

Testimony of

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Before the

**Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife Oversight Hearing  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives**

“Our Natural Resources at Risk:  
The Short and Long Term Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill”

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Good morning Madame Chairwoman. My name is David Cresson, and I am the executive director of the Coastal Conservation Louisiana. I am a native Louisianian and a recreational fisherman. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee as it discusses the long and short term impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

CCA was created 33 years ago by recreational anglers who were frustrated at the damage being done to marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico by rampant commercial overfishing. Although today CCA has about 100,000 members in 17 state chapters along the Gulf, Atlantic and Pacific coasts, it all began with just 14 men and women who saw a need to combat commercial fishing excesses and conserve the resources that they cherished. Their spirit of conservation and stewardship started with the "Save the Redfish" campaign and soon swept across the entire Gulf Coast. By 1985, Gulf-state chapters had formed from Texas to Florida. By decade's end, state chapters were founded through the mid-Atlantic region, and by the early '90s, development of the New England state chapters was completed. In 2007, Washington and Oregon opened CCA chapters.

CCA has been active in virtually every national fisheries debate since 1984 and has participated productively in state and federal fisheries management issues for longer than three decades. CCA continues to operate as a three-tiered organization, affecting issues on the local, state and national levels. We have built a very successful model for marine conservation, one in which our members are tied directly to the resources they cherish through stewardship programs. Our members have fully embraced their role as stewards of the marine environment.

CCA Louisiana had more than 17,000 members before April 20, 2010, when the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded and sank 50 miles off our coast. Those members have played an important role in securing Louisiana's title as the Sportsman's Paradise. They have been engaged in countless programs and projects to secure the future of our cherished marine resources.

Before the oil spill, CCA Louisiana was celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We were celebrating things like the inauguration of a CCA scholarship in marine sciences and a significant increase in youth participation in our STAR tournament. We were celebrating the growth of our artificial reef program through which we have spent millions of dollars over the years to build and restore marine habitat. We were celebrating our highly successful derelict crab trap removal program, a new youth education program, and the growth of our scientific fish tagging program. We were celebrating the successful removal of indiscriminate and destructive fishing gear from state waters. We were celebrating the signing of a Presidential executive order making red drum a game fish in federal waters. We were celebrating the dedication of our brand new state headquarters in Baton Rouge.

We were celebrating the thousands of ways sportsmen and sportswomen have shown their commitment to protecting and conserving the unique marine environment that is a way of life for us in Louisiana.

I am here today to tell you that the celebration is over. I am here to tell you that many of our members believe that all that work and effort and sacrifice is in mortal jeopardy. Many of our members believe that the future they were working so hard to secure, a future in which their

kids and grandkids would have the same opportunity to enjoy coastal Louisiana in the same ways that they did, is threatened. Many of our members believe that the danger that faces not just Louisiana, but all of the Gulf States is beyond their ability to control, impact or influence. And they are scared. Scared and angry.

There have not been many challenges in the past 25 years that the members of CCA Louisiana have not met head on, with their eyes on the horizon. What I see now is a remarkably committed group of people who, for the moment at least, simply don't know where to even begin. The challenge before us is playing out on such a scale that not even the men and women of CCA Louisiana, the same ones who have beaten the odds time and again in their efforts to protect their marsh, their coast, their Gulf and their fish, can find a way to answer it.

I have no doubt that we will find a way to reverse this disaster. I am confident that these darkest of days will be beaten back by the people of Louisiana through the same types of projects that have defined CCA since the beginning. We will rebuild reef by reef, acre by acre, fish by fish. When the leak is plugged and the last camera is turned off, when the rest of the world turns its back on the Gulf of Mexico, we will still be here, as we always have been, ready to do what needs to be done to restore the heart and soul of Louisiana. And that will be enough. It will be enough because it HAS to be enough. Because many of us are convinced that when hearings like these have come to an end, there will still be much work to be done. Most of that work will be done under a hot sun, by small groups of people, struggling in the mud and muck, to rebuild by our hands what was destroyed by the hands of others. And that work will be done out of the spotlight, away from the microphones, out of sight and out of mind of the vast majority of people watching now.

And that will be OK. If I may be so bold as to speak on behalf of the people of Louisiana, we have been here before.

I am glad to have this opportunity before you today not to cast blame or come with hand outstretched. I am glad to have this opportunity today to tell you about groups like CCA Louisiana, groups that will not just go away when the going gets tough. I am glad to be here today to tell you of the men and women who are going to suffer from a terrible mistake not of their own making, and who are going to find the will not only to survive themselves but also ensure the survival of the things they hold dear. It is often when we have lost faith in the things of man that we turn to the things of nature to restore our faith in ourselves. I believe it will be that way in Louisiana.

It will not be easy, though. The connection that our members feel to the marine life of the marsh and of the open Gulf is at a tenuous point. There is a very real danger that, having been cut off from the Gulf of Mexico, having watched the marsh die around them, some people may find it difficult or impossible to return. We hope that is not the case, but no one should underestimate the psychological and financial impacts a slow-motion, unstoppable disaster like this can have on a region. Especially one that is tied so intrinsically to the marsh.

I have a camp in Buras, Louisiana- near the mouth of the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish-that is a refuge for my family and me. It is our gathering place, it is the place where I hoped to craft a lifetime of memories for my kids, just as my father and I cemented our relationship in the outdoors hunting and fishing. What will become of that camp if the environment around it is poisoned? What will become of the businesses that depend on people like me going fishing, buying fuel for their boats and trucks, eating out at local restaurants, visiting local bait and tackle shops? When the marsh dies, the economy that is built around it will inevitably die as well, and that is as great a threat to our way of life as the oil itself.

