

September 4, 2007

Mr. H. Lee Scott, CEO
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.
702 S.W. 8th Street
Bentonville, AR 72716

Dear Mr. Scott:

We, the undersigned, are greatly concerned about Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. 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 Wal-Mart immediately cease all sales of cypress mulch.

Cypress forests are the Gulf Coast's best natural storm and flooding defenses^{1,2}, 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 storms³, cypress forests were almost completely unaffected and, if not logged, will remain as valuable protection from future catastrophes⁴. 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 shellfish⁵.

In light of Wal-Mart'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 Wal-Mart to be that company – the one we were after Katrina . . . at our best . . . all the time?", is for Wal-Mart to be an industry leader and stop selling cypress mulch⁶.

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

² 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>

³ 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/>

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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/>

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

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 Louisiana⁷, 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 mulch⁸. 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 mulch⁹. Yet, suppliers and, sadly, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. 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^{10, 11}. 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 melaleuca¹², 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 scale¹³. Other options include farmed eucalyptus, pine bark, and more creative choices like pecan shells.

Individual consumers can only make a small difference, but Wal-Mart 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 Wal-Mart stores today.

Sincerely,

⁷ 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/>

⁸ 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>

⁹ www.saveourcypress.org. Image Gallery.

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

¹¹ 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.

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

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

SAVE OUR CYPRESS COALITION

Dean A. Wilson
Executive Director
Atchafalaya Basinkeeper
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Cynthia Sarthou
Executive Director
Gulf Restoration Network
New Orleans, Louisiana

Marylee Orr
Executive Director
Louisiana Environmental Action Network
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Carlton Dufrechou
Executive Director
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation
Metairie, Louisiana

Paul Orr
Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dr. Mark Ford
Executive Director
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dr. Barry Kohl
President
Louisiana Audubon Council
Baton Rouge, LA

Cathy Coats
Conservation Chairperson
Baton Rouge Audubon society
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Leslie March
Chair
Delta chapter of the Sierra Club
New Orleans, Louisiana

SIGNEES:

Steve Fleischli
President
Waterkeeper Alliance
Irvington, New York

Francisco Ollervides
Irvington, New York

Rick Bryan
Conservation Chair
Central Louisiana Audubon Society
Pineville, Louisiana

Lauren Stewart
Co-President
ECO at Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Rick Bryan
Executive Director
Hunters for Hardwoods
Pineville, Louisiana

Charles Fryling Jr.
President
Louisiana Audubon Council
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Michael Tritico
Executive Director
RESTORE
Lake Charles, Louisiana

Karen Wimpelberg
Board President
The Alliance for Affordable Energy
New Orleans, Louisiana

Harvey Stern
Founder
Louisiana Purchase Cypress Legacy Project
New Orleans, LA

Charles Pattison
Executive Director
1000 Friends of Florida
Tallahassee, FL

Mary Whitworth

Bayou Preservation Association
Houston, TX

Sam Stearns
Public Education Coordinator
Friends of Bell Smith Springs
Stonefort, Illinois

Monique Harden
Natalie Walker
Lead Attorneys
Advocates for Environmental Human Rights
New Orleans, LA

Dave Bulloch
American Littoral Society, SE Chapter
Sarasota, FL

Louisiana ACORN
New Orleans, LA

Michael Roberts
Association of Family Fishermen
Barataria, LA

Bob Stokes
President
Galveston Bay Foundation
Webster, TX

Jim Ragland
Frank Bonifay
Alligator Bayou Tours/Spanish Lake Wildlife Refuge
and Botanical Gardens, Inc.
Prairieville, LA

Louis Skrmetta
Captain
Ship Island Excursions
Biloxi, MS
Dogwood Alliance
Asheville, NC

Monica Ferroe
Founder and Director
Raise Awareness New Orleans
New Orleans, LA

Charles Ansell
Chicagoan for Environmental Responsibility
Chicago, IL

Danielle Gaubert
President
Loyola University Community Action
Program

New Orleans, LA

Sunshine Bond
Shaina Chimes
Chad Carson
Co-Chairs
Loyola University Environmental Action
New Orleans, LA

Nancy Hirschfield
President
Informed Choices
Slidell, LA

Brant Olson
Rainforest Action Network
San Francisco, CA

Susan Spicer
Owner and Head Chef
Bayona Restaurant
New Orleans, LA

Captain Keven W. London
BLAST and CAST Guide Service
www.myspace.com/outdoorguide
Corpus Christi, TX

