

Wave Maker's News

Volume VI Issue III

September 2011

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Hundreds of Thousands of Fish Killed in the Pearl River

Beginning on August 12, GRN started hearing about a massive fish kill on the Pearl River, the river that divides Southern Louisiana and Mississippi; locals were reporting dead fish and other animals floating by their homes and camps along the river. It quickly became apparent that the cause was an unauthorized discharge of "black liquor" from the Temple-Inland paper mill in Bogalusa, LA. Black liquor is a toxic by-product of the paper industry—a mix of chemicals and organic

materials that does not belong in our water. Black liquor is caustic, has a large oxygen demand, and is used in the production of turpentine.

As it turns out, the plant started having problems on August 9, but didn't bother contacting the Louisiana officials until the 12th. By this time, black liquor had been flowing into the river for three or four days! Thankfully, Louisiana required the plant to stop operations while the dead fish were cleaned up and the plant was investigated. Thanks to our friends at South



Photo Courtesy of GRN and Southwings

Temple-Inland's treatment pond.

Wings, we had the opportunity to fly over the Pearl and the offending plant. By this time many of the fish were cleaned up, but we still saw evidence of the kill over a week after the initial discharge!

From the air, Temple-Inland's "treatment" ponds looked absolutely disgusting, and are situated less than 50 meters from an oxbow lake of the Pearl. The initial response from Louisiana included some strong talk. The Louisiana State Senate Environmental Quality Committee held two

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The Story of Water in Florida

The story of water is Florida's story. Our beaches, rivers, wetlands and springs are the lifeblood of the state's economy, and each family that calls Florida home has a stake in the health of these waters. Sadly, many politicians and industry leaders don't seem to understand this and throughout the state they are assaulting water protections. These short-sighted efforts to cut costs and rollback protections that were carefully crafted over decades of bi-partisan

action will inevitably imperil both the environment and the state's fragile economic recovery. This attitude was on full display at an August 9th Congressional Field Hearing inflammatorily titled: "EPA's Takeover of Florida's Nutrient Water Quality Standard Setting: Impact on Communities & Job Creation."

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A Chance to RESTORE the Gulf

The BP drilling disaster raised arguments and created a lot of controversies, many of which still rage over a year later. However, one thing almost every Gulf coast resident, and most people across the country, can agree on is that it's only fair that the Gulf coast receive a big chunk of BP's Clean Water Act (CWA) fines to help restore the region in the wake of the disaster. These fines are estimated to range between \$5 to 21 billion, but without swift congressional action the fine money will largely just disappear into the general federal treasury.

Over the past year, GRN and many other organizations and individuals have been working hard to push Congress to pass a bill to send the CWA fines back to the Gulf, and, finally in July, this effort began to pay off; nine of the ten Gulf coast senators joined together to introduce the RESTORE the Gulf



Coast Act of 2011 – a bipartisan proposal that would funnel 80% of the CWA fines from the disaster back to the Gulf for environmental and economic restoration. While the proposal isn't perfect, it does represent one of our best opportunities to ensure that the restoration of the Gulf's wetlands and communities receives the funding it so desperately needs.

Right now, the RESTORE act is being considered by the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee, and they have promised to act on the bill before the end of September. After that, it will move to the full Senate, and eventually to the House of Representatives. It's going to be a tough fight in the coming months, and GRN and our conservation partners will be working hard to make sure that Congress passes the best possible bill for the Gulf, and does it soon. ■

EPA Fails to Take Decisive Action on Huge Dead Zone

At the end of July, scientists once again braved the Gulf to measure the size of the Dead Zone. And the news isn't good: while they didn't see a record Dead Zone, it is still pretty darned big—about the size of Connecticut. Adding to this, just days after the measurement the EPA denied a petition filed by GRN and the Mississippi River Collaborative which asked for decisive action to reduce Dead Zone-causing pollution. Instead, EPA suggested that programs already in place are adequate.

Needless to say, this response is disappointing. Back in the 90's, EPA told the states to develop numerical standards for



Photo Courtesy of Jared Serigne

Leading Dead Zone researcher Dr. Nancy Rabalais.

nitrogen and phosphorus pollution. These standards would establish a baseline for the maximum amount of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution allowed in the Mississippi River. As of right now, only a handful of Mississippi River states have phosphorus pollution criteria and none have nitrogen criteria. Now after over a decade, we are still experiencing a huge Dead Zone every

summer and EPA has relegated themselves to a support role for the states in developing numeric standards. I don't know who said it, but if the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, maybe it's time for EPA to check with a doctor. ■

The Story of Water in Florida (continued from page 1)

For decades, harmful algal blooms such as Red Tide and freshwater blooms of green slime have threatened Florida's waterways with toxins and dead zones. These HABs are largely fed by runoff of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution from our lawns and wastewater. Despite this ongoing threat to state waters, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) spent ten years dragging its feet on establishing numeric nitrogen and phosphorus criteria for state waters that could help fix the problem. As a result, a coalition of environmental stakeholders sued EPA in July 2008 for its failure to fulfill its mandatory duties under the Clean Water Act and establish scientifically based numeric nitrogen and phosphorus criteria in Florida. In 2009, our allies prevailed in court. Unfortunately, industry, politicians, and bureaucrats in the FDEP are now doing everything they can to stop these new, more protective rules from being implemented.

