

The Truth about Cypress in Louisiana

For those who live in south Louisiana, a public campaign predicting the annihilation of cypress in the state has been ongoing for the last several years. "Battle over cypress" was a headline in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* quoting forestry officials on one side and so-called environmentalists on the other.

So, what is the truth and how did all this get started?

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

Our recent forest inventory shows that we have about 800,000 acres of cypress forests with 1 billion board feet of cypress. Figures show that we have 221 million board feet of growth each year.

State Forester Paul Frey has said that the most recent U.S. Forest Service FIA data indicates an increase in cubic foot and board foot volume of cypress between 1991 and 2005, which indicates that most of our forests are in a sustainable condition.

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.

Why are these trees dying?

It's not a new problem in Louisiana. In short, the problem is water and salt. Water control measures to prevent flooding in some areas have dumped more water in others. Some areas like the lower Atchafalaya have trees dying from too much water and too much saltwater. (See story page 6.) Canals cut into the landscape of the state have brought saltwater further inland to further erode the viability of standing trees and to prevent the growth of new cypress which typically grows from sprouts by natural regeneration.

Should we stop cutting cypress?

Cypress grows across the state, not just in south Louisiana. Loblolly/shortleaf

pine forests are the most prevalent in the state, but gum/oak/cypress forests are the next more common forest type. The Louisiana Forestry Association, a program facilitator for the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, supports the harvesting of cypress in a sustainable manner. Louisiana Best Management Practices guide landowners, loggers and foresters in management of cypress forests.

State law prohibits cutting cypress in

Removals of cypress have decreased over the last 10 years while mortality has more than doubled.

water bottoms owned by the state. We care as much as anyone about cypress.

If landowners stopped cutting cypress trees, there would be no fine wood for furniture or other products. But also consider that landowners would have no economic incentive to keep their land in productive forests. The forest value would disappear.

Who owns most of the cypress forests?

The situation is the same in Louisiana

as we have in all of the South. Private, non-industrial landowners own about 80 percent of the commercial forests. If they can not manage their forests, what incentive is there to keep them in forests? The biggest loss of forestland across the South has been development for homes and commercial properties. The LFA suggests that we provide incentives to private landowners to keep their land in trees.

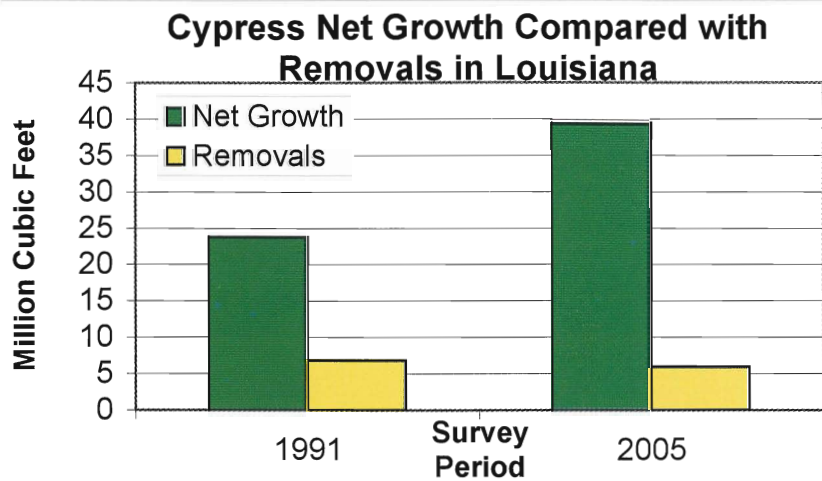
When did the controversy start?

Four years ago an ordinary logging job in Livingston Parish got the attention of some around the Lake Maurepas area in southeast Louisiana. The EPA did not have a problem with the cut because it fell under the status of an ongoing silvicultural activity. But the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stepped in using an 1899 Rivers and Harbors Act to shut it down.

The Corps said a permit would have to be issued before logging could continue. No such permit had ever been issued before. The one landowner who asked for a permit two years ago has never received one.

What exactly does the Corps take issue with?

In these wetland forests where cypress grow, harvest usually take place during



Source: Southern Research Station, USDA Forest Service

the dry season. Mat logging is the recommended practice for the sites to prevent soil disturbance. The logger fells a row of trees to use as a road for the heavy equipment to travel on. When the logger is finished, the log mats are removed.

The Corp maintained that this mat of logs was actually a structure, an impediment to navigation, and therefore a permit was needed. Because silviculture in wetland areas have never required a Section 10, Rivers and Harbors Permit, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has no permit process in place.

Are these logging jobs reasonably considered an impediment to any navigation?

No.

What is the situation in other similar states?

Only the New Orleans District of the Corps is invoking the Rivers and Harbors Act. In fact in Florida, the forestry community and the environmental community have agreed to a set of Best Management Practices that call for mat logging in these forests.

Is the Lake Maurepas area a sensitive area?

Saltwater has intruded on some areas around Lake Maurepas on the southeastern side. On the western side the cypress forests are suitable for sustainable forest management.

What does the Louisiana Society of American Foresters say about the issue?

The Louisiana SAF, which represents professional foresters, has issued a policy statement. (See box.) In a letter from Steve Templin, SAF chairman, he says the Corps is "clearly overstepping their jurisdiction."

What about environmentalists' aim to stop the sale of cypress mulch. Is mulch a problem?

Less than 2% of the trees harvested in Louisiana are cypress. Less than 20% of that 2% goes to mulch. Most landowners sell their cypress for higher value products like cypress lumber that is found in homes throughout the state. The by-products from these sawmills should go into other markets like mulch.

Otherwise, these operations would have to deal with the disposal of debris in a non-beneficial way.

Is cypress mulch a good choice?

The LSU AgCenter website recommends mulching for gardeners. There are many good choices and cypress mulch is one of them. One of the benefits is its durability as a mulching agent.

What about storm protection? Some of these groups have said the trees need to stand as storm protection in case of a hurricane.

First, remember the first defense along our coasts are marshes where no trees grow. It's not for miles inland until you reach the first band of forests. Stopping a single landowner from cutting his few hundred acres will not provide storm protection for the state.

Do we want to stop all forest management? How much protection would this

**Only 2% of annual
Louisiana
harvest is cypress.**

afford? Who is responsible for protecting the state from storm events? If it is the private landowner, the landowner should be compensated for his sacrifice.

What action, if any, is suggested by the Louisiana Forestry Association?

We have gone on record supporting research to study and map sensitive areas where regeneration of cypress could be a problem.

Incentives are needed to assist landowners in meeting the state's needs as well as providing support for sustainable forest management.

These dead cypress are an example of the problem with flooding and salt-water intrusion.



**Regulation of forestry activities under Section 10 of the
Rivers and Harbors Act
A Position of the Louisiana Society of American Foresters**

Position

The Louisiana Society of American Foresters (LA SAF) urges the enactment of new legislation or an amendment to current legislation that clearly establishes that wetland timber harvesting and silvicultural operations that utilize the placement of temporary mats are to be specifically and solely regulated under Section 404(f) of the 1977 Clean Water Act, and the regulations thereto, and not in any instance under Section 10 of the 1899 Rivers and Harbors Act.