

# FLORIDA'S DIRTY, ROTTEN SCANDAL

## Polluters permitted to pump waste into rivers, Gulf

By Linda Young

### MY VIEW

All over the world, smart companies are finding ways to make products, earn profits, and reduce pollution at the same time. It makes both financial and social sense, since everyone depends on clean water, soil, and air.

Sadly, Florida and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency aren't getting with the clean industry program - even though smart technology and innovation are American traditions. Some of Florida's worst polluters are about to get a free pass to use our public waters as their private sewers. Citizens shouldn't stand for it.

Three belching North Florida paper mills are going to be allowed to pipe their wastes to larger water bodies where people fish and swim, just because the companies claim that they can't meet water quality standards on the smaller rivers and creeks that they have already polluted and killed.

For years, the EPA has opposed the absurd idea that "dilution is the solution to pollution." The whole purpose of the Clean Water Act, after all, is to clean public waters - not allow industry to ignore new technology and keep adding more toxins to our rivers and oceans. But under the industry-beholden administrations of President George Bush and Gov. Jeb Bush, the state Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA are now supporting all three paper mill pipelines.

These pipelines will benefit fat corporations: Georgia Pacific in Palatka, International Paper in Pensacola, and Buckeye in Perry. And what does the public get? A polluted Gulf of Mexico, with black waste pouring all over the Big Bend National Seagrass Sanctuary not far from Tallahassee; a polluted Perdido Bay in Pensacola, where last summer Hurricane Ivan carried arsenic and dioxin-laced mud from International Paper's mill into people's homes and gardens; and a ruined St. John's River near Jacksonville, where Georgia Pacific's pollution is making fish change gender.

In fact, fish have been found changing sex near all these paper mills. They call them "bearded lady fish" because the females are developing male genitalia. State and federal regulators are now - with straight faces - allowing these companies to move that gender-bending poison farther into our marine nursery grounds.

There is already a 15-square mile "dead zone" where the Fenholloway River empties into our Gulf, thanks to Buckeye and its biggest customer, Procter & Gamble. P&G built the mill and ran it for years. This giant company made bundles of money by ruining our public fishing grounds. We Floridians got tired of being accused of wanting to take away jobs and stop progress in the name of clean water. So, we raised and spent private money to bring in some of the best paper mill technology experts in the world. From 2002 to 2004, these experts toured these mills, and

concluded that the mills could switch to cleaner technology, save money, and stop wrecking public waters.

The world is full of paper mills that no longer pollute like ours do. Too bad that state and federal regulators didn't listen. Instead, they want to apply 1950s technology to a 2005 problem. The saddest part of this story is that it would cost about the same amount of money to fix these problems with new technology as it does to build the pipelines. What does it take to get sane water policy in the state of Florida today?

The only thing left to do to protect public waters from these lax regulators and private profiteers is to go to court. Shame on our elected leaders! If you care about clean Florida water, boycott these polluters who refuse to get with 21st-century technology: International Paper, Georgia Pacific, and Buckeye. The least we can do is stop buying their products until they clean up their acts - and the public waters they polluted for profit.

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