



**Save Our Cypress Campaign
Action Manual:**

November 17th Day of Action

www.saveourcypress.org

www.healthygulf.org



**SAVE OUR CYPRESS
COALITION** WWW.SAVEOURCYPRESS.ORG



The Save Our Cypress Campaign

The Gulf Restoration Network and Save Our Cypress Coalition are publicly demanding that Lowe's, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart stop selling unsustainable cypress mulch! You can help stop the rapid loss of endangered cypress forests, and this Action Packet will provide the tools you need to successfully organize your own Save Our Cypress Campaign and a great event for the November 17th International Day of Action.

For more background information on cypress forests, mulch, and the on-going campaign, please visit www.saveourcypress.org and check out the Save Our Cypress General Action Manual and the Louisiana Cypress Fact Sheet at www.healthygulf.org/save-our-cypress/cypress-resources.html.

Campaign Update- Fall 2007

Your grassroots efforts are paying off! In August, Wal-Mart informed its mulch suppliers that it would no longer accept cypress mulch harvested, bagged or manufactured in the state of Louisiana. A victory for Louisiana's wetlands, and a good first step for securing the endangered cypress forests of the Gulf. Lowe's has engaged with scientists and state agencies while placing a moratorium on cypress mulch from coastal Louisiana, defined as south of I-10/I-12 excluding the Pearl River Basin. We haven't heard much from Home Depot.

Lowe's moratorium is a bit of an empty promise because there is no enforceable mechanism to ensure an honest implementation. Suppliers have proven willing to hide the source of their products in the past. Wal-Mart recognized the difficulties with a lack of transparency in the supply chain, and the company rightfully decided to make the whole state off limits. Even Wal-Mart can't be sure they're not getting any mulch from Louisiana, though, because there is no independent verification system, and brands bagged in Louisiana are using addresses from Texas, Arkansas, and Florida.

Cypress forests provide important habitat for wildlife, promote healthy water quality, and protect people from storms and flooding all throughout the South. All endangered cypress need protection from being ground into mulch. Wal-Mart set the standard for sustainability in Louisiana, but their actions could just push production to other states, such as Florida. In order to live up to their own corporate policies of sustainability, Lowe's, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart must stop selling unsustainable cypress mulch, no matter where it is logged.

Cypress mulch destroys the Gulf. To make Lowe's, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart live up to their sustainability promises, we've got to hold their feet to the fire. On November 17th, our collective actions will hold these companies accountable and move us towards a sustainable Gulf Coast.

November 17th Save Our Cypress Day of Action

Few people connect Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's cypress mulch to forest destruction. As activists and engaged citizens, we can portray that story in ways that engage the hearts and minds of the public, and the November 17th International Day of Action Against Big Box Retailers is the perfect opportunity to draw the public's attention to the dangers of cypress mulch.

On Saturday, November 17th, people all over the Gulf and the country will descend upon Lowe's, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart stores to demand an end to the sale of unsustainable cypress mulch. Whether you come with friends and the media in tow for a huge event or you stop by a store to drop off a letter to the manager, everyone can participate. Our combined effort will have a huge impact in moving these companies toward real sustainability for the Gulf Coast.



Effective store actions show people (including the manager and employees) the destructive nature of cypress mulch as well as engaging them to take concrete action. They are also fun and entertaining both to create and to watch. The key is to be creative, have fun, and share your successes. If you have good ideas pass them along so others can use it as well.

The overall goal of these actions is to convey to the manager and employees of the store that selling cypress mulch is unacceptable and have them relay the message to decision-makers in the corporate office. Generally, there are two ways to do that.

- 1.) **Tell the manager and employees.** Take a moment to talk to the manager of the store, give him or her a letter outlining your complaint (sample letters at the end of this packet), and ask the manager to tell his or her corporate bosses to stop selling unsustainable cypress mulch. Make sure to get a commitment from the manager that the complaint will be passed on to higher levels of management. Managers are top priority, but don't forget to inform other employees of the problem at their store. Most of them just don't know, and they won't be happy about it. Unhappy workers mean an unproductive company, and corporate executives don't want that.
- 2.) **Disrupt the customer experience, and then tell the manager why.** The most effective way to get a store's attention is to disrupt their customers' shopping experience. There are a whole variety of ways you can do that—from handing out photos of cypress clear-cuts to waiving banners to holding street

theatre demonstrations. It's crucial that the message "Lowe's (or Wal-Mart or Home Depot) Cypress Mulch Destroys the Gulf" get across to customers and ask them to take action by not buying cypress mulch and speaking to the store manager. Even when you're doing a more aggressive action, make sure to tell the manager your reasons for being there and leave him or her with a letter.

Photos are crucial!! Whatever you do, make sure to photograph it, **a lot**. If the manager doesn't deliver the message to corporate headquarters, we can send the pictures directly.

