

MEDIA RELEASE

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Coalition Will Fight Corps Plan to Strip Protection from Wetlands Near Gulf

Plan to waive requirements will mean loss of critical flood protection

OCEAN SPRINGS, MS (Nov. 7, 2006) - A coalition of community, housing, conservation and civil rights organizations is asking that the U.S. Corps of Engineers withdraw a proposed policy that would allow the destruction of wetlands needed to protect the Gulf Coast from the effects of hurricanes.

The proposed regional general permit would allow developers to skirt the normal permitting process. That means neither public notice nor other usual regulatory considerations are required. The permit would apply to projects destroying up to five acres of wetland, ten times the national standard of half an acre.

"This policy is completely irresponsible," says Howard Page, conservation chair of the Mississippi chapter of the Sierra Club. "We should be saving wetlands instead of filling them in. Wetlands are vital ecosystems that filter runoff, control floods and decrease erosion. They protect us. These are important lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina."

"In the wake of Katrina we need to be demanding no new wetland loss, not creating a whole new set of dangers for local communities. Haven't Gulf Coast communities faced enough devastation?" says Cynthia Sarthou, Executive Director, Gulf Restoration Network.

"The Corps is clearly ignoring the lessons of Hurricane Katrina and the fact that global warming will make these low-lying areas even more flood-prone," says David Conrad, National Wildlife Federation Senior Water Resources Specialist. "Unsuspecting residents and the nation's taxpayers will be left to pay the price."

"The ability to fill in five acres without public comment has tremendous impact. Five acres of wetlands doesn't sound like much, but it is. It's the same area as four and a half football fields, and it stores more than seven million gallons of water," says Derrick Evans, executive director, Turkey Creekkeeper. "When you have multiple five-acre impacts, or when you have 10 five-acre parcels together, you have the tremendous ability to change the landscape. The general permit change from one-half acre to five acres is a major change in rules that will have devastating consequences."

"This isn't a general permit, it's a free pass for developers," says Robert Wiygul, a lawyer who works with environmental groups. "The worst part about it is that it deprives citizens of any notice of what's happening in their community. People won't know the wetlands next door are being filled until the bulldozers show up."

Environmentalists say they are stunned by the hypocrisy of the Corps proposal. "Did the Army Corps of Engineers learn nothing from the Hurricane Katrina disaster? The Corps' plan to hand out rubber stamp permits to developers to destroy wetlands will only put more people in harms way. It's time the Corps gets its priorities in order." Lauren Brown, Staff Attorney, Waterkeeper Alliance.

The coalition of environmental and wetlands preservation groups includes: the Sierra Club, Gulf Restoration Network, Waterkeeper Alliance, Turkey Creekkeeper,

Natural Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, Clean Water Network,
Stanford Law School Environmental Clinic, and others.

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