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Wal-Mart to Stop Selling Cypress Mulch From Louisiana
Important Step Towards Preserving Endangered Cypress Swamps

New Orleans, LA- Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. has informed its suppliers that, effective January 1, 2008, the company will no longer buy and sell cypress mulch that is harvested, bagged, or manufactured in the state of Louisiana. The Save Our Cypress Coalition, a group of environmental organizations, has been publicly pressuring the major retailers Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's to stop selling cypress mulch since November 2006.

"It's a tremendous step that Wal-Mart has recognized that cypress sustainability is a serious concern," said Mark Ford, Executive Director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, "The Save Our Cypress Coalition sincerely thanks Wal-Mart for the action they've taken in Louisiana, and we will continue to work to completely end the sale of unsustainable cypress mulch."

The decision comes on the heels of another recent action by a home retailer that acknowledges the concerns of the Save Our Cypress coalition, while failing to implement practical solutions to address those concerns. Lowe's has stated it has implemented a moratorium on mulch from cypress harvested south of I-10/I-12 in Louisiana, excluding the Pearl River Basin. But there is no enforceable mechanism for ensuring that the moratorium is actually being upheld by suppliers. Home Depot and Lowe's have claimed in the past that their suppliers do not source from coastal Louisiana, but the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper has gathered evidence proving this assertion to be false. The evidence is available at www.saveourcypress.org.

"Suppliers of cypress mulch have proven willing to hide the source of their product in the past," said Dean Wilson, from the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper. "Wal-Mart recognizes the difficulties with verification and is acting accordingly by identifying the whole state as an unacceptable source."

A new interactive cypress map, at www.lmrk.org/cypressmap.html, demonstrates chain-of-custody concerns through documented examples of clear-cutting and cypress mulch production in Louisiana. As the map information shows, many of the brands of mulch produced in Louisiana are already labeled with addresses in Florida, Texas, and Arkansas.

"We're happy to hear that some cypress forests will be saved from the mulch machine, but how can Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's ignore Florida's wetlands?" asked Joe Murphy, Florida Programs Coordinator for the Gulf Restoration Network. According to the University of Florida IFAS Extension, cypress trees in Florida are being cut out of the wetlands at a rate faster than they can regenerate, and almost half of the cypress cut is used for mulch.

The Save Our Cypress Coalition continues to call on Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's to stop selling cypress mulch that is not certified as sustainable, no matter where the logging occurs. While cautiously celebrating Wal-Mart's move in Louisiana, the coalition submitted formal letters signed by over 160 organizations, from across the US and around the world, to Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's asking the companies to stop selling cypress mulch. Supporters include conservation groups, garden clubs, anglers, eco-tourism operators, and members of the faith-based community.

Cypress forests are heralded by scientists to be some of the Gulf's best natural storm and flooding protection. The swamps also support a wide array of wildlife including fish and crustaceans, migratory birds, and threatened and endangered species like the bald eagle and Florida panther. The swamps are of national importance to protect the economy, the unique environment of the Gulf Coast, and people.

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The Save Our Cypress Coalition is comprised of organizations and businesses that are dedicated to preserving cypress ecosystems and the ecological benefits, flood protection, and economic opportunities they provide. Leaders of the efforts in Louisiana include the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club, Gulf Restoration Network, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, Louisiana Audubon Council, Louisiana Environment Action Network, and the Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper. For more information please visit, www.saveourcypress.org.