Action Suggestions: Many of these ideas can be combined, i.e. a great media-demonstration-delivery event. These are meant to get the wheels turning, any and all ideas are welcome. Please share!

A. Deliver letters to local store managers. You can address them to the CEO's of the companies- Lee Scott (Wal-Mart), Robert Niblock (Lowe's), and Frank Blake (Home Depot)- or the managers themselves and hand deliver them on November 17th.

B. Present a cypress sapling to Wal-Mart, Home Depot, or Lowe's. Offer the stores a whole version of what they sell ground up in their garden department. Hand the manager a sapling with a certificate of adoption (hey, the companies are killing the saplings parents). Bring music and banners that make the action look like a ceremony. Managers will probably remember this even more than a letter.

C. Hold a classic demonstration. Outside the store, bring colorful signs, posters, and banners. Hand out information sheets to customers who walk in the store and ask them to talk to the manager. Oh, and don't forget to have some chants ready.

D. Visually connect forest destruction with Lowe's, Home Depot and Wal-Mart. Slip pictures of clear-cuts into stacks of mulch, or onto shelves. Pass out fliers with pictures of the destruction to customers and employees. A flier template is available at <http://www.healthygulf.org/save-our-cypress/cypress-resources.html>.

E. Do a street theatre performance in front of a store. Perform a story of forest destruction and loss of natural storm defenses. Have a script, practice, have props and costumes. This can be a lot of fun!

E. Hang a big banner: Make it big, colorful and on message, i.e. "Lowe's Cypress Mulch Destroys the Gulf". Get it in a perfect spot for the media and for pictures!

F. Perform gardening demonstrations. Show onlookers how to use sustainable mulches and explain why cypress mulch is not an option. Bring a red wagon and demonstrate how to plant a cypress sapling in it and use pine straw mulch around the newly planted tree.

G. Forest Animal Visit: If Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Lowe's have taken the trees out of our forests and moved them into their stores, why not bring the rest of the forests to

their aisles as well? Dress up as various forest animals and set up for the day in your local store. Or bring the stumps that Home Depot, Wal-Mart, and Lowe's leaves in every forest when they finish with it.

H. Involve younger children: It's the youngest generations that lose the most from forest destruction. Ask local elementary school teachers if you can give presentations on forests, and at the end have students paint pictures of forests that say, "Lowe's (or Wal-Mart, or Home Depot), Please stop destroying the Gulf Coast." Give them to the store manager or send them to the CEO.

I. In-Store Returns. Fill shopping carts with cypress mulch and bring it to the counter. As you are unloading it, ask the clerk if the mulch comes from endangered forests. If they don't know, have them call the manager. Tell them you don't want to buy forest destruction and end the sale. If they say "no", ask them to prove it. It is completely impossible for them to do that, so end the sale.

J. In Store Announcements: Make an announcement that endangered cypress forests are currently in aisle 9 (or something to that effect) over the intercom, with a bullhorn, or in a loud voice!

E. Organize a press conference: Invite people involved in the campaign from your area to speak about Home Depot, Lowe's, and Wal-Mart cypress mulch destroying the Gulf Coast's cypress forests. Then send out press releases and invite the media to come.



Action Tips:

- **Spectacle=message.** Everything about your action should convey your message that Wal-Mart's, Home Depot's, and Lowe's cypress mulch destroys the Gulf. Any skit, sign, or action should connect to the message so observers can see the action and understand why you're demonstrating.
- **Take lots of pictures!**
- **Make it fun and interactive for everyone.** All demonstrators should have a role and/or activity. Whether its handing out fliers, leading chants, or simply chanting, get

everyone engaged. Create excitement so a crowd gathers. Create settings and a tone that welcome people into your event. Recruit passersby to take action by joining you or talking to the manager.

- **With street theatre, tell a story and create simple images that repeat.** With street theater should have a plot, characters (villain, victim, hero), props/visuals, and a setting. Many stories have a villain, a victim and a hero. (i.e., Lowe', forest critters or communities, and a super-hero with a catchy name). Make the plot easy to follow, and easy to understand, and create scenes that look great in photos. Does a snapshot tell the whole story?
- **Visuals should be colorful and big.** One huge banner is a much better visual than dozens of smaller signs. Also, regardless of the size of your groups, clump them together rather than spreading people out. Remember the frozen image created by photography.
- **Record your event!** Make sure to take pictures and even video to show the impact of your actions. Please share your photos with us, it's inspiring to see you out there, and it helps build the network. Tell us what you do so we can give ideas to others and track our progress. We will also show corporate executives the campaign activities.

