



## **A Convenient Truth**

**Response to Blog and News Entry about the America's WETLAND Foundation**  
The Huffington Post, 07.28.10

July 30, 2010

Two authors contributing to The Huffington Post and DeSmogBlog, Brendan DeMelle and Jerry Cope, wrote a questionable story with a Blog that appeared to be a convenient and loose interpretation of the truth designed to mislead the public, celebrities and elected officials about the organizations, America's WETLAND Foundation (AWF) and Women of the Storm (WOS). Allegations that the organizations were front groups for major energy companies were based on conjecture at best and deceitful practices to cause harm at worst.

Here are the allegations taken from the article and the facts.

*ALLEGATION: "Wetland Front Group Funded By Big Oil Wants Taxpayers To Foot The Bill For BP's Gulf Destruction" (Headline Of Blog Entry)*

**FACT: At no time has the AWF asked that taxpayers foot the bill.** In an ad published in Roll Call Magazine and Politico, the America's WETLAND Foundation along with prominent local and national environmental groups including, Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, National Wildlife Federation and Ducks Unlimited, asked Secretary Mabus to ensure that monies already authorized by Congress and funds from the penalty phase of the BP oil spill be directed to coastal restoration.

*ALLEGATION: "A group of oil companies including BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, Citgo, Chevron and other polluters are using a front group called America's WETLAND Foundation and a Louisiana women's group called Women of the Storm to spread the message that U.S. taxpayers should pay for the damage caused by BP to Gulf Coast wetlands, and that the reckless offshore oil industry should continue drilling for the 'wholesale sustainability' of the region."*

**FACT:** The AWF was created by the state of Louisiana in 2002 for the express purpose of being a neutral arbiter to bring leaders of industry, environment and communities together to act in cooperation to save Louisiana's eroding coastline, termed America's WETLAND. The organization sought funding for its public awareness efforts from the largest of industry operators and used funds received from thousands of individual

contributors for direct on-the-ground restoration plantings involving thousands of volunteer hours. The foundation also used corporate grants to conduct research, support university collaborations, convene a series of scientific, engineering, and tourism summits, some of which leverage extensive contributions to universities and researchers, state tourism agencies and environmental/conservation NGOs. To further give voice to the region, the AWF created the America's Energy Coast initiative, in which a host of issues raised by international sustainability consortia were considered for the region. An accord for sustainability of the Gulf Coast was issued and a series of hearings on Climate Change and Resiliency, Culture and Community Loss, Insurability of the Region, Technology for a New Energy Future, were among field research with public participation that yielded a groundbreaking report, "Region at Risk," citing the challenges posed by conflicting federal regulations and obstacles to restoring the coast. Ideas from the report have been a central part of many agendas and studies that suggest a need for new leadership beyond the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build a cooperative spirit for large-scale comprehensive restoration in Louisiana and the Gulf energy-producing region.

*ALLEGATION: "Using the age-old PR trick of featuring celebrity messengers to attract public attention, America's Wetland Foundation is spreading a petition accompanied by a video starring Sandra Bullock, Dave Matthews, Lenny Kravitz, Emeril Lagassi, John Goodman, Harry Shearer, Peyton and Eli Manning, Drew Brees and others."*

**FACT: The "Be the One" video creation had no participation by the America's WETLAND Foundation.** The project was conceived by Women of the Storm, an independent group of volunteers from the Gulf coast, dedicated to coastal restoration and the survival of the region. The video was created in partnership with Peter Mayer advertising of New Orleans, LA, and at no time did the AWF have a role in its contact with celebrities or production of the material. Women of the Storm and the AWF share a common goal to use all strategies available to bring attention to the urgent need for coastal restoration. Began as a public awareness resource, the AWF regularly engages in public relations activities, and WOS is but one of its many cooperating organizations.

*ALLEGATION: "Perhaps the celebrities featured in the group's videos are unaware of AWF's true intent, and signed up thinking that they were helping the Gulf Coast cause in the wake of the BP gusher. But under the surface it sure looks like they are being used as pawns to lure the public into the oil industry's corner, ensuring that taxpayers pick up the tab for much of the damage caused by BP et al to the Gulf of Mexico, Gulf Coast communities, economies, and the environment."*

**FACT: AWF had no relationship with this video product and no part in its conception or production. It is a blatant lie to assert that there was any conspiracy to use celebrities as pawns to lure the public into the oil industry's corner by the AWF. The Foundation established itself in 2002 with an independent board of directors from conservation and environmental backgrounds who have guided the many transparent strategies of the AWF. In fact, no large financial contributors to the foundation and no oil company representatives sit on the board or make strategic decisions for the foundation.**

