



SAVE OUR CYPRESS COALITION WWW.SAVEOURCYPRESS.ORG

Coastal Wetland Forest Sustainability and Cypress Mulch Fact Sheet

Why are cypress forests so important?

Cypress forests are heralded by scientists to be some of the Gulf's best natural storm and flooding protection.^{1, 2, 3} 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.⁴ The swamps are of national importance to protect the economy, the unique environment of the Gulf Coast, and people.

What's the fuss about, don't cypress trees grow back once they're cut down?

No, most of the cypress forests in Louisiana will not regenerate once cut. In 2005, the Science Working Group on Coastal Conservation and Use convened by Governor Blanco released a report that outlined the dire situation of Louisiana's cypress. Due to massive changes in hydrology, or water levels and flow, have greatly impacted the ability of cypress forests to regenerate. The bottom line is that up to 80% of Louisiana's cypress will not be able to naturally regenerate, no matter what sort of sustainable harvesting methods are employed.⁵

The cypress is our state tree. Do we still have plenty of cypress in Louisiana?

At the turn of the last century, it is estimated that Louisiana had over 2.2 million acres of cypress forests.⁶ Those forests were effectively

logged out, and many of them have not regenerated. Today, only 800,000 acres of cypress forests remain. The US Global Change Program sums it up: "In Louisiana in 1948, bald cypress provided 49 million board feet but only four million board feet in 1977. Most of this reduction was the result of logging, but of greater concern today is that many cypress swamps logged 30 to 100 years ago have not regenerated".⁷

Logging advocates often cite US Forest Service FIA data that shows massive recent growth, but the same plots were not sampled in 1991 and 2005; therefore, comparisons are difficult to make.⁸ Also, data presented by the logging industry can be misleading. Gary Shaffer, a cypress expert at Southeast Louisiana

University, points out that the US Forest Service measures cypress in board feet. That means young trees don't count until they grow large enough to be marketable. So, a second-growth forest that

suddenly shows up in the count in 2005 may have actually been there for years and doesn't really represent net growth of cypress trees.⁹

Foresters say we harvest about 30 million board feet of cypress each year but we also have about 21 million board feet of cypress dying in our forests due to various reasons, mostly saltwater intrusion. Is that true?

Yes. Hydrology changes and salt water intrusion are threatening our coastal forests¹⁰, which is one reason we need to protect these areas from unnecessary logging. Cutting down cypress when they're already dying off is like

The Science Working Group convened by Louisiana's Governor has concluded that the vast majority of Louisiana's cypress forests will not regenerate once cut, regardless of harvesting methods.

spending your money faster because you're going broke. Members of the Save Our Cypress Coalition are also very active in larger coastal restoration efforts.

I understand that water levels, or hydrology, in Louisiana have changed and that threatens regeneration. Is that the only issue?

No. Invasive species and other faster-growing species have also changed the landscape for cypress regeneration.^{11,12} Even proponents of cypress harvesting admit it, "Pointing to a number of sprouting young trees – Chinese tallow, maple, oak, and green ash – Thomas [Mike Thomas, state stewardship coordinator for the Office of Forestry] says, 'This is a forest to me – not a big forest, not all cypress, but it's got trees on it.'"¹³ Cypress forests provide unique ecological, economical, and hurricane protection benefits that these other trees cannot.^{14, 15}

How much cypress is used for mulch?

That's a good question, and the answer is very unclear. Evidence collected by the Save Our

An internal US Army Corps of Engineers memo shows that one mulch producer has inquired about *logging up to 50,000 acres in Louisiana to produce cypress mulch.*¹⁹

On-the-ground evidence shows that the market for cypress mulch is a leading cause of cypress deforestation.

Is cypress mulch just a by-product of the lumber industry?

No. Cypress mulch started out as a by-product of the lumber industry, but its exploding popularity means that now swamps are being clear-cut and whole trees are being used solely to produce cypress mulch. The Save Our Cypress Coalition has documented evidence of these practices.^{20, 21}

Some people say that cypress mulch is rot- and insect-resistant and that it doesn't float away. Is cypress mulch better than sustainable alternatives?

