

September 4, 2007

Frank Blake, CEO  
The Home Depot, Inc.  
2455 Paces Ferry Rd. NW  
Atlanta, GA 30339

Dear Mr. Blake:

We, the undersigned, are greatly concerned about Home Depot contributing to the destruction of cypress forests in the Gulf Coast and throughout the country. Cypress deforestation for mulch is compromising the sustainability of our coast and its communities into the future. We formally request that Home Depot immediately cease all sales of cypress mulch.

Cypress forests are the Gulf Coast's best natural storm and flooding defenses<sup>1,2</sup>, and they provide habitat for important wildlife. Comparing the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the importance of wetlands as a natural buffer to storm surge, hurricane force, and flooding was remarkably clear, and cypress forests stand out as the best natural storm protection. Unlike the 217 square miles of wetlands that were destroyed by the two storms<sup>3</sup>, cypress forests were almost completely unaffected and, if not logged, will remain as valuable protection from future catastrophes<sup>4</sup>. In addition to protecting people, these forests are important habitat for threatened and endangered species like the Louisiana black bear, the Florida panther, the bald eagle, and the recently rediscovered ivory-billed woodpecker. Each year, nearly the entire system of migratory neo-tropical songbirds, and many of the western neotropical species, migrate through Louisiana's wetlands. These swamps also support more than 100 species of fish and shellfish<sup>5</sup>.

In light of Home Depot's new sustainability initiatives, you undoubtedly see the importance in protecting areas that support such biodiversity and defend human life and property. In the "Twenty First Century Leadership" speech that you gave on October 24, 2005, you stated, "We should view the environment as Katrina in slow motion. Environmental loss threatens our health and the health of the natural systems we depend on." We commend many of your company's initiatives to address environmental concerns, and we thank you for all your help in the wake of Katrina. Now, one of the easy answers to your question, "What would it take for Home Depot to be that company – the one we were after Katrina . . . at our best . . . all the time?", is for Home Depot to be an industry leader and stop selling cypress mulch<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Wold, Amy. "Researchers: Forests better at weakening hurricane surge". The Baton Rouge Advocate. 28 April 2007. <http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/7233386.html>

<sup>2</sup> Whitt, Toni. "Environmentalists say cypress belongs in swamps, not gardens." Sarasota Herald Tribune. 28 April 2007. <http://www.heraldtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070428/NEWS/704280458/-1/xml>

<sup>3</sup> Barras, John A. Land area change in coastal Louisiana after the 2005 hurricanes—a series of three maps: U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 06-1274. 2006. <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2006/1274/>

<sup>4</sup> Kohl, Dr. Barry and Shaffer, Dr. Gary. "Mulching Our Defenses- Cypress mulch and our coast". Presentation to Sierra Club New Orleans Group. United Methodist Church, New Orleans. 14 January 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Coastal Wetland Forest Conservation and Use Science Working Group. Conservation, Protection and Utilization of Louisiana's Coastal Wetland Forests. 03 April 2005. <http://www.coastalforestswg.lsu.edu/>

Cypress mulch is an inherently unsustainable and unnecessary product, and sustainable alternatives are readily available. Industrial logging of cypress swamps may not be sustainable anywhere, as this is an incredibly complex ecosystem and cypress trees require specific growing conditions. A report released in 2005 by the Governor's Coastal Wetland Forest Conservation and Use Science Working Group in Louisiana<sup>7</sup>, shows that, due to changes in hydrology, many of the cypress forests will never regenerate once cut. Anecdotal evidence indicates that clear-cutting of cypress prohibits regeneration because any saplings are quickly crowded out by invasive species, like Chinese tallow. Similar concerns about deforestation and regeneration are also being raised outside of Louisiana. Production numbers from Florida show that cypress is being harvested more quickly than it can regenerate, and 47% of total production is for landscaping mulch<sup>8</sup>. Total loss of coastal wetland forests could become a very real threat if current trends continue.

Some cypress forests are being clear-cut and entire trees are being used to make mulch<sup>9</sup>. Yet, suppliers and, sadly, Home Depot continue to claim that the cypress products sold are sustainable. Our coalition has gathered extensive evidence of the irreparable damages resulting from logging for cypress mulch, much of which we've presented to your company<sup>10, 11</sup>. Sustainability claims, on the other hand, have not been supported by any factual evidence. The cypress mulch industry is irreversibly harming these amazing ecosystems.

Meanwhile, sustainable mulch alternatives exist, and some are already capable of delivering on the commercial scale that your company must require. The innovative FloriMulch is made from melaleuca<sup>12</sup>, an invasive species that is harming Florida's wetlands. Pine straw can be raked up from existing pine plantations to provide sustainable mulch on a very large scale<sup>13</sup>. Other options include farmed eucalyptus, pine bark, and more creative choices like pecan shells.

Individual consumers can only make a small difference, but Home Depot has the retail power to make an enormous difference towards ensuring that these cypress forests and the natural flood protection and other ecosystem values they provide are not lost forever.

Please be a national industry leader and cease the sale of all cypress mulch products from Home Depot stores today.

Sincerely,

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<sup>6</sup> Scott, H. Lee. "Twenty First Century Leadership". Presented on October 24, 2005.  
<http://walmartstores.com/Files/21st%20Century%20Leadership.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Coastal Wetland Forest Conservation and Use Science Working Group. Conservation, Protection and Utilization of Louisiana's Coastal Wetland Forests. 03 April 2005. <http://www.coastalforestswg.lsu.edu/>

<sup>8</sup> Pasco County Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida. "Why We Recommend That You Not Use Cypress Mulch in Your Landscape". <http://pasco.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/mulches.htm>

<sup>9</sup> [www.saveourcypress.org](http://www.saveourcypress.org). Image Gallery.

<sup>10</sup> Kohl, Dr. Barry. "Cypress Mulching Operations in Louisiana". Presented to Wal-Mart on March 16, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Save Our Cypress Coalition. "Please stop selling cypress mulch". Letter with attachments to Tyler Elm, Senior Director Corporate Strategy and Business Sustainability. 29 August 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Forestry Resources, Inc. "The FloriMulch Family". <http://www.gomulch.com/index.cfm/name-FloriMulchLanding>

<sup>13</sup> Keller, Mike. "Save the cypress campaign may help Miss.: Pine straw a fine mulch alternative." *Mississippi SunHerald*. 18 November 2006.

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