



WHY KILL A TREE TO GROW A FLOWER?

Cypress mulch is sold in garden centers and nurseries throughout the county. Many consumers believe that they are buying superior mulch. Retailers make claims on the sources and sustainability of their product. But behind the clever marketing and myths lies a startling reality:

- **Cypress wetland forests are an irreplaceable hurricane buffer** from flooding and storm surges. Louisiana scientists estimate that 70-80% of the state's coastal cypress wetland forest, if cut, will NEVER grow back.
- **Cypress mulch is NOT a superior product.** Alternatives are cheaper, less environmentally harmful and may even be better for your garden.
- **The cypress mulch industry is fueled by illegal logging of cypress wetland forests** – their practices rely on anemic enforcement, unscrupulous public officials and cut-and-run methods.
- **Cypress wetlands are of exceptional cultural, wildlife and economic value** – these Louisiana bayous are the foundation of Cajun cultural heritage and are critical to the survival of North America's neo-tropical birds.



Waterkeeper Alliance is the guardian of more than 150 local Waterkeepers – citizen advocates who patrol our waterways and enforce environmental standards. Waterkeeper Alliance supports our member programs, taking their local campaigns to the national and international level to guarantee everyone's right to clean water.

Contact: **Eddie Scher**, Communications Director

914-674-0622 ext. 209 esch@waterkeeper.org

Atchafalaya Basinkeeper is the lead advocate for one of North America's largest and most ecologically, economically and culturally important wetland areas – 1.4 million acres of rivers, lakes, bayous and cypress forests.

Contact: **Dean Wilson**, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper

225-928-1315

basinkeeper@aol.com

The mission of **Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper** is to protect, preserve and restore the ecological integrity of the Mississippi River Basin for the current users and future generations through advocacy and citizen action.

Contact: **Mary Lee Orr**, Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper

225-928-1315

marylee@leanweb.org



THE CYPRESS MULCH INDUSTRY DESTROYS COASTAL LOUISIANA

Ancient bald cypress once covered much of southern Louisiana, towering 120 to 150 feet high and holding the old growth forest in perpetual darkness. By the turn of the 20th century cypress logging was one of the biggest industries in the state. By the 1920's there were no significant cypress stands left and the industry disappeared. Much of the majestic wetland forest did not regenerate.

The forest that did survive is the Louisiana bayou. It maintains biodiversity and productivity that rival the Amazon rainforest – the Atchafalaya Basin is home to 100 species of birds and is visited by 40 percent of the migratory birds in North America. It is also the wellspring of a rich Cajun cultural heritage.

Louisiana cypress forest is wet much of the year – holding and cleaning vast amounts of water.



Charles Henderson

Today's cypress average less than 100 years old, still too small for timber. It would take 100 more years for the trees to reach lumber harvesting size in the Atchafalaya Basin. Grinding these trees into mulch allows landowners to cash in their cypress now, but it means the end to Louisiana's irreplaceable cypress wetlands.



Exceptional Ecological Value

Louisiana's coastal ecosystems contain 40 percent of the coastal wetlands found in the United States. The Atchafalaya Basin makes up a large part of this coastal wetland, spanning an area of 1.4 million acres. This huge area includes 517,000 acres of marshland and 885,000 acres of cypress wetland forest. Healthy cypress wetlands:

- Protect coastal communities by naturally buffering and absorbing the worst of hurricane and storm surges and by alleviating flood waters;
- Naturally filter pollutants and excess nutrients before they contaminate swimming and fishing areas and the Gulf of Mexico;
- Support Louisiana's economy by providing many unique tourism and recreation opportunities;
- Sustain freshwater and coastal fisheries; and
- Provide critical, irreplaceable habitat for wildlife, including many threatened and endangered species.



Charles F. Fryling

Fishing the Atchafalaya Basin



Charles F. Fryling

Baby egrets

Each year, nearly the entire eastern population of migratory neo-tropical songbirds – and many of the western neotropical species – migrate through Louisiana's coast. On some days in April, more than two million birds will reach Louisiana's coast from South America. Migrants arriving on Louisiana's coast rely on the wetlands to rest and recuperate. The Atchafalaya Basin is also permanent home to more than 300 bird species.

