

Basinkeeper national hero

Charleston, N.C.

– Dean A. Wilson, the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, was named a 2011 Tom's of Maine River Heroes Award winner at a ceremony during the annual National River Rally conference here.

This award by River Network celebrates those who have dedicated their lives to protecting the nation's water supply.

Wilson's success conserving thousands of acres of cypress-tupelo swamps throughout coastal Louisiana and the nation as well as large tracts of wetlands within the Atchafalaya Basin earned him this top national honor.

Wilson is the founding executive director of the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper. He came to South Louisiana from Spain in 1984, at the age of 24, and for 16 years worked as a full-time commercial fisherman.

The detrimental effects of oil and gas-industry canals, illegal development and logging led him into becoming an environmental activist. He became chairman of the Sierra Club's Atchafalaya Basin Committee and later founded Atchafalaya Basinkeeper. Since then, Wilson's work has helped saved thousands of acres of cypress-tupelo swamps and other wetlands.

"Dean Wilson has selflessly given us a level of hope and optimism, often at the expense of his own safety and well-being, in a situation that I and many of my friends had deemed hopeless," said crawfisherman and Atchafalaya Basinkeeper board



BASINKEEPER – Cara Leverett, Aramis Wilson, and Dean Wilson show off Dean's River Hero Award.

member Greg Guirard. "He has brought new life to the Atchafalaya River and its people, its trees, its fish and wildlife, and he has done it with equal levels of energy and humility."

In the year 2000, when the logging of our second-growth cypress began, whole trees were being shredded into garden mulch and nobody was doing anything to stop it until Wilson stepped in. He researched regulations, found allies within government agencies, followed log trucks, surveilled mulch plants and made numerous flights to prove that cypress mulch was not the forest-friendly product claimed in its marketing.

From a peak of 20,000 acres per year in 2006, cypress logging has been reduced to almost nothing un-

der the threat posed by Wilson's monitoring flights, which are provided by Southwings Avionics of Hialeah, Fla.

The Atchafalaya Basinkeeper operates as with the help of River Network, which provides organizational, technical and networking assistance to people working for watershed protection at the local, state and regional levels. River Network has over 700 partner groups in all 50 states and beyond.

Tom's of Maine, which sells toothpaste, mouthwash, dental floss, deodorant, bar soap and body wash, is a "green-minded" company that uses wind power and recyclable packaging.

To find out more about the Basinkeeper and to help support its objectives, go to www.basinkeeper.org.