

## MORE TROUBLE LOOMS FOR AILING GULF

By Linda Young  
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On TV, Florida's tourism ads promise clean white beaches and a glistening Gulf stretching across the horizon. What a surprise Florida tourists have had this year. They've rubbed their itchy eyes and watched bulldozers piling up dead fish in the worst red tide episode in decades. They've seen gasping sea turtles and bloated manatees, victims of red tide.

The Gulf's sickness has dealt a blow to beachfront hotels, for sure, and it has also sucker-punched recreational and commercial fishermen and divers. Even North Florida's famous Apalachicola oysters were inedible for much of the year, thanks to red tide.

Now, with red tide still lingering, your state and federal governments are poised to issue a permit for a major new pollution source in the Gulf, a kind of pollution that has already caused fish to change sexes.

The state Department of Environmental Protection has issued a draft permit for one of the South's biggest polluters – Buckeye Florida's pulp mill in Taylor County – to build a huge pipe to send toxic waste from the black and smelly Fenholloway River into the Gulf.

The pipe, incredibly, will empty not far from the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve, an Outstanding Florida Water and nursery ground for mullet, sea trout, redfish, scallops, oysters, clams, shrimp, blue crab, and other economically important species.

Most people in Florida don't know much about this crazy plan, but they should. We still have time to stop it. A tiny band of Taylor County citizens – as well as myself – have filed a petition to force the state to hold an administrative hearing on the pipeline. We point out that this pollution is preventable and illegal. DEP's draft permit is full of special loopholes. Incredibly, the five-year permit allows Buckeye to ignore water quality standards *for the next nine years!*

EPA has proved repeatedly that Buckeye is discharging the deadly chemical dioxin into the water, but DEP's permit sets no limits on dioxin. And if you think that's bad then here's the kicker: At the end of that nine years, when the permit at long last becomes effective, DEP has a loophole for Buckeye that will allow a special "mixing zone" for "chronic toxicity" that extends a full three miles around the pipe. The state is officially sanctioning a legal three-mile dead zone, on top of the fact that the pipe will send gender-bending chemicals out into Gulf marine nursery grounds. Scientists have documented the sex-changing fish. What they don't know is what these chemicals will do to people.

You might think what happens in rural Taylor County won't affect you. But it will, because those polluted marine creatures will be coming to shores all over the Gulf, and around the peninsula to the Atlantic.

We need a good dose of public outrage to stop the state's misguided gift to the polluting Buckeye, and we need it now, before the DEP issues the final permit. This aging pulp mill already killed a perfectly good river - the Fenholloway once was full of fish and had a drinking-water bottling plant on its bank. Let's not let it kill the Gulf, too.

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