The basin also supports more than 100 species of fish and crustaceans. This wealth of seafood is essential to local sport and commercial fishing. Many people in these Cajun communities rely on shrimping and crawfishing to make their living.

The Atchafalaya Basin is one of the last refuges for such endangered species as the Peregrine falcon, Louisiana black bear and the Florida panther. In addition, bobcat, coyote, alligator, beaver, mink, otter, armadillo and fox are some of the wildlife that call these wetlands home.

The Atchafalaya Delta is the only growing delta in the United States and is critical to maintaining Louisiana's coastline and preventing coastal erosion.



US FWS

Louisiana Black Bear



Gone Forever

In 2005, a scientific study commissioned by Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco estimated that 70 to 80 percent of Louisiana's cypress forests will never grow back if cut – even if artificially planted. While cypress trees can live in high water, they require dry land to germinate. Due to changes in elevation and water flow throughout coastal Louisiana over the past century, many cypress forests are flooded much of the year. In areas like the Atchafalaya Basin, deep flooding during spring months makes cypress regeneration impossible. Invasive species and other stresses also prevent the regeneration of cypress trees in the vast majority of coastal Louisiana wetlands.

Loggers work quickly when waters recede. Soils, however, remain waterlogged; machinery permanently disrupts natural water flow.



Richard Dove

Florida to Louisiana to America

Cypress mulch companies are moving to Louisiana as they exhaust Florida's cypress swamps. A growing number of Florida municipalities, after watching their vital wetlands obliterated, have banned the use of cypress mulch. The industry makes no effort to replant or sustainably replace clear-cut cypress forests. Right now, the coastal cypress wetlands of Louisiana are under intense pressure from the mulch industry. Coastal cypress forests along the entire south Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and up the Mississippi River valley from New Orleans to Illinois are at risk.



Superior Mulch? It's a Myth – Alternatives are Better

The University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences recommends “That You Not Use Cypress Mulch in Your Landscape.”

Only ‘heartwood’ from mature cypress trees is rot and termite resistant. Mulch from the young trees being clear-cut across Southern Louisiana to feed the growing cypress mulch industry does not have these qualities. A University of Florida study confirmed that cypress mulch isn't any better for your garden than pine bark or pine needles/straw – even leaf litter. Pine mulch is a byproduct of commercial pine plantations, not critical coastal wetlands. The University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences identifies pine straw, pine bark nuggets, pine bark shreds, eucalyptus, melaleuca (florimulch) or red/brown hardwoods as better choices for your garden.

[\[http://pasco.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/mulches.htm\]](http://pasco.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/mulches.htm)



Richard Dove

This mulching plant near Baton Rouge, LA, grinds whole cypress trees into mulch. Mulch bags from this plant claim ‘made from environmentally harvested cypress.’ While there are still a few small operations producing cypress mulch as a byproduct of high-value lumber operations, there are no sustainable cypress plantations in Louisiana. This is a one-time liquidation as irreplaceable trees are ground into low-value mulch.

Uncertified & Unsustainable

There is no credible system of environmental certification for wood products in Louisiana. Nothing prevents producers or retailers from slapping an environmentally friendly message on a bag and claiming the sustainability of their product. While cypress was historically cut for lumber, and mulch collected and sold as a byproduct, today whole cypress trees are ground up into garden mulch. The mass retail sale of cypress mulch requires mass production – outstripping the stock of cypress forest in any one region. This industry's practices are dangerous anywhere, but they are a death sentence in coastal Louisiana wetlands where much of the cypress forest will not grow back.



Illegally Cut Cypress Fuels Mulch Industry

Much of the logging of cypress in Louisiana cypress wetlands is illegal. Two federal laws protect these forested wetlands – the Clean Water Act and the Rivers and Harbors Act.

