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## Tidings The Newsletter of the Friends of Perdido Bay

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Jackie Lane - Editor

[www.friendsofperdidobay.com](http://www.friendsofperdidobay.com)

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### **In Memoriam - Jim Lane February 1, 1935 to August 3, 2012**

I am very sad to report that Jim Lane, who was the President and one of the founders of Friends of Perdido Bay has died. He spent the past two years fighting a rare form of skin cancer called Merkel Cell cancer. Like melanoma, Merkel cell easily spreads to other organs of the body which it had done. He was a champion for a better Perdido Bay. Unfortunately he did not live to see his beloved bay improve. He will join a long line of fighters who have not lived long enough to see Perdido Bay improve. JoAnn and Harry Allen tried for years to make their government officials do something about the condition of Perdido Bay. They died disappointed.

Jim was sure that swimming in Perdido Bay water, which was laced with dioxin in the late 1980's and early 1990's (and maybe even today), was partially responsible for his cancer. Exposure to the sun was another contributing factor. Jim loved Perdido Bay and used it nearly every day in the summer. Our family had a ritual of swimming twice a day - before lunch and before dinner. It kept us cool, especially since our house did not have air-conditioning in the early days. We have slide after slide of Jim and our children spending the summer splashing around the bay. We erroneously thought that the bay was safe to swim in. We erroneously thought that our environmental agencies would not allow toxic or carcinogenic substances to be dumped in the bay. We were wrong. We have learned that money and politics trumps health and a clean environment. Hopefully, he will be the only member of our family to suffer the consequences of swimming in a polluted bay.

Jim Lane's effort will not stop. Friends of Perdido Bay will continue to publish the newsletter. Publishing a truthful account of the permitting and scientific studies on Perdido Bay is, I believe, important. Continuing to do testing on Perdido Bay is also extremely important to counter our government's efforts to whitewash the papermill pollution. Third party (that is us) involvement in testing and permitting is extremely necessary, usually because it is the only truthful point-of-view. The little ritual that the government and polluters do in the "permitting process" is tilted in the polluters' favor. Friends of Perdido Bay's general meetings have been discontinued these past several years because of poor attendance. Many of our members live out of town and we think that we can communicate effectively through the newsletter. Your dues fund both the newsletter and the testing which is our primary effort. Too bad our taxes can not be spent to honestly protect our environments. Yes, our efforts will not stop.

## **Slanted Journalism**

On August 12, 2012, the Pensacola News Journal had a feature article on their front page about IP's wetland project. The title was "International Paper nearing completion of \$60 million plan to stop its pollution of Perdido Bay". The subtitle was "It remains to be seen if the wetlands-based treatment project will work." You would think from reading the headline that the project was undertaken to clean-up Perdido Bay. Nothing could be further from the truth. The project was undertaken so that IP could expand its production from 1500 tons of pulp a day to 2500 tons of pulp a day. Every dollar a business spends must have reasonable assurance that more money will be made in return. That is capitalism. The return on investment in the paper industry is relatively low compared to other businesses and the paper industry has been forced to cut corners to make a profit to keep its shareholders happy. That is why Perdido Bay has gotten worse. Environmental laws be damned! A profit must be made to keep U.S. workers employed. Considering both environmental and economic factors, paper made at the Cantonment mill should cost more to make. Perdido Bay is small with not much dilution when compared to other discharge sites located on big rivers. Environmental controls should be more stringent and more costly in order to protect the bay. This is why the Clean Water Act contains criteria for both technology-based standards AND water quality-based standards. If technology-based standards are not sufficient to protect the discharge site, then water quality based standards should apply. While IP has standards which are slightly more stringent than technology-based standards, they are not stringent enough to protect Perdido Bay. The modeling which Champion and then IP did on Perdido Bay, totally ignored the suspended solids which the paper mill discharged into the environment. These solids are for the most part organic (composed of very small wood fibers and bacteria from the treatment ponds), require a long time to degrade, use up oxygen in the environment, and over enrich the environment. Domestic wastewater treatment plants remove their solids using filters. Paper mills claim it is too expensive to remove their solids. IP is currently permitted to discharge 11,000 pounds of solids a day into Perdido Bay. According to the papermill scientists, this level of solids is having "no or very little impact" on Perdido Bay!

Control of solids has always been a major headache for paper mills. Champion had a series of ponds in which the paper mill solids settled. In the primary settling pond, a man-operated dredge continuously dredged up the settled material and deposited it on the banks to de-water. It was a terribly smelly and super messy operation. IP replaced that dredge with screw-type mechanical solids handlers. They are less messy, emit less odors and are more efficient. After the first attempt at removing solids, the watery effluent goes into treatment ponds which use bacteria to break down the easily degradable material. In the treatment pond which Champion used to have, called an aeration stabilization basin, the average treatment time was nine days. Some effluent was treated for a little more and some for a little less. The higher the level of oxygen in the system, the greater the treatment. Giant stirrers or agitators drove oxygen into the system. These agitators require electricity to operate. The more the agitators agitate, the more electricity is used, and the bigger the electric bill. The mill in Cantonment generates nearly all of their own electricity using bark and coal for fuel. You can really save some money, if you don't run those agitators so much. So when IP took over the mill in 2000 that is what they did. We could see this from our aerial flights over the mill. The end result - more pollution and more solids coming into Perdido Bay. We reported this to the Florida DEP who looked at the reports IP was sending in and said nothing looked amiss!

After the main treatment pond there were three more ponds where solids settled (this is the old treatment scheme). These ponds were periodically dredged out and the material deposited in a landfill down the road. This was another expensive and messy operation. In the early 1990's, the Florida DEP sent several letters to the mill requesting the mill to please clean out their settling ponds. There was even a Consent Order (wow) issued in 1999, ordering the mill to handle their solids better.

