



PRESS-REGISTER

Consensus builds on D'Olive Bay cleanup

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IT IS said that D'Olive Bay used to be more of a bay and less of an extended mud flat.

But anyone who moved to or was born in this area in the past 40 years will have to take someone else's word for it.

State Rep. Randy Davis, R-Daphne, is one such credible witness. He says that when he was a child, D'Olive Bay was "clear and deep."

Decades of development along the Eastern Shore in the Daphne/Spanish Fort area created erosion that sent uncontained runoff into D'Olive Creek. From there, the plume of mud flowed into D'Olive Bay and then into Mobile Bay.

Aerial photos from as far back as the mid-1970s show the plume going into the Gulf of Mexico.

The good news is that a coalition of government agencies, environmental groups, private interests and the public is trying to restore D'Olive Bay, which means first finding and blocking the many sources of mud that contribute to what is essentially the filling in of D'Olive Bay.

The goal is to work together to solve the problem.

As for blame, there's plenty to go around. Start with the development of the Lake Forest subdivision, where thousands of homes were built in a densely wooded area and no one seemed to worry about the lake.

Old aerial photos show the plume of mud emanating directly from Lake Forest.

Since the 1970s, multiple subdivisions and commercial developments from Daphne and Spanish Fort east to Malbis have contributed their shares of runoff, too, with muddy water sometimes pouring from various drainage culverts.

Today, D'Olive Bay can't be used for navigation, the environmental balance has been disrupted and water quality has been affected.

Enforcement of environmental regulations and basic erosion controls could have been better, but again, it's too late to point fingers.

The coalition is a great step in the right direction, but stopping the runoff and doing something about D'Olive Bay will be a complicated and expensive proposition. It will require not just cooperation among local agencies, but self-regulation by builders as well as anyone else who's responsible for property on which runoff is occurring.

The lake in the Lake Forest subdivision has been a longstanding problem. One option being considered involves draining, dredging and refilling it.

Stopping any more mud from getting into D'Olive and Mobile bays is the first step. Trying to restore D'Olive Bay itself is a long-range goal. But, as coalition leader David Yeager notes, "We just let everything run into the bay. Well, we can't do that anymore."

Mobile Bay is too important to the environment, recreation, boating, fishing and seafood interests to continue letting it fill up with mud from D'Olive Bay and D'Olive Creek.

People who settle at or near a shoreline want water that is clean and beautiful, not muddy and shallow.

Development is not going to stop along the Eastern Shore. It's in everyone's best interest - residents, developers and those who love the water - to contribute to solving the problem.

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