At the hearing on August 9th, the Congressional Field Panel and the invited stakeholders ignored sound science, public



Harmful algal bloom on the Caloosahatchee River.

opinion, and the judicial decisions that support the establishment of new numeric nitrogen and phosphorus criteria. Instead, the hearing served as a forum for industry and politicians to air their one-sided views, and grill Gwen Keyes Fleming, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4, and Earth Justice Attorney David Guest. Perhaps most frustrating of all, this taxpayer funded charade ignored the opinions held by the majority of Floridians who overwhelmingly support water protection.

This issue has languished for 13 years and in that time the threat to Florida's economy and communities from harmful algal blooms has only grown. The EPA continues to express a willingness to work with FDEP to address perceived issues with the new water protections, but they have yet to find a willing partner. It's time for FDEP to come to the table with EPA and create a working blueprint for protecting Florida waters, and GRN will continue to work to make sure that happens. ■



Algae warning sign in Lee County, Florida.

Fish Killed in the Pearl River (continued from page 1)

hearings, asking tough questions of the state agencies and Temple-Inland. They said that this incident will change how Louisiana approaches the regulation of the paper industry in Louisiana.

Regretfully, this strong talk has not been backed up by strong actions. Less than one month after killing hundreds of thousands of fish, including at least 26 threatened Gulf Sturgeon, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality allowed the plant to resume operations. The plant is required to do much more intense monitoring for about three months, and then operate under their old permit, with little improvement to the actual treatment of their

discharge.

Along with fighting for proper monitoring, GRN is actively working to ensure that the plant installs state-of-the-art technologies that will dramatically reduce the pollution that they dump into the Pearl. We have given public testimony, encouraged our activists to send letters to LDEQ and their State Senators, and sent a formal letter to LDEQ objecting to the premature opening of the plant that decimated the Pearl. It will be a tough battle to hold Temple-Inland and Louisiana accountable for this environmental disaster, but with the support of our partner organizations, members, and other Wave Makers, we will. ■



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UNITED FOR A HEALTHY GULF

Sewage Threat to Mississippi's Leaf and Bowie Rivers

Often simple, everyday activities can cause damage to the environment and people's lives if steps are not taken to mitigate their impacts. The sewage treatment lagoons in Hattiesburg are a prime example of this dilemma.

For decades, Hattiesburg, Mississippi has relied on outdated sewage lagoons to process both residential and commercial waste. These facilities, constructed before the existence of clean water laws, discharge millions of gallons of wastewater directly into the Leaf and Bowie Rivers every day. Although we now have federal and state requirements for protecting our waters, the lagoons in Hattiesburg have been cited for violating these laws and will in all likelihood continue to violate our clean water laws if steps are not taken to upgrade the current facilities.



A view down the Bowie River.

As part of our ongoing efforts to make sure the city of Hattiesburg cleans up the lagoons, we recently went on a series of canoe trips down the polluted rivers with local citizens and others interested in clean water issues. On the Bowie

River, we enjoyed a beautiful stretch of largely undeveloped river, until the North lagoon's sewage outfall. From there onward, the river was clearly impaired by the impacts of the sewage lagoon, and the legacy of in-stream mining activities. On the Leaf River, we encountered an even more dramatic sight as large quantities of brown water flowed out from the South Lagoon, and literally changed the color of the water downstream.



GRN's Scott Eustis testing oxygen levels in the Bowie.

These canoe trips provided us with a valuable opportunity to observe the sewage outfalls and monitor water quality before and after the discharge sites. Hattiesburg's out-dated and poorly functioning sewage lagoons are clearly impacting not just the health of the rivers and the critters that live in them, but also the lives of people who live, work and play in and around Hattiesburg. We will continue to work with the people of Hattiesburg to push the city, and state and federal officials, to take action to clean up the lagoons and protect our rivers and streams. ■

There are two different sets of lagoons in Hattiesburg: the North and South lagoons. In the past 5 years, the North lagoons have violated the Clean Water Act 22 times and the South Lagoon has violated the same laws 17 times! Most of these violations have to do with low dissolved oxygen, which impairs the ability of aquatic animals to survive; however, other violations can be of direct threat to human health – especially to the many people who recreate on local water bodies. For example, in the first quarter of this year, the North lagoon was cited for violating their permitted limits for fecal coliform, a bacterium that can indicate contamination from human waste, by 475%! In addition to the public health concerns, the Hattiesburg South lagoon causes a disgusting odor that often permeates Hattiesburg during the warmer months.



Wastewater outfall from the South Lagoon into the Leaf River.