



Wave Maker's News

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EPA Dumps the Pumps

In a time where there are astonishing examples of taxpayer waste such as the infamous "bridge to nowhere" in Alaska, the Yazoo Pumps still holds a special place among the list of notorious boondoggles. Originally authorized by Congress in 1941, the Yazoo Pumps was an Army Corps of Engineers project that would have created the world's largest water pumping plant in Mississippi in one of the most sparsely populated regions of the country. The project was designed to drain wetlands for agricultural intensification—with taxpayers being left to foot the more than \$220 million bill. The project was so wasteful that the Jackson, MS Clarion-Ledger Editorial Board wrote, "Come on, guys. This project stinks. It stinks so bad that no one - repeat, no one! - outside this state sees it as worthy."

On September 2, 2008 the EPA vetoed the Yazoo Pumps Project, putting an end to the dreadful project once and for all. Because of

the significant environmental impact the project would have had, draining as much as 200,000 acres of wetlands, the EPA used its veto authority under the Clean Water Act



GRN Photo

to stop the project. This move by the EPA is truly historic. It is only the 12th time in history that EPA has used such authority, and EPA has never vetoed a project that would have destroyed nearly as many acres

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The Campaign to Save the Nature Coast Rolls On

Stretching from just north of Tampa Bay to Apalachee Bay in the Big Bend region, the Nature Coast is one of the longest, wildest coastlines left in America. The Nature Coast is the embodiment of nature at the landscape



Courtesy of Southwings

scale, a powerful reminder of what once was along the Gulf coast and what still could be if we summon the grace and wisdom to preserve what is left. This is the Florida that John Muir walked through in 1867 and botanist and adventurer William Bartram wrote about in 1791. The Nature Coast is our last and best chance to get it right in Florida by protecting miles of healthy coastal wetlands, seagrass beds, and estuaries.

GRN is working to save the Nature Coast by battling three projects that would forever alter the Nature Coast and set in motion changes that strike at the wild heart of the region. The first project we have opposed is

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Working Towards Real Solutions for the Dead Zone

This year brought us yet another almost record-setting Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Unfortunately, the long-term health of our coastal ecosystems is at stake because for years state and federal agencies have refused to take the aggressive actions necessary to reduce this dangerous phenomenon.

The Dead Zone is a national problem that deserves significant national attention. Dead Zone-causing pollution in the Mississippi River not only threatens the \$2.8 billion Gulf fishing industry, but also causes environmental problems throughout the entire Mississippi River Basin. These include toxic algae blooms that can kill livestock and pets, cause fish kills, and damage drinking water supplies. For this reason, GRN and our allies are pushing both federal and state government to take decisive action to make sure the Dead Zone gets the attention it deserves.

Throughout the past decade, we have seen state and federal governments draft action plans that are never implemented and only push voluntary mechanisms to reduce Dead Zone-causing pollution. Given the recent growth in the average size of the Dead Zone, these "actions" are obviously not working and more needs to be done. In fact, some scientists have stated that if the Dead Zone is not reduced, we might witness a fundamental shift in the ecology of the Gulf of Mexico. We are past the point of waiting, and need decisive action if we want to preserve the abundant fisheries off the coasts of Louisiana and Texas. In order for real change to occur, there must be action from the Mississippi River States and the Federal Government. Recognizing this, GRN is pushing Louisiana and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to address the Dead Zone head on.

On the state level, we are calling on Louisiana to step up to the plate. The Dead Zone is a national problem, but it is manifested most evidently in and off the coast of Louisiana. Under the Clean Water Act, each state is required to submit a list of polluted waters to the EPA,



Courtesy of United States EPA

and amazingly, Louisiana does not list most of the area where the Dead Zone occurs as being polluted. Nor does Louisiana list the Mississippi River as being polluted by nitrogen and phosphorus, even though it is these pollutants that cause the Dead Zone. If Louisiana is to expect the rest of the nation to rally behind efforts to reduce the size of the Dead Zone, Louisiana first needs to admit to having a problem. As a result, we are pushing Louisiana to list the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River as being polluted in order to prioritize the issue and facilitate clean-up of these waters.