ALLEGATION: *“The celebrity video announcement leads viewers to [RestoreTheGulf.com](#) where a curious reader would learn that a group called Women of the Storm is behind the effort. But a click through to the [“sponsors”](#) page reveals that this effort is actually led by [America’s WETLAND Foundation](#), which is funded chiefly by the same oil companies who have ruined the Gulf and endangered the planet with their global warming emissions.”*

FACT: **AWF does not lead the Women of the Storm, a separate 501c3 organization, which has its own board and strategic direction.**

ALLEGATION: *“The America’s WETLAND Foundation (AWF) was launched in 2002 with [primary support from Shell Oil and a host of other oil companies](#). AWF is run by the PR shop [Marmillion+Company](#), whose [founder previously served as a PR manager at ARCO and staffer to various GOPers.](#)”*

FACT: The AWF was announced at the Southern Governor’s Association by then Governor Mike Foster, whose appointed coastal commission had recommended creation of a national awareness effort to bring the story of Louisiana’s eroding coast to the American public. Flanked by the leader of Environmental Defense and Shell, who agreed to sponsor the effort, the Campaign to Save Coastal Louisiana was launched with the support of Marmillion + Company providing marketing, public relations and public affairs support. Val Marmillion is a life-long Democrat who, during a brief stint between the death of Louisiana Senator Allen J. Ellender and arriving Congressman John B. Breaux, took a short-term position with Congressman Burt Talcott of California. His service to progressive causes, from launching California’s first AIDS public awareness campaign to Arts Education advocacy for all students, is well recognized as is his service on numerous progressive boards including the National Civic League.

ALLEGATION: *Last fall, America’s Energy Coast [released a white paper called \*\*Region at Risk: Preventing the Loss of Vital National Assets \[PDF\]\*\*](#), which called on Congress and the Obama administration **“to resolve the maze of bureaucratic roadblocks that threaten the long-term sustainability of the region.”** In language that demonstrates fully the bastardization of the word “sustainability” by polluting interests...”*

FACT: “Region at Risk,” developed by the AWF’s America’s Energy Coast (AEC) initiative is a compilation of findings through research and hearings that point out the inherent roadblocks to coastal restoration. The hearings process for the initiative is one where issues are vetted in committees that are co-chaired by an NGO and an industry representative. For example, the AEC climate change hearing held in Mobile, AL, earlier this year was chaired by Pew Center on Global Climate Change and Entergy. The AWF takes what it considers an enlightened view of bringing to the table critical and interested parties who can aid and cooperate with solutions. Most recently Entergy has sponsored regional ads about the need to address climate issues and is sponsoring a major study on the impact of sea level rise due to climate change on America’s Energy Coast. Most of the blog authors’ allegations take excerpts from the report out of context and re-interpret their meaning to suit the blogger bias.

ALLEGATION: The AWF is a “green washing” campaign.

FACT: From its inception, the AWF has involved all sectors of the region in its work. Its programs, committees, events and research have been transparent and placed on its website so that anyone can understand the programs of the foundation and be a participant in saving the coast. The programs of the foundation have received over 50 awards for effectiveness, ingenuity, and creativity and building broad public understanding about the importance of coastal restoration. Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the AWF helped to create and support the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation, a social justice foundation whose mission is to repair local non-profit capacity in Louisiana and the Gulf region to ensure those without a voice would be heard. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised to support the America’s WETLAND Conservation Corp programs operated by the LSU Ag Center, groups of AmeriCorp members and volunteers who regularly get dirty with plantings and educational programs. The America’s WETLAND Birding Trail, that completed the Great Gulf Coast Birding Trail, is a direct result of funds raised by the foundation and donated to help this program become a reality for birding enthusiasts and eco-cultural tourists. The LSU Coastal Sustainability Studio, critical to bringing together multidisciplinary academic leaders to share best practices and work of coastal sustainability solutions is a program funding by the AWF. The Foundation often works with coalitions of national environmental and conservation organizations to extend the messages of environmental stewardship and practice. For more information, review the six-year report of AWF accomplishments at [www.americaswetland.com](http://www.americaswetland.com).

While the fast and real time world of Internet blogs can quickly raise questions about the integrity of an organization or individual, so can the web allow those who are interested in the facts the opportunity to dig into the good work of organizations who might not be recognized for their true commitment to an important cause. When tragedy strikes, like the BP spill or disastrous storm events, many try to gain a part of the message and establish positions. Unfortunately, in this working coast, disasters have been a constant visitor and the result has often been a toxic political atmosphere. We are a group dedicated to overcoming our nation’s most important environmental challenge and we realize that there will be those who may not agree with our approaches. Most any group worth their salt will have detractors if they are actively pursuing their mission. In this case we make no apology for accepting corporate donations from those who have a stake in the future of America’s WETLAND and, in fact, we encourage increased contributions, as the challenges we face to restore the coast are immense. Finally, we request that if you are interested in our work that you read the ad on the following page and indicate your support for saving America’s WETLAND.