



America's WETLAND Foundation – Who We Are

In a few recent national blogs there has been erroneous information about the purpose and origins of the America's WETLAND Foundation. In an attempt to clear up these inaccuracies, we provide the following factual information.

The America's WETLAND Foundation (AWF) was founded in 2002 at the recommendation of then-Governor Mike Foster by a special Louisiana coastal study commission to raise awareness of the devastating loss of the state's coastal wetlands and how the loss impacts the rest of the nation.

Governor Foster launched the Foundation and its "Campaign to Save Coastal Louisiana" that year. Standing with him were Environmental Defense, Shell Oil, and many other environmental and economic interests to transcend historic and parochial differences and work together for the higher good of saving an environmental treasure that supports economic and energy activities depended upon by the entire nation.

The oil industry, one of the biggest Gulf coast users, was brought to the table, along with those who represent navigation, transportation, fisheries, wildlife habitat, culture and communities along this fragile coast. AWF also works with scores of national, state and local environmental and conservation organizations who have joined the effort as "cooperating organizations." We have also engaged a cadre of leading scientists and engineers whose expertise informs the Foundation's programming.

Since its inception seven years ago, the AWF and its partners have called for a Federal commitment to environmental restoration of Louisiana's coast. When the Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to levee the Mississippi River in the 1930s, the wetlands – the Mississippi's delta – were cut off from their life source. Without the river's fresh water and sediment that had historically replenished them and allowed them to outrace the natural subsidence of the land, the wetlands began to die.

The restoration of the ecosystem deserves a Federal commitment: it is the nursery ground for marine life in the entire Gulf of Mexico; provides habitat for one of the largest flyways of migratory waterfowl and songbirds in North America and the largest fishery in the U.S. outside Alaska; it protects the infrastructure for the largest port system by tonnage in the world and on-shore support of a third of all the oil and gas consumed in this country, connecting to 50% of our nation's refining capacity.

The value of these assets are undeniable and to ensure the region's sustainability, the AWF earlier supported actions by former Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco to block an OCS oil and gas lease sale on the grounds that environmental impacts were not adequately considered following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The myriad activities that exacerbate land loss in this fragile ecosystem include Federal navigation channels and oil and gas canals that have allowed saltwater to intrude into the marshes and cause further deterioration.

Additionally, continual and persistent subsidence of the land and sea level rise make the landscape and the communities it supports even more vulnerable. For this reason, AWF and many of its partners have been long-time advocates of the sharing of Federal offshore oil and gas revenues with the Gulf coast producing states to be used for coastal restoration and protection of this region, at risk to storms and hurricanes, sea level rise, subsidence, and manmade disasters. AWF has always fought for a Federal commitment to bring to bear the revenues necessary to restore this coastline and it will continue to fight for that commitment until the job is done.

In the case of the **Deepwater Horizon disaster**, AWF has been clear in its position: a portion of the damages to be paid by BP must go to coastal restoration of disappearing wetlands and barrier islands. AWF and some of its partners – **Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana** – recently ran ads in national and regional publications, calling for measures that would accelerate restoration, and “ensuring that a significant percentage of the penalty monies that will be paid by BP be dedicated to coastal restoration as reparations for the contamination of the thousands of acres of coastal marsh that cannot be cleaned up”. **AWF has never advocated that taxpayers foot the bill for the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill**

Since day one, AWF has purposefully invited the oil and gas industry to participate in the work of the Foundation in raising awareness of land loss and in its America’s Energy Coast initiative that brings together national environmental organizations with industry and diverse coastal interests to forge cooperation in making the Gulf region sustainable, both economically and environmentally. Our partners in this effort are many and can be found listed on our website at www.americaswetland.com.

At no time was a major sponsor of the AWF invited to sit on the board or direct the actions of the Foundation. The America's WETLAND Foundation is guided by an independent board with impeccable environmental and conservation credentials dedicated in its mission to raise public awareness of the impact of Louisiana's wetland loss on the state, nation and world.

There are those who do not agree that all interests should be at the table. Some do not agree that oil companies should help finance the work of the AWF that includes science, awareness, and many other efforts to make the Gulf more secure for our environment and communities. We disagree and find this the convenient view standing from outside the arena where the largest land loss on the planet is allowed to continue. The inconvenient truth is that our nation has not warranted the loss of wetlands an urgent enough event to take immediate action.

Unless all users of this incredible coastline are at the table working in cooperation and moving forward what we can agree to, we will simply continue the never-ending cycle of opposition, a toxic state of politics and inaction.

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