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TALLAHASSEE – **Seven** Taylor County residents and Linda Young of the Clean Water Network of Florida filed a petition today for an administrative hearing on a new state permit that would allow Buckeye Florida to pipe pollution from its Taylor County mill into the Gulf of Mexico.

If approved, the permit would allow Buckeye to discharge polluted effluent from its Fenholloway River pulp mill into the Gulf, not far from the Big Bend Seagrass Sanctuary. The citizens' petition says that Buckeye has not provided reasonable assurance that the effluent will not further pollute groundwater, the Fenholloway, and the Gulf.

The petition, filed with Florida's Division of Administrative Hearings, points out that Lee Shiver, Joy Towles Ezell, Joshua Ted Ezell and Linda Young are unable to use the Fenholloway for swimming and fishing because it is grossly polluted.

Pumping the discharge into the Gulf should not be allowed, the petitioners point out, because the effluent fails clean water standards for oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, chronic toxicity, color, and other pollutants.

“This is an illegal permit, and DEP has no business issuing it and letting Buckeye pollute our public waters with their toxic waste,” said Young, director of Clean Water Network of Florida, a grassroots coalition of 155 citizen groups in the state.

The Fenholloway is Florida's most polluted river, a place where black water and low oxygen has killed marine life. The mill's bleaching process also produces cancer-causing dioxin. EPA has tested Buckeye's wastewater at least twice in the past five years and found high levels of dioxin in Buckeye's effluent. Some fish in the river are changing sex, a phenomenon that scientists nicknamed “bearded lady fish.”

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency opposed the pipeline plan in 1997, but has reversed its position. A collaborative three-year review by the world's top pulp mill experts, representatives from EPA, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Buckeye found that the mill could use available technology to clean its waste and avoid building the pipeline into the Gulf

altogether. Those findings have been ignored, and DEP has now issued a proposed permit to allow the pipeline anyway.

DEP's Administrative Order illegally gives Buckeye more than nine years to complete "improvements" and comply with water quality standards. Florida and federal law do not allow permits to last longer than five years.

"Buckeye has chosen not to make these improvements and therefore does not qualify for a renewed permit or new permit for a new discharge location," the petition states.

The Ezells own property in Taylor County. One of their concerns is that if the mill's discharge is taken out of the river and into the Gulf, polluted river sediment will dry up and blow across a wide area of Taylor County, exposing wildlife and people to dioxin-laden sediments. Among the endangered species that would be affected are wood storks and manatees.

Lee Shiver owns waterfront property on the Fenholloway that has been in his family for 50 years. Mr. Shiver points out that he has been deprived use and enjoyment of his property along the Fenholloway because of the unlawful pollution being allowed by Buckeye and its predecessor, Procter & Gamble.

"Even as a child, Mr. Shiver remembers that his parents had to bring in drinking water to the river because the groundwater was compromised with pollution," the petition states.

The citizens' petition asks that DEP deny the permit and require Buckeye to meet the standards of the Clean Water Act.

"The state's proposed permit was a sham, a lie, a joke on the people of the state of Florida. That river belongs to all of us, not them, nor to Buckeye. Buckeye either needs to clean it up or close it down. We've waited patiently for many years and now the time has come," said Joy Towles Ezell, a rancher and fifth-generation Taylor County resident.

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