algae blooms stopped but the bay was still dead. Must be something else!! Like paper mill chemicals? The EPA has known this for years but has buried this information.

So, because IP’s permit expired and they still did not have a permit and were still killing Perdido Bay with their chemicals, IP is proposing another solution which may bring them into compliance and allow them to operate legally. They are going to build another berm in the wetlands and then go into Perdido Bay. This will allow them to go into saltwater (and not freshwater) and somehow magically meet state standards. Of course, they can not meet standards just yet because they have to build the berm. How the berm is going to make a difference in their effluent is unclear. It is just another ruse which hopefully the Florida DEP and the EPA will not fall for but probably will. According to IP, they could not come into compliance because they were misled by the environmental agencies about nutrients after IP had done all that work on the wetlands. Also EPA changed the rule for site specific alternative criteria **.Folks, it is time for some outrage from Perdido Bay residents.** We will post IP’s letter on our website

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 \$20.00 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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