

## **Coastal Conservation Association: Putting the “Con” in Conservation**

The Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) was founded in 1977 on the Gulf Coast of Texas. The CCA’s founder and president is Walter Fondren III, heir to the Humble Oil fortune. Humble Oil, a Texas Corporation, has evolved into today’s ExxonMobil Corporation. ExxonMobil, BP, Reliant Energy, and Mr. Fondren’s own Fondren Foundation are the principal funders of the national Coastal Conservation Association.

The rise of the CCA and its successful attempts to ban net fisheries in Texas, Florida, and Louisiana are chronicled in a fascinating book by Robert Fritchey, titled *Wetland Riders*, published by New Moon Books (Golden Meadow, LA, 1993). Here’s what fishery columnist Nils Stolpe of *National Fisherman* had to say about *Wetland Riders*:

### **A must read for anyone interested in fisheries issues, March 31, 2000**

“Mr. Fritchey drew on his background as a commercial fisherman and his impressive skills as a researcher to put together this compelling story behind the story of the so-called ‘fish conservation’ movement that’s become so popular with the mass media today. In *Wetland Riders* he’s exposed this blatant resource grab for what it really is; a well-coordinated and well-financed assault on the U.S. consumer’s right to fisheries resources that belong to us all. From consumer to commercial fisherman to someone who enjoys the ambiance of coastal communities without boardwalks and amusement parks and tee shirt shops, if you have any connection to the seafood industry at all you owe it to yourself to read this book.”

In 2007, the CCA was invited to form new chapters in the Pacific Northwest by Gary Loomis of graphite sportfishing rod fame. Loomis also bankrolled the effort with \$30,000 of his own money. For months thereafter Loomis traveled all over the Northwest making a standard stump speech relating how Fish First, an organization he founded, had restored a run of coho salmon in Cedar Creek, a small tributary of the Lewis River in southwest Washington state, only to have them targeted and wiped out by Columbia River gillnetters. However, no matter how attractive his pitch may have been to the average sport fisherman, his claims simply weren’t true. (See “State says fish tales don’t quite ring true,” by reporter Cassandra Profita for the *Daily Astorian*, published on Wednesday, February 6, 2008.)

As *Wetland Riders* reveals, using underhanded political tactics is nothing new for the CCA. The national campaign of the CCA to eliminate commercial fisheries follows a standard script to create crises in fish management by trumpeting the collapse of fish stocks — even when they’re healthy — as a result of overfishing by commercial “netters,” while downplaying considerably greater impacts on fishery resources by uncontrolled recreational fisheries. Another well-known tactic is to inflate the economic importance of sport fisheries vs. commercial fisheries by making exaggerated claims concerning the value of recreational fishing, using what academic economists recognize as specious methodologies (but which might seem plausible to laymen). Also common is hyping the non-selectivity and deadliness of commercial gear, while suppressing information about hooking mortalities in recreational fisheries. The end result of these efforts often has been to put out of business commercial fishermen who actually were stewards of coastal habitats and resources, thus opening sensitive coastal wetland habitats to unwise development that leads to genuine decline of fishery resources. This agenda truly does put the “con” in conservation.