Captain Ginger Rushing
Attakapas Adventures
Napoleonville, LA

Mark Ferrulo
Executive Director
Environment Florida
Tallahassee, FL

John Swingle
Group Chair
Central Florida Sierra Club
Orlando, FL

Marianne Cufune
President
Environment Matters Consulting
Tampa, FL

Ed Ross
Director
Community Stepping Stones
Tampa, FL

William Lorenzen
Executive Director

Tampa Bay Conservancy
Tampa, FL

Paul Trunk
President
Clearwater Audubon Society
Clearwater, FL

Phil Comptomn
President
Friends of the River
Tampa, FL

Gayle Reynolds
Chairwoman
Manatee/Sarasota Sierra Club
Sarasota, FL

Bill Stokes
Alliance for a Livable Pinellas
St. Petersburg, FL

Dan Kandz
Conservation Chair
St. Pete Audubon Society
St. Petersburg, FL

Karen Ahlers
President
Putnam County Environmental Council
Palatka, FL

Marian Ryan
Conservation Chair
Polk Sierra Club
Lakeland, FL

Manley Fuller
President
Florida Wildlife Federation
Tallahassee, FL

Don Chaney
Chair
Healthy Gulf Coalition
Sarasota, FL

Dan Rametta
President
Citizens for Sanity
Land O'Lakes, FL

Linda Vanderveen
President

Hernando Audubon Society
Brooksville, FL

Mary Gerken
Chair
Suncoast Sierra Club
St. Petersburg, FL

Joy Ezell
Chairwoman
Friends of the Fenholloway River
Perry, FL

Florida Chapter of the Sierra Club
Tallahassee, FL

Joy Ezell
President
HOPE for Taylor County, Inc.
Perry, FL

Rick Causey
Chairman
Environmental Alliance of North Florida
Perry, FL

Hernando Native Plant Society
Brooksville, FL

Karen Orr
Director
Save Our Wetlands Coalition
Gainesville, FL

Beverly Griffiths
Chairwoman
Tampa Bay Sierra Club
Tampa, FL

Julie Wert
Board Member
Gulf Coast Conservancy
Aripeka, FL

Marilyn Blackwell
Help Save the Appalachian River Group
Ajjpalachicola, Florida

Betsy Roberts
Chairwoman
Clean Water Network of Florida
Tallahassee, FL

National Environmental Trust
Washington, DC

Mike Brown
President
Keep Hillsborough Beautiful
Tampa, FL

Pinellas Native Plant Society
St. Petersburg, FL

Nick Williams
Director
Florida Defenders of the Environment
Gainesville, FL

Jim Northrup
Executive Director
Forest Watch
Richmond, VT

April Ingle
Executive Director
Georgia River Network
Athens, GA

Michael J. Kellett
Executive Director
RESTORE: The North Woods
Hallowell, ME

Marcus de la Houssaye
Owner Operator
de la Houssaye's Swamp Tours
Bayou Teche, LA

Coerte Voorhies, Jr.
Owner Operator
The Atchafalaya Experience
Lafayette, LA

Danny and Lyn Willingham
Blue Dog Bait, Inc.
Slidell, LA

Regional Association of Concerned
Environmentalists
Kentucky/Southern Illinois

Kristi Hanson
President
Jackson Purchase Audubon
Paducah, KY

Alex Morgan

Seattle Audubon
Seattle, WA

AIYEEEE Ron "Black" Guidry
www.guidebookamerica.com
A Cajun Man's Swamp Cruise, Inc.
www.cajunman.com
Houma, LA

Joe Serres
President
Friends of Living Oregon Waters (FLOW)
Grants Pass, OR

Sandra Silber
President
League of Women Voters of St. Tammany
Covington, LA

Ben Taylor
President
Lake Maurepas Society
Hammond, LA

Loretto O'Reilly
President
Advocates for Smart Growth
Covington, LA

Chris Nogues
President
Bayou Liberty Association
Slidell, LA

Elizabeth Berli
Manager
Aria Salon Spa Shoppe
Alpharetta, GA

Peter Ostroske
Old Harbor Outfitters
Block Island, RI

Stan Kroh
President
Tampa Audubon Society

Chuck Morton
President
Hernando Environmental Land Protectors
Weeki Wachee, FL

Gus Muench
President

Oyster Reef Designs, Inc.
Ruskin, FL

Jim Bierly
President Citrus Audubon Society
Crystal River, FL

Brett Paben
Senior Staff Attorney
Wildlaw Florida Office
Tallahassee, FL

Svetlana Frolova
Marketing Director
Avant Salons ans Spa
Austin, TX

David Gurney
President
CFACT
Hammond, LA

WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE MEMBERS

Altamah Riverkeeper-Altamah Coastkeeper
James Holland, Riverkeeper
Deborah Sheppard, Coastkeeper
Darien, Georgia

Assateague Coastkeeper
Kathy Phillips
Berlin, Maryland

Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
Eliza Smith Steinmeier
Baltimore, Maryland

Black Warrior Riverkeeper
Nelson Brooke, Riverkeeper
Charles Scribner - Director of
Development
John Kinney - Legal Program
Coordinator
Mark Martin - Chief Prosecuting
Attorney
David Whiteside - Founder / Board
member:
Birmingham, Alabama