Roles to fill for day of Action:

- **Liaison** with store manager: deliver the letter, interact with employees
- **Leader of chants, director of skits**
- **Fliers**—1 person point on this, everyone working on it
- **Postcards**—1 person point on this, everyone working on it
- **Media:** have press release and talking points handy
- **Photographer/Videographer**
- **Police Liaison-** Someone calm and articulate who can communicate with security and/or police if necessary.

Ideas for Banners/Signs

Get creative. You can mix and match the phrases below to get started.

Lowe's Cypress Mulch Destroys the Gulf

Wal-Mart's Cypress Mulch Destroys
Endangered Forests

Home Depot's Cypress Mulch Destroys the
Gulf's Natural Flood Protection

Don't Clear-Cut the Gulf Coast: Stop
Selling Cypress Mulch

Cypress Mulch Destroys the Coast

Event Checklist

The following is a helpful checklist of the things you should do before the event. This means that many of these things should be done in the weeks before. Check out the media checklist below too.

THREE WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- Speak at events, table at other events, and generate lists of interested volunteers.
- Call other environmental and other interested groups in the area and invite them.
- Send out an invitation to any e-mail lists.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE

- Decide what your action will be, make all props and write skits.
- Plan a schedule for the event- set time(s) and specific meeting place(s) for the event.
- DO A SITE CHECK! Scout out the store and determine where people should stand, where signs should be held, etc.

ONE WEEK BEFORE

- Finish materials like banners and signs.
- Call those who said they were interested and ask them to your event (and to come help make props beforehand.)
- Create visibility around your event by poster and chalking.
- Finalize specific roles in the event such as police liaison, media spokesperson, chant leader, etc.
- Finalize your own program and agenda in detail.

Are you entering the store to do a tour? Are you postcarding for the entire time? Do you have any drummers to add music to the event? Do you have a press conference planned? Have you rehearsed your skits? Whatever it is—decide what you’re doing, practice, and tell people the game plan when they arrive.

- PRACTICE, especially if you’re doing street theatre or expecting the media.

TWO DAYS BEFORE

- Call and confirm all the people who said they’d be there.
- Site check your location again to make sure nothing’s changed.
- Coordinate transportation to and from event.
- Develop a back-up plan in case you get asked to leave. Unlikely as it may be, if this does happen, you can always go to the sidewalk in front of the parking lot, or go to another store in your area. Either way, be prepared!
- Go over schedule with participants, make sure everyone who needs training is trained
- Play the “what if” game and be prepared for every possible situation

THE DAY OF THE ACTION

- Have enough postcards to sign/materials to hand out (at least 200-250.)
- Bring clipboards for postcards.

If you don’t have enough or any clipboards, then bring pieces of cardboard with rubber bands wrapped around them – they work just as well.

__ Have fun!

AFTER THE EVENT

__ Send pictures and a brief description of your action to the GRN, so we can track the cumulative impacts of the campaign!

__ Write letters to the CEO's of the company and tell them about your event

Know Your Rights

Protests and demonstrations have created social and environmental change throughout history. From the Boston Tea Party to the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the Labor Rights Movement -- and the Home Depot Old Growth campaign -- non-violent direct action has played a crucial role in exposing injustices and winning important victories. These actions allow us to exercise our basic rights as U.S. citizens as well as participate more fully in the democratic process. Most importantly, nonviolent direct action is empowering because it works.

However, it is important to know your basic rights before you hit the streets. Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's stores and usually their parking lots are private property. Before you go, appoint someone to talk to the police and manager and tell them what you are doing and why you are there. Be courteous and respectful to all authority. This can work in your favor many times. If you have a demonstration at the store, the manager might come out and ask you to leave. Not leaving can result in arrest. However, at most demonstrations thus far, demonstrators have been permitted to stay, especially if you stress that you are going to leave at a certain time. Arrests result in bad publicity for the store. Most demonstrations encounter few problems with the police.

It helps to have a back-up plan. You can hit another store or take your event out to the sidewalk. Even if you are asked to leave, you can buy time by talking to the manager and police.

The following is not meant to be legal advice, nor comprehensive, but should provide some things to think about before planning an action:

- Appointing a police liaison to speak with them is generally beneficial. A police liaison conveys information between the police and the group. The police liaison should be articulate, calm, and able to communicate with the police as well as able to de-escalate the situation as much as possible.
- Always use your judgment. Remember to be safe and keep your group safe.
- Remember that rights do not always equal reality.

If you would like more information on legal issues, there are many activist legal collectives including the: Midnight Special Law Collective: <http://www.midnightspecial.net/>, The Just Cause Law Collective: <http://www.lawcollective.org/>, and the New York City People's Law Collective: <http://www.tao.ca/~nycplc/>

Also, the American Civil Liberties Union has lawyers all over the country that work to protect our rights and freedoms, <http://www.aclu.org>.

