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The Cypress Mulch Industry Threatens Coastal Protection in Louisiana *Coalition Calls on Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Lowe's to Stop Selling Cypress Mulch*

New Orleans, LA- The Save Our Cypress Coalition, a group of local and regional environmental groups in Louisiana, is publicly requesting Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Lowe's immediately cease all sales of cypress mulch products. Louisiana's endangered cypress-tupelo swamps are being clear-cut to feed an unsustainable and unnecessary cypress mulch industry.

"As the nation's largest retailers, Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Lowe's have the power to dramatically reduce needless destruction of our cypress forests," said Leslie March, Chair of the Delta (Louisiana) Chapter of the Sierra Club, "We are calling on these three retailers to live up to their corporate policies of sustainability to help save Louisiana's coast."

The Save Our Cypress Coalition is asking the retailers to stop selling all cypress mulch products until a credible, third-party certification system is operating to ensure that no cypress mulch products are being sourced from non-renewable cypress swamps.

"Cypress forests are an important barrier to hurricane storm surge," explained Gary Shaffer, PhD., from Southeastern Louisiana University, "Satellite imagery shows that most trees in Katrina's path were downed while contiguous cypress forests stood strong and actually protected the rest of the ecosystem."

Cypress mulch does not provide any superior attributes, and alternatives, such as pine straw, pine bark nuggets, and eucalyptus mulch all provide the benefits of mulch without destroying coastal wetlands. Despite sustainable options, entire swamps are being clear-cut to produce mulch.

"I have been following trucks from clear-cuts in the Atchafalaya Basin to a facility in West Baton Rouge Parish that is solely producing cypress mulch from whole trees. Our pictures show thousands of bags of cypress mulch being filled there, and those same bags end up in the gardening departments of Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's," said Dean Wilson, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper. "Subsequent investigation with flyovers also have confirmed the cypress mulch operation."

Even without the threat of a wholesale mulch industry, cypress-tupelo forests throughout the Gulf are already stressed, and the sustainability of cypress harvesting has been questioned. Referencing the Governor's Coastal Wetland Conservation and Use Science Working Group Report, Dr. Shaffer, a member of the group, explained, "From saltwater intrusion to increased levels of flooding, cypress forests in Louisiana are already in danger, and there are many swamps that will never grow back once they are cut."

Cypress forests in Louisiana and throughout the Gulf region also provide important habitat for wildlife, including threatened and endangered species like the Louisiana black bear, and forty percent of the migratory birds that fly through North America.

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