Blackwater/Nottoway Riverkeeper Jeff Turner Sedley, Virginia	Detroit, Michigan
Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper Julie Barrett O'Neill Buffalo, New York	Galveston Baykeeper Charlotte Wells Shoreacres, Texas
Canadian Detroit Riverkeeper Kelly St. Pierre Windsor, Ontario Canada	Grand Riverkeeper Labrador Inc. Roberta Frampton Benefiel Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador Newfoundland, Canada
Canadian Detroit Riverkeeper Ken Cloutier Windsor, Ontario Canada.	Grand Riverkeeper, Oklahoma Earl Hatley Vinita, Oklahoma
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Casco Baykeeper/Friends of Casco Bay Joe Payne South Portland, Maine	Great Salt Lakekeeper Jeff Salt Salt Lake City , Utah
Catawaba Riverkeeper Foundation, Inc. Donna Marie Lisenby Charlotte, North Carolina	Hackensack Riverkeeper Captain Bill Sheehan Hackensack, New Jersey
Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper Michael William Mullen Banks, Alabama	Housatonic Riverkeeper - Housatonic River Initiative Timothy Gray Lenoxdale, Massachusetts
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Coosa River Basin Initiative Joe Cook Rome, Georgia	Kansas Riverkeeper/Friends of the Kaw Laura Calwell Lawrence, Kansas
Detroit Riverkeeper Robert Burns Detroit, Michigan	Klamath Riverkeeper Regina Chichizola Orleans, California
Emerald Coastkeeper Chips Kirschenfeld Pensacola, Florida	Colorado Riverkeeper John Weisheit Living Rivers Moab, Utah
French Broad Waterkeeper Hartwell Carson Asheville, North Carolina	Long Island Soundkeeper Terry Backer East Norwalk, Connecticut
Friends of the Detroit River Peter J. Benz	Louisiana Bayoukeeper, Inc Tracy Kuhns

Barataria, Louisiana	Prince William Soundkeeper Jennifer Gibbins Prince William Sound, Alaska
Lower Neuse Riverkeeper - Neuse River Foundation Larry Baldwin New Bern, North Carolina	Raritan Riverkeeper Bill Schultz Keasbey, New Jersey
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Michael R. Helfrich York, Pennsylvania	River Advocate Stacey Kronquest Savannah, Georgia
Milwaukee Riverkeeper Cheryl Nenn Milwaukee, Wisconsin	Russian Riverkeeper Don McEnhill Healdsburg, California
Mobile Baykeeper Casi (kc) Callaway Mobile, Alabama	San Diego Coastkeeper Bruce Reznik San Diego, California
Morava Riverkeeper Helena Kralova Czech Republic, Europe	San Francisco Baykeeper Sejal Choksi San Francisco, California
Mountain Watershed Association Bev Baverman Melcroft, Pennsylvania	San Luis Obispo Coastkeeper Gordon Hensley San Luis Obispo, California
New Riverkeeper – New River Foundation Brian Wheat Jacksonville, North Carolina	Saranac Waterkeeper Jill Reymore Saranac Lake, New York
New York/New Jersey Baykeeper Andrew Willner Keyport, New Jersey	Satilla Riverkeeper Gordon Rogers Waynesville, Georgia
Ogeechee-Canoochee Riverkeeper Chandra Brown Swainsboro, Georgia	Savannah Riverkeeper Stacey Kronquest, River Advocate Savannah, Georgia
Ouachita Rivekeeper Cheryl Slavant Monroe, Louisiana	Shenandoah Riverkeeper Jeff Kelble Boyce, Virginia
Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper/Pamlico-Tar River Foundation Heather Jacobs Washington, North Carolina	South Riverkeeper – South River Federation Drew Koslow Annapolis, Maryland
Peconic Baykeeper Kevin McAllister Quogue, New York	St. Clair Channelkeeper Doug Martz Harrison TWP, Michigan
Potomac Riverkeeper Ed Merrifield Washington, DC	St. Johns Riverkeeper Neil A. Armingeon Jacksonville, Florida

Tualatin Riverkeepers
Brian Wegener
Tigard, Oregon

Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
Sally Bethea
Atlanta, Georgia

Upper Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Paul Ortruba – Environeer
Mansfield, Pennsylvania

Wabash Riverkeeper
Rae Schnapp, Ph.D.
Hoosier Environmental Council
Indianapolis, Indiana

Waccamaw Riverkeeper
Christine Ellis
Conway South Carolina

Waterkeepers Australia Ltd.
Stacey Bloomfield
Carlton VIC, Australia

West/Rhode Riverkeeper, Inc.
Bob Gallagher
Shady Side, Maryland

Western Lake Erie Association/Waterkeeper
Sandy Bihn
Oregon, Ohio

Youghiogheny Riverkeeper
Krissy Kasserman
Melcroft, Pennsylvania