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Contact:

John Hill
America's WETLAND Foundation
Marmillion + Company
504.293.2610
504.756.0101
225.335.9104

Melissa Landry
America's WETLAND Foundation
mlandry@mcopr.com
(504) 458-5180

THOUSANDS EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN 'LAST STAND FOR AMERICA'S WETLAND'

America's WETLAND Foundation announces public demonstration on behalf of coast

NEW ORLEANS – The America's WETLAND Foundation announces it will host "Storm Warning IV: Last Stand for America's WETLAND" – three days of special events kicking off Hurricane Season 2009, including a 24-hour public rally designed to heighten the nation's awareness of the state's coastal crisis.

"Last Stand" will include a free riverfront concert by Irma Thomas, Rockin' Dopsie Jr., and other New Orleans talent at the new Blaine Kern Mardi Gras World East Bank at the foot of the Crescent City Connection on Saturday, May 30th.

The next day, flotillas of recreational and commercial watercraft will participate in parades on the intracoastal canal, one leaving from Morgan City, the other from Larose, converging at the Houma Downtown Marina for a rally-style concert and festival. The Terrebonne and Lafourche Parish sheriff's departments will be joining the boat parade. At 2 p.m., boat pilots will sound their horns and point reflectors to the sun, to be photographed by satellite to demonstrate that all the land below the waterway will be lost if nothing is done soon to save the fragile Louisiana coast.

A summit on coastal issues, called "Sustaining the Unique Coastal Culture of Louisiana," will be held in Lake Charles on Monday, June 1, the official opening of Hurricane Season 2009.

The events are designed to give Louisianans a chance to help focus the national spotlight on the strategic importance of Louisiana's coast and how much land will be lost.

More performers will be announced later. The America's WETLAND Foundation is also working with other communities to add participants and is specifically encouraging the involvement of the regional RV and Harley communities to take a stand.

State Senate President Joel Chaisson of Destrehan, chair of the events, R. King Milling, chair of the America's WETLAND Foundation, and others announced the events at a press conference this morning in New Orleans. State Senator Reggie Dupre of Houma, chair of the Senate Natural Resources Committee, State Senator Butch Gautreaux, a member of the Senate Select Committee on Coastal Restoration and Flood Control, and Valsin A. Marmillion, managing director of the America's WETLAND Foundation, made the announcements this afternoon in Houma.

The AWF has staged three "Storm Warning" events at the beginning of hurricane seasons in the past, most notably the ominous draping of blue tarp along a block of Royal Street in the French Quarter, just before hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit in 2005, to demonstrate the flooding level if New Orleans were ever struck by a Category 5 storm.

"This event is different," Milling said. "Storm Warning IV: Last Stand for America's WETLAND is a rally that will be held May 30 and May 31. This celebration of our culture, heritage and land will be immediately followed by a serious look at the problem when we convene state leaders in Southwest Louisiana for a coastal conference on June 1."

Louisianans have had the problem of coastal erosion brought too close to their doorsteps, he said. "We live on the edge of this crisis, and we have a responsibility to raise awareness and educate others about what's happening here so they can help us do everything we can to stop it," Milling said.

Chaisson called it fitting to announce the events on Monday, World Wetlands Day.

"America's WETLAND is one of the most productive and diverse ecosystems in the world, providing a critical habitat for thousands of species, many of which are rare and endangered," Chaisson said. "And, as a working coast, this valuable landscape is key to America's energy and economic security."

"The coast provides protection to hundreds of billions of dollars in property and infrastructure, 2 million people, 30 percent of the nation's domestic oil and gas supply, 30 percent of the seafood and the largest ports system in the U.S.," Chaisson said.

"Since the devastating storms of 2005, our nation's attention and sense of urgency has wavered – yet the problem remains," Chaisson said.

Musician Rockin' Dopsie called South Louisiana "one of the most distinctive and culturally rich places" in the entire world.

"If we lose the land, we lose the heart and soul of our state," Rockin' Dopsie said. "I am proud to take a last stand for the wetlands by contributing my talents to this important cause."

Marmillion said Storm Warning IV will be “one of the most widespread citizens' events in Louisiana's history. These events would not be possible without the support of many state leaders, community organizations and private partners that have joined us in this effort.”

“Additionally, the project offers the people of Louisiana a number of opportunities to participate and actively join in the cause. Citizens across the state are encouraged to display ‘Take a Stand!’ yard signs, decorate their doors, join in the boat parade, write members of Congress and come to the rally-style concerts. School children are also encouraged to participate in the ‘Keep Your Eye on the Prize’ Photo, Art and Poetry Contest as part of the initiative. All these various ways of getting involved can be found on our website, americaswetland.com,” said Marmillion.

Barry Kern, another of the projects committee co-chairs, said Mardi Gras World is happy to host the May 30 concert.

“Together, with help from our fellow Louisianans, we can send a very important message to the nation,” Kern said. “Our family has long been alarmed about the loss of this critical and fragile coast, and like many, we have watched it disappear with frightening speed. Therefore, we are proud to partner with the America's WETLAND Foundation in presenting this unique celebration calling the nation's attention to the plight of the wetlands – and the fact that so much will be irretrievably lost if we do not act soon.”

In Houma, Dupre said he was proud to be an honorary co-chair of the events. “I am not alone - as further evidence that this issue transcends all parties and political boundaries, an unprecedented, bipartisan group of legislators from across the coast has joined me...I have no doubt Storm Warnings IV will be a huge success.”

Sen. Butch Gautreaux of Morgan City joined Sen. Dupre in support of the “Last Stand” rally. “Together, with help from our fellow Louisianans, we can send a very important message to America,” Sen. Gautreaux said. “The continuing disappearance of our coastal wetlands is directly tied to America's economic and energy future as well as commercial, conservation and cultural interests of the nation. Vulnerable to massive land loss, rising sea levels and increasingly intense hurricanes, America's WETLAND represents ground zero for some of the challenging sustainability issues the world faces. All Louisianans should join us.”

For more information: www.americaswetland.com

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