A second major step that GRN has recently taken was to join together with other conservation groups throughout the Mississippi River Basin to petition the EPA to set and enforce limits on nitrogen and phosphorous pollution.

This petition has been long overdue, given the fact that the EPA called on states back in 1998 to adopt state-based limits on nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, threatening to enact its own limits if states had not complied by 2003. Needless to say, it is 2008 and there are few limits on nitrogen and phosphorus pollution throughout the Gulf States. The EPA is shirking its duties but we intend to continue to hold their feet to the fire until real action is taken on the Dead Zone. ■

EPA Dumps the Pumps (continued from page 1)

of wetlands as the Yazoo Pumps. In fact, in the words of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Pumps would have damaged "some of the richest natural resources in the nation." Those resources include the Panther Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, the Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, and Delta National Forest.

The Gulf Restoration Network and its members have been working to stop the Yazoo Pumps Project for over ten years. We applaud the EPA for taking this historic step to stop the massive wetland loss that would have accompanied the Yazoo Pumps project. More importantly, we thank our members and partner organizations who have attended hearings, sent emails to the EPA and Corps, and educated others about this boondoggle. Your work has truly helped to make this victory possible. The EPA received over 47,000 written comments, with 99% of all comments in support of vetoing the Pumps. ■

Holding Louisiana Accountable to Protecting its Most Valued Waters

Within the state of Louisiana, there is a special classification of streams and bayous that the state is required to protect to the highest degree by not allowing any new pollution that would degrade the waters. These streams and bayous are known as "Outstanding Natural Resource Waters," and many of Louisiana's most scenic streams are included in this designation such as the Kisatchie River, Saline Bayou, West Pearl River, and Whiskey Chitto Creek.

Unfortunately, protection of these Outstanding Waters is not always a given in Louisiana. This is where GRN and local communities must take action. In the past year, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality announced two new draft sewage treatment plant permits that would have allowed new pollution into the Tchefuncte River, not only an Outstanding Natural Resource Water, but also a State Scenic River.

A Louisiana sewage company proposed these two plants that would have discharged into tributaries of the Tchefuncte, including Timber Branch and Soap and Tallow Creek. Luckily, the GRN and local community members were watching closely. We filed comments on these proposed discharges that helped spur

Department of Wildlife and Fisheries involvement in the permitting process as administrators of the State's Scenic Rivers program. The result is that the sewage company will be able to build a new sewage treatment plant on Timber Branch, but only to replace two other old sewage plants that need to be upgraded. No new pollution will result. If the sewage dischargers obey their permit limitations, this action will result in actually reducing the pollution that is currently flowing into the Tchefuncte system.

The proposed discharge into Soap and Tallow Creek was another success. Because of outrage from the surrounding community and a large attendance at a public hearing, it was announced that this discharge will have to be moved out of the Tchefuncte River system.

These two proposed discharges are great examples of how citizens need to remain vigilant and cognizant of what is going on in the rivers that they love. In an ideal world, states would adequately enforce their laws. In the states we live in, however, it often comes down to citizens and watchdogs to make sure that the laws on the books are actually enforced. ■

A Mighty River and a Magic Bay Need Our Help

The Apalachicola River, born in the high hills of southern Appalachia, brings a gift of life to the waters of Apalachicola Bay. The River's floodplain and bay system in the Florida Panhandle is one of the most ecologically productive places in the Gulf of Mexico. As rich waters flow from Georgia and Alabama into Florida, and eventually the Gulf of Mexico, they bring forth an estuary in Apalachicola Bay that is defined by vibrancy and life.



Courtesy of Apalachicola Riverkeeper

With the state of Georgia facing significant challenges in terms of drought and water supply issues, there has been a prolonged effort on the part of the state and the US Army Corps of Engineers to reduce freshwater flow and deprive the Gulf Coast of these life-giving waters. GRN feels strongly that human and ecological communities in Florida should not be degraded, endangered, or punished as a result of Georgia's failure to implement meaningful water conservation or growth management policies.

