



## Resolution: “Caring for Gulf Coast Creation” March 2012

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**WHEREAS** the Psalms proclaim: “In wisdom you made them all, the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small... When you send your Spirit, they are created and you renew the earth” (Psalms 104:25,30)

**WHEREAS** John assures us: “Through Him all things were made: without Him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3)

**WHEREAS** Jesus revealed himself to his apostles Simon Peter, James and John by catching an enormous net full of fish, where previously there had been none (Luke 5: 1-11)

**WHEREAS** the coastal wetlands, cypress swamps and barrier islands of the Mississippi River delta are some of the most fertile, nourishing, and important examples of God’s creation in North America, providing as much as 24% of the nation’s fisheries harvest from the lower 48 states, and critical habitat to much of the nation’s wintering waterfowl and migrating neotropical songbirds;

**WHEREAS** these wetlands are in crisis, losing 16 square miles every year, becoming open water because of our efforts to tame the Mississippi River for shipping, flood protection and commerce, and because of our thoughtless exploitation for oil and gas, and exacerbated by the impacts of climate change;

**WHEREAS** the BP oil drilling disaster of 2010 has further jeopardized these wetlands, their bounty and all who rely upon them: shrimp harvests have decreased; dolphins, minnows, red snapper, shrimp, crabs, whiting and other species are showing the signs of toxic exposure to BP’s oil;

**WHEREAS** the BP disaster has alerted us to the ongoing spills and accidents in the Gulf, which continue at the rate of over 3,000 spills in the past year alone;

**WHEREAS** without action, coastal wetlands loss may accelerate, with as much as 51 square miles of wetlands turning to open water annually, greatly jeopardizing coastal communities which rely upon these wetlands as natural storm protection and the first lines of defense for hurricanes and tropical storms;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Louisiana Interchurch Conference meeting in Annual Assembly, March 5-6, 2012, affirms its support for efforts to protect and restore the coastal wetlands of the Mississippi River delta, and efforts to direct BP’s Clean Water Act fines to Gulf coast ecosystem restoration, such as the RESTORE Act (SB 1400), and efforts to ensure oil and gas activities are safe, clean, and accountable to communities they affect, such as the creation of a Gulf Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council, and urges its member churches and denominations to support these efforts to protect and restore our Gulf coast creation.



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### Supporting information:

**The RESTORE Act and Gulf restoration funding.** On July 21, 2011, nine of the 10 Senators in the Gulf Coast Congressional delegation introduced the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economy of the Gulf Coast Act of 2011 (The RESTORE Act, SB 1400), to direct 80% of the fines that will eventually be levied against BP to the restoration of the ecosystem, culture and economy of the Gulf of Mexico region. Absent such legislation, the majority of these fines will end up in the federal treasury.

Restoration projects that would be funded under this bill (such as those in the Louisiana Master Plan, above) can help to protect communities, restore ecosystems, revive the tourism and fishing industries, and create tens of thousands of jobs as residents rebuild and diversify their economy. This bill encourages policies to help Gulf Coast workers and businesses compete for economic opportunities and funds training programs which could help families impacted by the spill to find good paying livelihood opportunities in ecosystem restoration, helping families maintain economic self sufficiency, while protecting our precious resources and environment for all Americans. Despite regional, bi-partisan support, this legislation is currently languishing in Congress.

**Oil industry transparency and accountability.** When the BP oil drilling disaster began on April 20, 2010, it was no longer possible to ignore the significant and negative impact the industry is capable of imposing on our coastal communities and ecosystems. While the industry’s economic impact is significant and positive, more must be done to increase its transparency, accountability and spill response effectiveness.

The National Oil Spill Commission, recognizing the need for ongoing local involvement in spill planning and response in the Gulf, recommended establishing a Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council similar to the mandatory citizen councils created after the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska. Funded by an agreement with the oil industry, the Prince William Sound RCAC has been successful in on-going efforts to empower communities, while improving oil industry safety and reducing spills. Language to create such a council is also languishing in Congress.

***The Commission on Stewardship of the Environment** of the Louisiana Interchurch Conference encourages faith leaders to support advocacy for these efforts, and engage local, regional and national creation care and social justice ministries to prioritize collaborative efforts to make the restoration and protection of the Gulf of Mexico a national priority. With the 2 year memorial of the BP drilling disaster falling just two days before Earth Day 2012 (Sunday, April 22, 2012), we encourage all faiths to mark the event and the ongoing needs of the Gulf during worship services through specific mention in prayers and messages, and creation-care themed songs and readings.*