Sea Grant Assists European Documentary

Louisiana environs and the people who work to conserve them will be the subject of a 52-minute documentary to air on French television in early 2008.

Paris-based reporter/director Ania Szczepanska and videographer Robert Iseni spent two weeks traveling the coast, interviewing experts and trekking through wildlife refuges for the program Sentinelles de la Nature (Guardians of Nature), which will be broadcast on TF1, Ushuaia TV, the National Geographic Channel and various other foreign stations.

"The goal of our program is to show places, regions or countries of the world, with special regard to their natural resources, beauty and the human interventions implemented to save and preserve them," Szczepanska said. "For each sequence, we go and meet scientists, site guards, naturalists and other enthusiasts involved in protection and preservation. We chose Louisiana because we wanted to show something positive about this state – not only the impacts of Katrina and Rita."

Before their arrival, the filmmakers were assisted by Louisiana Sea Grant Communications Manager Roy Cron and Editor Paula Ouder, who helped the pair make contact with relevant subjects. A current and a former LSG affiliate will be featured in the documentary.

David Bourgeois, associate area agent with LSG and the LSU AgCenter, took Szczepanska and Iseni on a day-long boat tour in and around the Pointe-aux-Chenes Wildlife Management Area in Terrebonne Parish. He shared his personal and professional insights, as well as the sights, sounds and tastes of a Louisiana marsh.

"They wanted to film more and more of the birds, fish and even some jellyfish underwater," Bourgeois said. "I shocked some fresh oysters I picked for them. The highlight of the day was when Ania and Robert conducted an interview sitting on a dead oak tree log on Bayou Point au Chenes. It was soft and muddy and they both got covered with mud."

The next day, Bourgeois arranged a filming with teachers and students from Montegut Middle School planting native trees for the Coastal Roots program.

LSG’s recently retired invasive species coordinator Marilyn Barrett-O’Leary, who continues to work on invasive species issues as an independent project manager, also is scheduled to appear in the documentary. Szczepanska said she was impressed with Barrett-O’Leary’s ability to thoroughly explain the threat posed by some non-native flora and fauna and feels viewers will learn a great deal from the segment.

Barrett-O’Leary and James Seales from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries took the journalists on a boat tour of Caddo Lake in north Louisiana to learn about the invasive plant, giant salvinia.

"I was delighted that French television was interested in some of Louisiana’s conservation efforts," Barrett-O’Leary said. "It demonstrates that they recognize that conservation issues are global. Our shrinking planet is important, and we must all make an effort to conserve water and biota for present and future generations."