Temple Inland Fined $3.3M for 2011 Spill

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal judge has ordered Temple Inland, a subsidiary of International Paper, to pay $3.3 million and serve two years of probation for polluting the Pearl River in 2011 with illegal discharges from its Bogalusa paper mill that killed thousands of fish.

Equipment malfunctioned at the mill, which makes containerboard, allowing an untreated plume of a substance known as black liquor to flow into the Pearl River. Black liquor isn't toxic, but it sucked up all the oxygen in the river as it decayed, suffocating more than 160,000 fish and more than 430,000 freshwater mussels.

An International Paper spokesman said Thursday the company has made major improvements at the Bogalusa plant since acquiring Temple Inland 2012.

"We have invested considerable financial and human resources into improving the mill and correcting the issues that affected it prior to the purchase," Thomas J. Ryan said in an email.

Those included infrastructure improvements and the hiring of new personnel, including an environmental scientist to lead the renovation of the wastewater treatment system, Ryan said.

U.S. Attorney Dana Boente's office, in a news release, said U.S. District Judge Ivan L.R. Lemelle ordered the company Wednesday to pay $1.2 million in restitution and a criminal fine of $1.5 million "for the harm caused by the negligent discharge to the Pearl River and its tributaries," including the loss of the protected species Gulf sturgeon and other aquatic life, Boente's office said.

The company pleaded guilty in February to a two-count bill of information charging it with misdemeanor counts of negligent violation of the Clean Water Act and the Refuge Act.

Under restitution, $900,000 will be paid to the Trust for Public Land and $100,000 to The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana, both nonprofit organizations. The money will be used to buy and protect land and waters in the Pearl River basin, prosecutors said. The properties purchased by the organizations will be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Another $200,000 in restitution will pay for a study of the Pearl River focused on recovery of the Gulf sturgeon species and environmental changes in the river "that will be of interest to the local communities and the state," according to the news release.

In addition, Temple Inland will pay $500,000 to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality for the costs of monitoring for and responding to chemical

spills; $50,000 to the Louisiana State Police emergency services unit; and $50,000 to the Southern Environmental Enforcement Network, an alliance of government agencies, for training.

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