

AUDUBON * ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND * NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Dear President Obama,

We commend your decision, announced yesterday, to legally compel BP to establish an escrow account to compensate individuals and businesses harmed by the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. As conservation leaders we write today to urge you to include wildlife among those harmed and to designate habitat restoration as the appropriate form of compensation. In addition to making whole the fishing, tourism, outdoor recreation, and other interests whose livelihoods have been decimated by the disaster, we must look to the eventual recovery of the coastal wetlands that support Louisiana's productive fisheries, abundant birdlife, and diverse wildlife communities. These natural resources belong to and benefit the entire nation and, as the recent heartbreaking pictures of oiled-drenched pelicans and oil-drowned sea turtles remind us, they must be counted among the victims of this environmental disaster.

BP's public relations efforts frequently assert "we will clean this up" or "we will make this right." But when oil infiltrates sensitive coastal marshlands, it really can't be cleaned up. Scientists around the country are warning that efforts to clean up oiled marshes—from burning to adding microbes to employing physical methods to clean or remove oiled vegetation—will do more harm than good. The resulting die off of marsh vegetation could mean more and more acres of wetlands will wash away. It is no wonder that Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen recently said "Oil in the marshes is the worst-case scenario."

The restoration of Louisiana's coastal ecosystem, through major diversions of river water and sediment into coastal marsh and careful rebuilding of barrier islands, is the only way to ensure the long term resiliency and sustainability of this system. Given the scope and severity of this recent assault, it is urgent that these aggressive restoration efforts get underway as soon as possible. BP should not be allowed to escape responsibility for the further degradation of this ecosystem just because direct acre-by-acre repair of oiled wetlands is impossible. The company must make immediate reparations to this entire system. We believe a minimum \$5 billion of the proposed \$20 billion escrow fund should be set aside to support the immediate launch of large-scale restoration efforts. Additional funds will be required once Natural Resource Damage Assessments have been completed and the full extent of the spill damage is known, but a down payment of a minimum of \$5 billion will help this fragile ecosystem start to heal and rebuild, in much the way that affected families and businesses must do.

After Hurricane Katrina, the country was briefly aware that coastal wetlands provide the first line of defense against storm surges. Where they are healthy and abundant, coastal wetlands can protect communities from storm damage. Unfortunately, this understanding did not translate into support for restoration, though tens of billions were spent to repair and shore up levees and rebuild homes and communities.

We must not let this disaster pass without recognizing the need to invest whatever is required to restore the coastal wetlands that protect coastal communities, provide much of the nation's seafood, support a vibrant culture, and shelter a diversity and abundance of wildlife that all Americans have reason to cherish and protect.

Thank you for all you are doing to force accountability for this catastrophe.

Sincerely

Larry Schweiger, president and CEO, National Wildlife Federation

Frank Gill, president, National Audubon Society

Fred Krupp, president, Environmental Defense Fund