Actions to reduce downstream flow supported by the

state of Georgia and the federal government would not only negatively impact threatened and endangered species in the Florida Panhandle and the Gulf of Mexico. They would also directly and adversely impact the public health and the economic viability of Florida residents and communities.

GRN is working closely with the Florida Coastal and Oceans Coalition and Apalachicola Riverkeeper to serve as a voice

for the Apalachicola River and Apalachicola Bay. We support the efforts of Florida Governor Charlie Crist and Florida DEP to ensure that Florida's needs and natural resources are protected as the tri-state "water wars" continue. We are working in October to turn out our members and supporters for a series of public hearings held by the Army Corps on the future of this resource. If you are interested in attending, please contact Joe Murphy. If you are unable to attend, you may submit comments at www.acf-wcm.com until November 21, 2008. ■



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UNITED FOR A HEALTHY GULF

GRN Steps up Efforts to Protect Southwest Florida

Charlotte Harbor is an incredible place to enjoy and explore everything a Florida Gulf Coast estuary should be. But these days all is not well in paradise. Massive pollutant-laden outfalls from the Caloosahatchee River, flowing from Lake Okeechobee, have degraded the estuary. Polluted runoff from development, roads, and parking lots is on the rise. The state of Charlotte Harbor would be even worse if not for the incredible work being done by conservation groups. Yet despite all the good work, Charlotte Harbor and the rivers that feed into it are facing mounting threats and daunting challenges. The threat from expanded phosphate strip mining in central and southwest Florida is foremost among these challenges.

Phosphate strip mining rips the soul from the landscape, forever alters the hydrologic cycle of the region, and is a direct threat to the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor. Florida's coastlines and coastal communities deserve better. If you fish in the Gulf, like to eat fish, or just think marine critters are cool, this is an issue you should follow. As go the estuaries of Florida's Gulf Coast (the literal cradles of life for marine species, essential to the food chain and to reproduction) so goes Florida's multi-billion dollar recreational and commercial fisheries. If places like Horse Creek and the Peace River are lost to Big Phosphate, so shall Charlotte Harbor be a dim memory of what it once was.



Courtesy of Manasota-88

State and Federal regulatory agencies have a history of saying yes and granting permits for this destruction despite the apparent violations of the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. GRN and our conservation partners are engaged in a court battle against the US Army Corps of Engineers over this issue, and we are proud to be a co-plaintiff with this coalition of groups. We see the same types of threats (mining, development, sea level rise, water pollution, and reduced freshwater flows) facing all of our coastal estuaries. GRN is committed to protecting the health of Florida's Gulf Coast and coastal estuaries from Florida Bay and southwest Florida to the Tampa Bay region and on through the Nature Coast and the Panhandle. ■

Campaign Rolls On (continued from page 1)

the Magnolia Bay/Reserve at Sweetwater Estuary development, which would set a horrible precedent for development projects along the Nature Coast and would lead to a loss of coastal wetlands that is unacceptable. Since 2007, we've campaigned to stop this project in Taylor County. We have had some strong victories in this effort, and have built a working coalition of over 40 groups that also oppose this project. While we recently had a setback when the Suwannee River Water Management District issued a permit for the project, our campaign to protect Boggy Bay and prevent the Magnolia Bay/Reserve at Sweetwater Estuary development continues with a lot of opportunities ahead to protect the northern section of the Nature Coast and

the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve.

We are also working hard to protect Florida Black Bear habitat by opposing the Sunwest Harbortowne development project in Pasco County as well as campaigning with our member groups to oppose the Tarmac Mine proposal in Levy County. This massive mine would degrade coastal water quality and is another knife poised at the heart of the Nature Coast. GRN is using all of its tools and resources to pressure regulatory agencies, build strong coalitions, and make our case for protecting one of the last wild places in Florida. ■