



National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, Environmental Defense Fund

## **Gulf Escrow Must Invest in Restoring Coastal Habitats, Conservation Groups Say**

Washington, DC (June 15, 2010) – Conservation groups sent a [letter](#) to President Obama today, calling for habitat restoration investments within the escrow account being established 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.”

In the letter, National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, and Environmental Defense Fund called for about one-quarter of the escrow account to serve as a down payment for restoring lost habitats that support Gulf livelihoods. “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.”

“Despite BP’s public claims, when oil infiltrates sensitive coastal marshlands, it really can’t be cleaned up,” said Larry Schweiger, president and CEO of National Wildlife Federation. “That’s why investments to rebuild the lost wetlands are critical to rebuilding healthy and prosperous Gulf coast communities.”

“The Mississippi River discharge is dropping fast,” said G. Paul Kemp, Ph.D., vice president for the National Audubon Society’s Louisiana Coastal Initiative. “Unless the Army Corps of Engineers quickly releases more water from dams upstream, we will see oil penetrating deeper into the marshes. It’s high time we got serious about renewing this globally important ecosystem for the sake of all the human and wildlife communities that depend on it, not only in Louisiana but across the nation and the hemisphere.”

“The wetlands in coastal Louisiana harbor valuable fisheries, essential wildlife habitat and combat storm surge, so they clearly are worth billions of dollars,” said Elgie Holstein, oil spill response coordinator for Environmental Defense Fund and the former associate director of the Office of Management and Budget for Natural Resources, Energy and Science. “But since no single person or company owns the wetlands system and the wetlands can’t speak for themselves, we are calling on the Obama administration to set aside money to rebuild this badly damaged resource.”

The groups said that it is urgent that aggressive restoration efforts – including major diversions of river water and sediment into coastal marsh and carefully rebuilding barrier islands – get underway as soon as possible. “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.”

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