No, the perception of cypress as a wonder wood persists from a time when lumber was

The Save Our Cypress Coalition is asking Home Depot, Lowe's, and Wal-Mart to stop selling unsustainable cypress mulch, no matter where it is logged. Visit www.saveourcypress.org to send your own request to the CEO's of all three companies asking them to live up to their policies of sustainability.

Cypress Coalition suggests that cypress mulch is the main driver of cypress logging. Of the seven cypress manufacturing facilities we know of in the state, there are only two are producing any lumber at all¹⁶, and they both make massive amounts of cypress mulch from whole trees as well.¹⁷ The Louisiana Forestry Association states that less than 20% of cypress harvested is used for mulch, but they present no data to back that assertion. And their aggressive public campaign on the issue and claims that the cypress industry will die without the mulch market suggest that it is a more significant product.¹⁸

produced from old-growth. The truth is today's cypress harvested for cypress mulch is usually younger, smaller trees that have not had the time (hundreds of years) to develop the decay and insect resistant properties of older trees.²² For example, melaleuca mulch is better at keeping bugs away,²³ and pine straw stays in place better than cypress mulch.²⁴ Sustainable alternatives to cypress can satisfy gardeners' mulching needs.

I heard Wal-Mart is no longer selling cypress mulch. Doesn't that mean the problem is fixed?

Wal-Mart will still sell cypress mulch, but they have committed to no longer accepting cypress mulch that is harvested, bagged, or manufactured in the state of Louisiana. This is a good first step towards securing the Gulf's endangered cypress forests, but we've still got a hike ahead of us. It's great that Wal-Mart recognized that cypress sustainability is a major concern, but they are only one company, and Louisiana is only one state. Production of cypress mulch will undoubtedly be shifted to other states, like Florida. In Florida, cypress is already being harvested at a faster rate than it can regenerate, and 47% of it is used to produce cypress mulch.^{25, 26} Home Depot and Lowe's have both stated that they will not take from coastal Louisiana, but there is no enforceable mechanism for ensuring that the moratorium is being upheld by their suppliers. Even Wal-Mart cannot be positive that they are not receiving cypress from Louisiana without an independent, third-party certification program. Many of the brands of mulch produced in Louisiana are already with addresses in Florida, Texas, and Arkansas.²⁷

How does all of this affect small landowners in Louisiana?

Coastal wetland forest owners are sadly losing their trees. Logging advocates promote clear-cutting for mulch as a sustainable practice despite the fact that it flies in the face of all documented science, and small landowners who follow their advice could lose their forests forever. The Save Our Cypress Coalition supports efforts to compensate landowners for leaving the land in trees, such as conservation easements, voluntary state buyout programs, and eco-tourism opportunities.

What did you say about cypress as natural storm protection?

Wetlands and marsh, in general, are crucial storm defenses, and cypress forests are our best natural storm protection. It is estimated that four miles of wetlands reduces storm surge by one foot and that one mile of cypress forests

accomplishes the same reduction²⁸. Even in areas farther from the coast, cypress trees are important for absorbing excess rainwater. Cypress forests are also very resilient, and they were virtually unaffected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.²⁹ By contrast, trees in bottomland hardwood forests snapped like matchsticks³⁰, and we lost 217 square miles of wetlands.³¹ As long as they are not cut down, cypress will continue to be storm protection for generations to come.

What can I do to help protect the Gulf's cypress forests?

Join in the efforts of the Save Our Cypress Coalition! You can start by making sure you're only using sustainable alternatives to cypress mulch, like pine-bark nuggets, pine straw, melaleuca, farmed-eucalyptus, and sugarcane bagasse.

Visit www.saveourcypress.org to learn more and take action by asking the CEO's of Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's to stop selling unsustainable cypress mulch.

If you're a representative of an organization, consider joining the Save Our Cypress Coalition. Contact dan@healthygulf.org for more information.

The Save Our Cypress Coalition is comprised of over 160 conservation groups, religious organizations, businesses, gardening clubs, and civic organizations. In Louisiana, the steering committee is comprised of the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, Baton Rouge Audubon Society, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club, Gulf Restoration Network, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, Louisiana Audubon Council, Louisiana Cypress Purchase Legacy, Louisiana Environmental Action Network, and the Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper. For more information, visit www.saveourcypress.org.

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