Of course one way to clean out those settling ponds is to wait for a big, heavy rain to flush out the ponds and let the material flow out into Perdido Bay. Which the mill did on occasion. Those heavy rains saved the mill a lot of money. Also operating the landfill to handle all those solids is another big expense. Champion contracted out management of the landfill to a subcontractor called Arizona. One day I went to Champion's landfill and a workman proudly showed me around. It looked like the face of the moon- earthen craters everywhere. And where did the leachate from the landfill go? Mike Steltenkamp, IP's vice president for the environment, health and technology, assured me the leachate was trucked back to the mill's treatment ponds in this old beat-up tanker truck. I forgot to ask him if the truck had a motor. I didn't believe him, because I knew that this was another onerous expense. Just where does the leachate go? My best guess is, it is piped to the Perdido River which is very close. A gas pipeline runs right through IP's landfill to the Perdido River and across at the Muscogee Bridge. This area used to be a great swimming area but was closed when the "gas" pipeline was put in. This gas pipeline was owned by the Koch Industries. It is now owned by another company. Of course, there is no permit to discharge leachate into the Perdido River, an outstanding Florida water, and most likely no permit would be issued. But no problem because the DEP is not going to check. This is another good reason for an independent third party.

So the old system of solids, settling ponds, and landfills was messy and expensive. So fast forward to today's improved treatment system with a discharge to a wetland which is purported to "stop the pollution of Perdido Bay". It is just the opposite. The new treatment called activated sludge, pumps bacteria which has settled on the bottom of the first settling pond after the main treatment pond, back into the main treatment pond. This helps to maintain a high and more (sometimes) constant level of bacteria. This reduces the treatment time of the effluent and much more effluent can be treated in a shorter period of time. Of course some chemicals in the effluent are still going to be slow to degrade and will come out untouched or untreated. This type of treatment is the least expensive of the treatment options to meet BOD (biological oxygen demand) limits and reduce nutrients WITH the increase in production. The other option was to build more treatment basins for which IP did not have the space. The only problem with this new activated sludge treatment is that it produces a sludge which does not settle. This characteristic of the activated-sludge sludge (solids) has been known since the early 1970's. If you have solids which don't settle, there is no reason to put in settling ponds after the main treatment. So you take them out. By taking out these ponds, you have saved a lot of money - no ponds to clean out, less material to manage at the landfill. So what happens to the solids which don't settle? They go into the wetlands. The only problem is, they don't settle in the wetlands either. We can see that. Perdido Bay has been extremely turbid since IP converted to activated sludge. The sand in the shallow water which was once tan sand is becoming black muck. This is the solids from activated sludge settling out in Perdido Bay. IP is saving a lot of money at our expense. Recently after a heavy rain, the bottom in the shallow water was squishy with muck. I assumed the rain had washed the accumulated solids and dirt out of the wetland. I have not been up to see the little tidal lakes, Tee and Wicker Lakes, into which the wetland drains, but I imagine they are filling up with the accumulated solids. It is a disaster.

It seems to me that a lawsuit is in order. But don't expect any of the local lawyers to file a suit about damages due to papermill solids. Our lawyers in the last lawsuit which was dismissed in 2007 (the Levin Papantonio Law firm were the main attorneys) wrote several briefs stating that papermill solids were no problem in Perdido Bay. Their arguments agreed with the Champion scientists. So it looks like IP is immune from lawsuits due to solids.

The wetlands are also not going to remove substances dissolved in the effluent, like salts. With greater production will come more salts. These salts are not pure but rather industrial grade and have heavy metals associated with them. These heavy metals become associated with the solids and settle in the bottom of Perdido Bay. The last newsletter discussed the metals which we found associated with the solids in Perdido Bay. These heavy metals definitely are associated with the discharges from the paper mill. Analyzing solids from Perdido River, Elevenmile Creek and Perdido Bay (above Barrineau Park), clearly show the source of the heavy metals into Perdido Bay. It is the papermill. This is another disaster which the EPA or the DEP should stop.

But Perdido Bay has become a victim of the politics of money. In 1982 when St. Regis was ready to fold because the market for brown paper bags was destroyed by the introduction of plastic bags, the paper mill should have been allowed to close. The mill was falling apart. But instead they were saved by Champion who stepped in as a “white knight” (remember those days) and poured millions of dollars into modernizing the mill. In the process, Champion converted the mill to 100% bleached pulp. This was another huge mistake. This mill is surrounded by people. I assume that there are (were) many, many people in the Cantonment area who ended up with all types of cancer due to the dioxin which was being emitted in the air. The EPA did studies of the dioxin emitted in the air around bleach plants, but I could never obtain those records. I am sure the dioxin was high. We did obtain, years later (1995), records of the dioxin found in the water, the sludge and fish in Perdido Bay and Elevenmile Creek. Yes, there was lots of dioxin. It was not a pretty picture. We had a lawsuit which was settled in 1996 for dioxin contamination. The papermill never admitted guilt. We all got several thousand dollars. Champion embarked on a campaign to convince the rest of the paper industry to convert to chlorine dioxide, a bleaching agent which produces less dioxin. Champion was the good guy. They were a company with a “soul” pushed by the Clinton/Gore administration. Warren Buffet and the Lowe’s Corporation (owned by the Tisch family) were large shareholders of Champion stock in 1996. Champion spent lots of money to modernize and the Warren Buffets and Lowe’s Corporation signaled their approval. But this mill was still a hazard and walked a fine line between public health, the environment of Perdido Bay, and their bottom line. Lawsuits can not make up for lost lives or lost quality of life. I believe it is time for this mill to close. It is just too dangerous for this mill to operate in an economically reasonable manner in a little bay which does not flush.

### 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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