

Testimony of Captain Ryan Lambert
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Before the
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
of the House Natural Resources Committee
Hearing on Our Natural Resources at Risk
“The short and long term impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.”
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I am deeply grateful to the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify at this hearing, and to explain the impact that the Deepwater Horizon oil spill is having on my community, my business and my way of life.

I am a member of Ducks Unlimited and the Coastal Conservation Association, and sit on the Board of Directors for the Louisiana Charter Boat Association, as well as being President of Cajun Fishing Adventures. As a professional fishing and hunting guide with 29 years of experience, I have built one of the most successful fishing lodges in the state of Louisiana. I am licensed by the Coast Guard, and I have been hunting, fishing, trapping and shrimping in South Louisiana all of my life.

As the years have passed, our way of life has been increasingly threatened due to the erosion of our wetlands. These wetlands are a place where our unique culture has existed for generations. They are our home, and we value working in the rich gulf waters.

The people of Louisiana have been stereotyped as being “backwards” or “behind times”. The truth is, we are just salt-of-the-earth Americans. Americans that are not afraid to roll up our sleeves and make a living off of the land. When our shrimp season closes or our crabs aren’t giving, we adjust to find another way to make our money off

the land. We don't run to the unemployment line and we don't seek the help of agencies. Unfortunately, now that our shrimp boats are in dock and our crab traps are on the bank, there aren't any sportsmen wanting to come down to fish or hunt waterfowl with guys like me.

With millions of gallons of oil entering this fragile ecosystem from the oil spill of the Deepwater Horizon, Never before has our national treasure, been in more jeopardy than it is now. It is apparent that it is time for us to turn to you for the help we need to save our precious wetlands and our way of life.

For far too long, Louisiana's restoration projects have been held back due to red tape and political bureaucracies. It is time for someone to step to the plate and reconnect the Mississippi River to the marshes it sustains. This disconnect is at the root of our problem. A spotted owl can stop the logging industry. An endangered mouse can halt a housing development. But we lose the size of a football field every 30 minutes as we sit back and let the greatest estuary in North America go by the way side. This estuary supports the vast majority of south Louisiana with its great abundance of resources such as oil, seafood, fishing and hunting. It is an economic engine in itself.

The Mississippi River is one of the most highly engineered in the entire world and provides great benefit to the nation's economy at Louisiana's expense. For years the Corp of Engineers has dredged the river and put the sediment in hopper barges taking it offshore to dump it in the gulf instead of putting it to good use in our wetlands. The reason given was that it is not cost effective to use it in the marsh. How many millions of dollars do we need now because we did not spend the extra money to use this resource wisely?

Twenty-five years ago, the restoration of a major portion of the Plaquemines Parish shoreline, the Shell Island project, was estimated to cost \$35 million. Unfortunately, it was not completed at that time. That same project has again been under study by the Corps of Engineers for over five years. The current estimated cost is \$250 million. The time for studies has past.

The Corp is primarily a flood control and navigation agency, and has no mission or procedure to elevate the restoration of south Louisiana to levels of equal importance as its traditional missions. The precedent is no action. We need a new precedent. We need to take

extraordinary action, which will involve risk and uncertainty. We need to send the Corp a new mission. A mission that is at least equal to the navigation of the lower Mississippi, a mission of restoration!

As we did after Katrina, we are again watching our military helicopters flying sandbags trying to plug the large gaps in our coastlines. Had we taken control of our river and sediment years ago, we would not have to protect ourselves from the large plumes of oil lurking off the coast. We would not be in the fix we are now in. This is the fourth time in recent years we have felt the sting of our failures. Without taking into account the hurricanes and this oil spill, we are losing countless acres of wetlands every day. The time has come to save our national treasure.

Other states refuse to drill off their coast, yet they allow Louisiana to take the hit when something like this oil spill happens. Louisiana has been refused royalties due to the state for drilling in our fragile ecosystem. Now after all the years we have been supplying the country with 30% of domestic oil from the gulf, we will start getting well-deserved royalties in 2016. This is too little too late. This money should be sent to Louisiana immediately. The money should be sent to fund programs such as the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) and used solely for the restoration of our abused coast.

We don't know for sure the long term affects that the dispersants and the millions of gallons of oil are going to have on our marshes. We do fear that after the visible oil is cleared and the news media is gone, we will be left to wait for mother nature to heal herself. We will be left without a way to make a living and our wetland will just wash away.

It seems that many people refuse to see the big picture of what is really happening. While the loss of pelicans and turtles are devastating scenes, the real damage is going on inside the marshes. These marshes serve as the nursery to twenty percent of the nation's commercial seafood. The eggs and larva of shrimp and crabs, the spat from oysters, as well as the young of many of our fish species are being killed by the millions. Without these young and the invertebrates that they feed on, Louisiana, and our way of life, will be changed forever. All life starts at

the bottom of the food chain, this is where the most damage will occur when the oil and dispersants cover our waters.

Also when one of the greatest natural spectacles in North America starts in late August, with the migration of our waterfowl and other wetland birds, if the oil is not cleaned up by then, this alone will be truly a national disaster of epic proportions. This migration will send some 15 million waterfowl passing through south Louisiana. A great percentage of them will winter in Louisiana until the spring winds call them back to the north to nest. The wetlands of the Gulf Coast comprise the most important wintering area for waterfowl and many other wetland dependant migratory birds in North America. Perhaps 50% of the ducks in the north migrate through or winter in Gulf Coast wetlands. The spill will devastate these birds, some of which are already threatened. Everyone has seen the photos of pelicans and other shore birds covered in oil. Imagine photos of millions of waterfowl and other beautiful birds, covered in black. My other fear is that the small animals and invertebrates as well as many aquatic grasses will not be present. These are the fuel sources that take many of these birds to Central America to winter. Plaquemines Parish where I make a living contains 14% of America's wetlands. A major percentage of the Mississippi flyway waterfowl winters here. This is ground zero for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. If we lose 50% of these waterfowl, the economic impact will be felt from Alaska and Canada and throughout the central United States for many years.

I sit here preparing my written testimony, having just returned from a visit to one of our completed restoration projects. I think about how optimistic I was this morning before arriving on the beach. I thought maybe BP was right - that it is not coming inshore because after 47 days, I hadn't really seen the giant oil slicks everywhere. Now I have lost the wind from my sails after seeing millions of tar balls rolling in the surf. Not only was every tar ball covered with small dead clams, but just under the surf are millions of these clams covering the beach. This is just the start of the death that we will be seeing in the future.

By BP putting the dispersants on the oil, it has sunk out of sight of the cameras. The oil is there, millions of gallons of it. It is just starting to make its way to the Louisiana shores. My walk took place ninety miles from the Deepwater Horizon. Areas closer to the oil well don't have a beach to protect it from the oil balls coming into the marsh. They are

underwater where you can't see them, but they are there. This is just the start of what's to come. The oil will be coming from the depths for years, not floating on the surface but out of sight. It is not too late to rebuild our coast. We need to open up the Mississippi to the marshes and let it do its job the way nature intended it to. There is a happy medium between navigation and restoration. We need to find that place and find it fast. Now is not the time for more studies. It's time to get the river flowing through the natural channels that still exist. Sure there will be shoaling in places, but it doesn't take the whole river to navigate to New Orleans.

I thank the subcommittee for letting me share my thoughts on our great Mississippi delta. I would also like to take this opportunity to invite each and every one of you to come down and let me show you in person just what I am talking about.

Thanks

Captain Ryan Lambert