The National Lawyers Guild is also a good resource, www.nlg.org.

Mobilizing Media Momentum

Gaining media coverage around the campaign is critical to alert the public about Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's forest destruction and pressure them publicly by documenting all of the grassroots actions organized throughout the country against their company. The key to gaining media attention is to hold exciting events that engage reporters. Just like activists, most reporters don't like to be bored. Have fun and be creative when telling your story, and get ready to see your story in the paper the next day!

Tips for Getting Great Media:

- **Create a plan.** Gaining media attention is like running any other campaign. You need to decide who to target, what influences them, and a step by step plan to reach your goal. Attached at the end of this section is a media checklist.
- **Build relationships with reporters.** Much of the news is based on the individual preferences of a reporter. Use your events to get to know reporters and find out what interests them. Read the stories they write. Use that knowledge to "spin" a story. Are they interested in forest protection? Students and young people? Corporate citizenship? Find out their deadline and be considerate. Finally, don't just stop at one reporter. Sometimes talking to several reporters helps you distinguish which ones are most interested in your story.
- **Write effective news advisories and news releases.** A news advisory states who, what, where, when and why of an event. Send it out 2-3 days before an event to place an event on a reporter's schedule. A news release is the story you would want written about your event. Hand it out at your event and send it to reporters soon after your event ends.
- **Create a message and stick to it.** Tie it to the area where you are, and make it simple and concise. Most importantly, practice your talking points before your demonstration. For example, a simple 3- part message could be the following:
 - 1) Cypress forests are the best natural flood protection for the Gulf Coast, and they are being clear-cut to make cypress garden mulch,
 - 2) Lowe's, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart are promoting the destruction of coastal forests by selling cypress mulch when other sustainable alternatives exist
 - 3) Citizens from throughout your town have gathered at Home Depot (or Lowe's or Wal-Mart) to demand they stop selling cypress mulch

Return to one of your major points with every statement you make to reporters. Remember that you don't have to answer all the questions that the media asks you. If you are unable to answer a question, just go back to your message.

- Have a couple of people appointed that deal primarily to the media. Everyone should be prepared to talk, but these are the people that you point reporters to initially. Media liaisons should be articulate, knowledgeable, and on message.

Do It Yourself Media

Sometimes the corporate media outlets you faxed your press releases to don't show up. Or they misquote you or take a segment of your sound bite out of context. This, of course, doesn't mean that the word won't get out about your action. You can be your own media and document your hard work and creativity. Be sure to bring a camera or more to actions and afterwards write your own articles about your fabulous demonstration to distribute and publish.

With the Internet, the opportunities to create your own media are endless. Blogs, social networking sites, YouTube- all of them are a great ways of reaching the public with our message to protect cypress forests. Independent media sites like www.indymedia.org have great websites where you can publish stories, articles, and pictures. Be creative and stay on message, and then watch your campaign "go viral". Make sure to send the Gulf Restoration Network a link too so we can see it!

You can also write articles and submit them to your local paper. It is usually much easier to get them into smaller, and more local publications. Other options include writing a letter to the editor, or writing an opinion piece that is featured, more commonly called Op-Ed.

Media Checklist

ONE OR TWO WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

__Get a media outlet list from your area.

You can look in the phone book for the media outlets, and ask for the "environmental reporter," or call one of the local environmental groups and they're sure to lend you their list.

__Prepare media advisory and press release (samples for the Arbor Day of Action are coming soon.)

THREE DAYS BEFORE EVENT

__Fax the advisory to the media, and call reporters about the event.

In your phone calls, you'll have about 30 seconds to tell them the WHO-WHAT-WHEN-WHERE-WHY of the event, and then they'll ask you to fax your advisory. Think about your pitch and practice it with a friend a few times to warm up.

__Call the AP and get the event in their "Daybook."

The Associated Press of your state circulates to all the media outlets in your area a schedule of events for each day. Find their number in the phone book or information, and tell them you have an event for the daybook.

__Prepare press packets.

Include your press release and fact sheets provided as an information packet to the press.

__Designate media liaison and greeters, and have a set of people prepared to deliver the message to any reporters that come. Practice fielding questions from the media and role-play sound-bites and answers.

TWO DAYS BEFORE EVENT

__ Call all the reporters you didn't get in touch with yesterday.

MORNING ON DAY OF ACTION

- Call through media contacts once again.
- Bring press packets and a sign-in sheet for reporters who attend event.

AFTER THE ACTION

- After your event, send out your release to any reporters who did not attend, and follow up with all reporters.
- Post your event to the web the best way you know how.
- Look for coverage of your event on the news or in your paper. Record and clip articles.
- Write Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor.

For media work, we'll be following up soon with sample press releases and advisories and conference call trainings. Watch your email to stay up-to-date.