Clean Water Act, Section 404: Loggers claim they do not need a federal Clean Water Act permit to cut these wetland forests. They claim that their activities fall under a legal exemption for “normal silviculture activity.” Normal, in this case, means logging that ensures the same species of tree that is cut will grow back. But logging irreplaceable cypress wetlands is not ‘normal.’ A 2005 scientific report to the Louisiana Governor Blanco found that 70 to 80 percent of Louisiana’s forests will never grow back if cut. This logging is not exempt from federal law and is illegal unless logging companies obtain a Clean Water Act permit from the Corps of Engineers.

River and Harbors Act, Section 10: This law applies to silviculture (logging) in forested wetlands that are below the ordinary high watermark. Any activities, including logging that requires the removal of stumps, dredging or the removal of dirt requires a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Atchafalaya Basinkeeper has documented and reported numerous logging operations of high-risk cypress stands where loggers are cutting trees without the required permits. The federal government is simply not enforcing the law.



Most of this forest will never recover from logging. Clear-cutting Cajun country for cheap garden mulch puts profiteering ahead of hurricane protection and the safety of the people of Louisiana.

Atchafalaya Basinkeeper



Rick Dove

Cypress wetlands absorb excess water like a sponge, controlling flood height and speed.

\$Billions in Flood Protection Wasted

Coast 2050 is Louisiana state government's \$14 billion plan to maintain the state's coastal wetlands. The project would save more than \$150 billion in lost infrastructure alone – not including loss of life, livelihood and wildlife habitat. The money would come through the federal government as the state's share of offshore oil and gas revenue. Coast 2050 was developed to implement the federal Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act. More than 80 restoration projects have already been initiated or completed.

State and federal officials are right to ask Congress to help pay to restore Louisiana's coast. But this effort is directly contradicted by state public officials and agencies who undermine the current state and federal laws that should protect cypress wetlands. Existing laws must be strengthened, not weakened. But state or federal authorities are not even enforcing provisions of existing state and federal law that protect these wetlands from unsustainable logging. Our environmental cops are asleep at the wheel. This sends a mixed message to the rest of the country and hurts the legitimacy of Louisiana's efforts to truly save the coast.

Enemies of the Environment

In fall 2005 Louisiana Senator David Vitter proposed an amendment to the Water Resources and Development Act of 2005 that would have severely limited the power of the Corps of Engineers to enforce Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. Under the amendment, Section 10 would no longer apply to logging wetlands, swamps and bottomland hardwoods. Atchafalaya



Senator Vitter

Basinkeeper, in coalition with our partners, rallied support to defeat the rider. But the risk remains that the Louisiana Congressional delegation will try to sneak this law change through the U.S. Congress.

This fall, Louisiana U.S. Congressman Billy Tauzin and Richard Baker sent a letter to the Commander of the Army Corps of Engineers in Washington, DC, in an attempt to pressure the New Orleans District to reverse decisions stopping cypress logging on Section 10 swamps.

Too many of Louisiana's elected officials are putting profiteering by their corporate supporters ahead of the safety of Louisianans.



Reforming State Wetlands Protection

State policies must be changed to prevent logging in areas that are unlikely to regenerate. The logging of cypress should only be allowed in areas that scientists and certified foresters find are sustainable – where cypress can germinate and replace itself. Incentives must be created for private landowners to protect their cypress wetland forests. Some options include permanent conservation easements, tax incentives for protection, tax-deductible donations to a land trust or the transfer of timber rights.

WINNING

Atchafalaya Basinkeeper patrols have halted the illegal clearing of thousands of acres of cypress wetland and forced the mulch industry into increasingly desperate means to circumvent the law.

Gardeners and retailers must understand how their decisions are connected to the destruction of the coastal wetlands that protect Louisianans. The public ultimately drives the policies of retailers, regulators and logging companies.

It's time to make our concern for our endangered cypress forests heard – and stop the mulching of our natural heritage.



Charis Henderson

The stump of an old-growth cypress, cut in the early 19th century, surrounded by 100-year-old trees. Cypress trees are virtually hurricane proof, stabilizing Louisiana's coastline against hurricane flooding and storm surges.

**Thank You for Joining
Waterkeeper Alliance, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper,
Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper and our partners to
STOP Cypress Mulch**