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Basinkeeper and others suing School Board over sale of native cypress forest

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Dean Wilson

A group of environmentalists is threatening the sue the St. Martin Parish School Board under the federal Clean Water Act if the board proceeds with a plan to cut down stands of bald cypress trees on 16th section land in the Atchafalaya Basin.

The environmentalists – local commercial fishermen, the Sierra Club, Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper Dean Wilson and author and nature photographer Greg Guirard – contend that logging in the swamp will cause spoil to be discharged into the water

without the proper permit, and than the harvest will also adversely impact the Louisiana black bear, a threatened subspecies under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Earlier, the activists tried to convince the board of the economic value of the cypress forest for carbon credits and as a draw for ecotourists far into the future, but the board opted to take a one-time cash payment of \$88,650 from Good Hope Timber for the sale of the trees.

Experts say the slow-growing native cypress are unlikely to grow back under competition from fast-growing invasive species like black willow and Chinese tallow.

The vote was 5-3 to cut the trees with Jimmy Blanchard, Wanda Babin, Aaron Flegeance, Richard Potier and Frederic Stelly in favor and Russell Foti, Robert Hollier and Mark Hebert against. (Steve Fuselier abstained and Floyd Knott was absent.)

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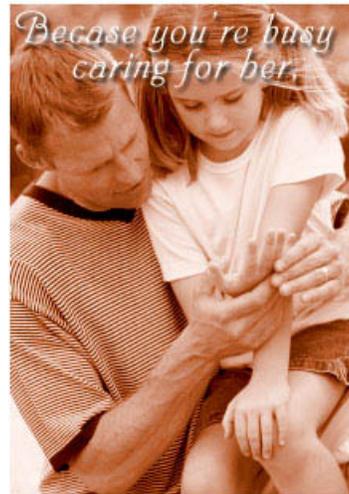
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