



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES? PERHAPS YOU SHOULD LOOK DOWN

NEW ORLEANS – Gardeners concerned with saving wetlands and protecting old growth cypress forests can make a simple choice: refrain from buying cypress mulch.

“If you are concerned about hurricanes and loss of wetlands, then you must be concerned about the loss of cypress forests because they serve as one of our layers of defense,” says Leslie March, chair of the Louisiana Sierra Club. “Cypress forests play an important ecological role. They shouldn’t be sacrificed for mulch.”

Cypress forests, she says, are an important ecological resource that filter pollutants and serve as reservoirs for floodwater. Cypress swamps and forests provide unique and irreplaceable habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife. They are part of Louisiana’s national image and support the economy through eco-tourism and outdoor recreation including fishing, boating and camping.

“Early in the last century, logging was a major industry throughout the state,” says March. “By the 1920s, clear-cutting had eliminated virtually all of the old-growth areas. What had once been stands of trees that rivaled the redwoods and sequoias of the West Coast in size and age had become flat treeless marshes. In addition to lost habitats, these changes also cost us wetlands and other buffer areas that protect us from storms.”

In recent years, many forests have begun to come back. However, not enough time has passed for the trees to become mature. Any new harvesting is cutting short the habitat's chance to rebuild.

“This is where the irony comes in,” says March. “Gardeners buy cypress mulch because of the tree's reputation for resistance to weather and insects. However, the characteristics that provide this protection exist only in older trees. It takes hundreds of years for a cypress to grow the heartwood that provides those protective properties.”

March says gardeners should be using other sources of mulch such as pine bark, a byproduct of the pulp industry, or waste wood, rather than deliberately cutting cypress for mulch.

“These trees are simply too valuable for mulch,” March says. “The cypress is the state tree of Louisiana and the key to restoring our wetlands. If we have any hope for saving our wetlands, we must start with our cypress trees.”

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The Sierra Club's 700,000 members work together to protect communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Delta (Louisiana) chapter of the Sierra Club has more than 3,500 members and has been active in local conservation projects for more than 30 years. For more information, contact the organization's website: www.louisiana.sierraclub.org.