

Coastal Roots Program receives NOAA Bay-Watershed Education and Training grant

BY BILLY GOMILA

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, in the past 15 years, Louisiana has lost 1,500 square miles of coastal wetlands. This represents 80 percent of the total wetlands loss in the United States.

The NOAA Bay-Watershed Education and Training, or BWET, grant that was recently awarded to the LSU College of Education's Coastal Roots Program and its various partners is aimed at engaging hundreds of school-aged children in actively working toward the restoration of Louisiana's coast and marshes and to address the state's coastal needs.

Since its inception in 2001, the LSU Coastal Roots Program has focused on providing an active learning curriculum in which students can explore strategies for sustaining coastal ecosystems and develop an attitude of stewardship toward natural resources. From installing and maintaining school "can yards," which are nursery production areas where plants are raised, to planting the seedlings on annual restoration trips to coastal areas, students experience processes necessary for successful restoration.

The Coastal Roots Program is now poised to expand its outreach program as a result of the three-year NOAA grant. This grant also includes a sub-award to the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium, or LUMCON's, Bayouside Classroom and the Mississippi State University's Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi, Miss. Bayouside Classroom is a middle and high school water-sampling program designed to promote environmental awareness by collecting and interpreting water-quality data and connecting this activity to the science that students learn in schools.

"This is an important opportunity for the College of Education at LSU to work collaboratively with national, state and local scientific communities to improve environmental educa-

tion and contribute to coastal ecology through education and stewardship," said College of Education Dean M. Jayne Fleener.

"The students participating in this program will develop a sense of ecological stewardship that can guide them in acting environmentally responsible throughout their lives. This, along with working with teachers to develop curricula that extend classroom lessons to meaningful actions in areas of the coast that are vital to our collective futures, will be important legacies of this project."

The grant supports the work of Coastal Roots and Bayouside Classroom, particularly in the area of teacher professional development. The grant will also allow for the expansion of program features that include developing new curricular materials and increasing the number of schools participating in both programs.

"The BWET grant will allow us to concentrate on providing the professional development and resources that our classroom teachers need in order to effectively incorporate the Coastal Roots Program into their classrooms," said Pam Blanchard, director of the Coastal Roots Program and assistant professor in the College of Education. "Access to LUMCON's Bayouside Classroom water-monitoring program will be a great asset to teachers who are looking for ways to incorporate technology and real-time data into their classes and to extend the philosophy of ecological stewardship into the science curriculum."

"I am very excited to be a part of this grant and equally honored to get to work with the Coastal Roots Program," said Jennifer Conover, marine education associate and aquarist with LUMCON. "This grant will allow many more teachers and their students to learn more about Louisiana's coastal issues so that they will have a greater understanding of what role they play in taking care of our environment."

Louisiana Sea Grant, or LSG, a current partner in the

Coastal Roots Program, will provide professional development training for teachers in aquatic invasive species education and introduce teachers to the Nab the Aquatic Invader educational Web site. LSG will also create educational classroom posters and field checklists for students on invasive species, wetland plants, water-quality monitoring and other coastal and wetland issues.

"NOAA's BWET grant is a wonderful opportunity for Sea Grant, LUMCON, and LSU's Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice to work together toward our common goal of promoting stewardship of our coastal resources," said Dianne Lindstedt, marine education coordinator at LSG. "It's equally important for us to build an environmentally literate population that will become personally invested in coastal issues now and in the future."

The NOAA grant will also allow Coastal Roots to expand into Mississippi through a subcontract to the Mississippi State University's Coastal Research and Extension Center. The expansion of the Coastal Roots Program will establish partnerships with at least four schools in Mississippi within three years, and expand the network of Coastal Roots schools from more than 25 in Louisiana to include these new schools in Mississippi. Teachers in Mississippi will be able to draw from the expertise of Louisiana teachers already participating in both the Coastal Roots and Bayouside Classroom programs.

"The Coastal Roots Program continues to be an excellent example of education and restoration coming together," said Cheryl Brodnax, marine habitat resource specialist at the NOAA Restoration Center. "Not only have hundreds of students learned life-long lessons of stewardship and conservation, but, in addition, meaningful on-the-ground restoration of critical coastal habitats has resulted."

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