The oil spill has resulted in some of the largest fishery closures in history for the Gulf of Mexico, closures that impact both the anglers and the businesses that rely on angler expenditures. While much of the focus both in the media and in this Administration has been on the impacts to commercial fishing operations, the damage done to the recreational sector by this disaster must be addressed as well.

According to a recent economic impact study conducted by Gentner & Associates for the American Sportfishing Association, if the entire Gulf were closed to recreational fishing from May through August, the region would lose \$1.1 billion in revenue, which supports \$2.5 billion in total sales, \$1.3 billion in value added, \$811.1 million in income and 18,785 jobs. These are not small numbers. These are just numbers to many of the people at this hearing – statistics to be pored over by economists and lawyers. But these are our friends, our neighbors and our families. These are lives that have been built over the decades that are ebbing away like the tide as the oil makes its way inexorably towards our coast.

Some may point out that the entire Gulf is not closed, nor is it likely to ever be all closed at once. Even though the closures announced to date have encompassed less than the entire Gulf, and have hovered around the 35 percent mark, Gentner asserts that any closure is likely to reduce the trips taken by more than just the area closed because anglers, particularly non-resident anglers, will likely avoid taking a saltwater fishing trip even if their local waters are not officially closed due to adverse feelings about encountering the oil spill. This will be particularly true as the spill spreads to other popular recreational areas on the Florida Coast. If the spill or the perception of adverse impacts from the spill further spreads to the Keys and Eastern Florida beaches, these damages will increase dramatically.

While unlikely, if the closures last long enough, anglers may quit making expenditures on durable equipment entirely. If all durable good expenditures cease in the Gulf of Mexico, \$14 billion in revenue will be lost as a result of the Deepwater Horizon incident. This level of expenditure supports \$32.8 billion in total sales, \$26.3 billion in value added, \$10.7 billion in income and 261,855 jobs. Fifty-thousand of those jobs are in Louisiana.

Admiral Thad Allen pointed out last weekend that the crisis created by the oil spill will continue until the fall. As Admiral Allen put it, and I quote: “This is a siege across the entire Gulf. This spill is holding everybody hostage, not only economically but physically. And it has to be attacked on all fronts.”

Nobody really knows what long-term impact the spill will have on recreational fishing. We do know the immediate impact, and it is that recreational fishing in the closed areas is down to zero. We do know that we will have an enormous rebuilding job. The longer the crisis lasts, the longer it will take to get back to where we were. We don't know if the many small businesses that rely on recreational fishermen using their services can survive. Even CCA, a charitable organization, will suffer serious financial hardship due to reduced memberships.

Studies will be required to learn the harm that massive amounts of crude oil have inflicted on marine life. Programs will have to be implemented to reverse that damage. CCA will be a partner in conducting these studies and we will be involved in the rebuilding effort.

CCA's goal through this crisis is to ensure that our fishery is restored. There are two important areas that CCA believes must be addressed in the recovery: building new fish habitat through artificial reefs and building a large, world-class fish hatchery.

Over the years, CCA has been active in coordinating construction of numerous artificial reefs along our coast. These reefs serve as habitats for all sorts of marine life, including the species of fish targeted by most anglers. Our reef projects stretch from the eastern coast to the western coast of Louisiana. As part of the rebuilding effort, we propose that dozens of new artificial reefs –using safe, clean recycled materials–be constructed across our coast to attract the type of marine life that is being killed or chased away by the oil spill. This project would cost an estimated \$20 million.

Along with our Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, we also propose building a state of the art marine fish hatchery in Louisiana. Before the spill, the estuaries in Louisiana were some of the richest in the world, meaning there was no need for a hatchery system to supplement fish populations. There is no question that the oil spill will have an effect on our current fish population, and an even greater effect on the next several years of species recruitment. Very simply, oily water cannot support fish spawning. Referring to the Gentner numbers above, we cannot afford several years of no spawn. Our fish population (and therefore our economy) will be devastated without a hatchery to supplement the process. The project will cost \$50-\$75 million to complete... a drop in the bucket when you consider what's at stake. We will rely on our friends in the federal government to support this project.

Madam chair and members of the subcommittee, CCA's reason for existing is to conserve our marine resources. Never in our history have we encountered a man-made disaster such as the BP oil spill. For that matter, we anticipate that the oil spill will wreak more damage on our fish resources than any hurricane has done.

Facing adversity is nothing new to the people of Louisiana. Over the years, we've been devastated by hurricanes, floods and other disasters. Our people have the spirit and stamina to overcome great obstacles, but clearly this is not a battle we can fight and win alone. We will need the great resources of the federal government and that of the parties responsible for this disaster to help us.

I have a personal friend who was killed in the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon. A young man whose wife was expecting their second child just days after the accident. I attended his funeral and mourned with his family, still shocked at the unthinkable loss. Over the past several weeks, I have visited the once vibrant marsh and picked up handfuls of thick, sludge-like oil. I have looked into the eyes of fishermen and small businessmen who have a lifetime invested in our coast. I have seen tears in their eyes as they talk about closing their doors. I have seen the disappointment in my own children when I tell them I don't know when we can fish again. On behalf of CCA, my family and hundreds of thousands of Louisianians who have made a life on our coast, we don't expect anybody to come in and rescue us; we just want to be provided the resources that will make it possible for us to one day resume our lives on the coast as we once knew them.

Thank you.