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Taking Action: The Future of South Padre Island

South Padre Island is like a second home to me and plays a very big role in my life, because I spent many weekends there with my family to relax and enjoy the environment. Over the years I would visit, and gradually I started to notice little differences in my surroundings. From seeing the blue of the water dim, to seeing more trash and waste wash upon the edge of the beach, there was certainly a change that was coming. Pollution is an issue that is taken quite lightly anywhere because it does not pose a major threat at the moment. I feel that taking action as soon as possible is best to solve a problem that will create many more problems in the future.

Taking action does not necessarily mean to go out change laws and do big things that may not even have an impact, but will be words in a book, but rather just do small things that will make the environment one step cleaner than before. Through my findings I realized that it is not one direct solution, but a collaborative effort that must be taken to solve the problem that will be for the overall good for the environment and community. Policies and laws still play a certain significance because when laws are enforced, it obliges the citizens to abide by these rules and follow them. Sometimes rules are broken or ignored, but having them in the first places gives the issue importance that it deserves in the first place.

During my archival process in the Special Collection the University of Houston library, I found it rather difficult to find any resources of any kind that pertained to my research paper. I did find a box that had to do with the Galveston beaches and the different types of environmental

concerns that things like pollution and the laws and legislation related to it. Finding my data bases was as equally difficult because of the fact that all databases refer to only subjects concerning the Houston area. I was able to come across a few articles that had to do with effects of oil pollution to the marine environment and oceans, and how the natural gas pipeline also negatively affects South Padre Island. Some of the articles that I chose were not directly related to my topic at all, but did add contribution to my research paper as a whole.

During my observation field notes, I found how several areas of the island are affected by pollution. The two locations that I sought to be the most impactful during Spring Break were “Beach Access 5” and “Clayton’s Beach Bar and Grill”. Beach access 5 is a secluded area of the beach where most people go to isolate themselves from the commercial part of the island. This also means that this is one of the areas where it is treated carelessly and like a dumpster. There is trash scattered all over this area of the beach since it is far away from everything else. Clayton’s is a popular spot for people to go during Spring Break. There are usually events going on during the day and night throughout the week such as performances from several artists and parties. This is one of the most heavily polluted locations on the island due to its high population rate. Trash is never picked up since people are there every day of the week. It is not until after Spring Break that all the waste is eventually cleaned up by workers or just get washed away by the ocean. Pollution presents a substantial threat to wildlife in the sea and to the environment as well.

The scholarly articles I used brought different perspectives to light in my research paper. In the National Parks Service’s article, “Environmental Factors”, The author uses several statistics within the article to help support their claim. According to the article, winds average at around 12 miles per hour, which evidently result in random objects such as debris from hurricanes and from man end up along the coast of the beach (Par.1). The most serious damage

done to the beach is from trash. This trash is typically either plastic or Styrofoam and can be very dangerous to wildlife and sea life. The author takes into account how much more harmful the man-made waste is than the nature-based waste is. The article focuses on what the causes of the pollution and waste along the beach, and there is still no proper solution to the problem.

All the articles that dealt with Galveston had nothing to do with my research topic, I found information that had problems related to the environment that would help support my claim in the end. My source from the Special Collections, there was a book that had a page labeled, “The Beach- Another Form of Environmental Concern”, talks about other environmental concerns on the beach. Unlike the other articles, this page talks about other causes of environmental damages to beaches all around Texas. It uses examples like fences and beach barricades and altered vegetation lines. The page focuses a lot on the legislation and passing of laws benefitting the beach environment. However, even though there are laws and laws pertaining to the problems on the beach, the problems continue to be ignored. The Open Beach Act continues to be ignored, which contains laws that the public should have the free and unrestricted right of access to the public beaches of Texas. With public access comes its own issues, such as the pollution and waste that constitutes with people just walking around the beach due to the lack of law enforcement.

In David Robledo’s article, “Texas Most Beloved Beach Is at the End of the Natural Gas Pipeline”, the article focuses on the how Brownsville, a city 30 minutes away from South Padre Island is negatively affecting the island. In the article, the author provides information that Brownsville has different LNG facilities that are releasing different chemicals into the environment and burned into the air of the state’s most popular beach. “Liquefying natural gas is a dirty and unsightly enterprise. The plants’ 500-foot flaring towers—which release

mercury, hydrogen sulfide, helium, carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons and other impurities from the natural gas” (par. 5). The article uses outside conflicts which in this case is the harmful substances being dumped into the environment as a way to show that problems along the beach are not the only thing harming their community. Harmful chemicals are not doing damage at the moment, but when the environment is exposed to multiple substances for a longer period of time there will most definitely a negative impact on the environment as a whole.

Solutions do not form overnight, but taking small steps into the right direction will put the environment in a better position that it was yesterday. We have to act now and act quickly because there are a lot of problems that are arising other than pollution. It may seem like a small problem at the moment, but over time it will have a snowball effect and become a bigger problem than what it is before. The articles I summarized and presented show how there is not just one solution but a matter of a collaborative effort from the community to help do the little things such as picking after themselves and doing anything they can to keep a healthy environment to make a greater impact on their surroundings. Making a change in one place can inspire others in different cities, states, and countries to follow the example and do it themselves making the world a better and cleaner place. It's not the big changes we have to do right now, but doing the little things as a community and as a family will most definitely leave a positive mark in our environment in the long run.

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