NEW ORLEANS (AP) — He's photographed the Yucatan and the Grand Canyon. He's drifted down the Mississippi on a raft, taking photographs and keeping an Internet journal on the way. For his next book, C.C. Lockwood will spend a year on a houseboat in Louisiana's vanishing swamps and marshes.

He and his collaborator, painter Rhea (pronounced "ray") Gary, wanted to draw attention to the losses — about 25 square miles a year — and help convince the country to spend billions of dollars to rebuild the wetlands.

"It's amazing how many people ... don't realize how much we're losing and how critical it is to culture, recreation, history, seafood, oil and gas, hurricane protection — just the myriad of things that we could lose down there," he said.

The book was Gary's idea. Gary, who paints expressionist landscapes ("the imagery is recognizable but the colors are often very exaggerated — although often when I put colors I really see out there, people think I made them up"), had taken her boat down Bayou Dularge. She was looking for places to paint after giving a workshop in Houma.

"I just saw miles and miles and miles of dead cypress trees. I was horrified," she said. Her brother, a college geography teacher, explained that wetlands losses had allowed salt water to travel up the bayou. It had killed the trees.

Another revelation had come a few years ago, when she and her husband went to Grand Isle, after years away. "I said to my husband, 'When we go over the Leeville bridge, I want you to really go slow, because I want to plant that view of the wetlands in my memory. The view is so pretty from the top of the bridge.'"

When they reached the top, she gasped. Flat water stretched to the horizon. She also found that even in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, where the daily newspapers have covered wetlands loss for years, many people don't know about it. "I said, 'Something has got to be done. How can I use my art in some way to help us with this problem?'"

The answer, she decided, was a coffee-table book that would teach subtly, with art. She wanted photographs, too — if possible, Lockwood's. But she didn't know him.

She mentioned that to DeLaine Emmert, the LSU chancellor's wife, who introduced them.

"We're hoping this will get the message to a different group of people than normally read scientific journals," Gary said.

This will be her first book, Lockwood's ninth. He expanded the project immensely.

"Would this be another picture book out in the bookstore with hundreds of others? I thought back to the Mississippi River trip — how many people followed me and e-mailed me as I went down the river," he said.

They decided to create a four-year publicity campaign. It will start with a year on a houseboat and a Web-based journal illustrated with his photographs, like the one he did during the raft trip, and end with a traveling exhibit of paintings and photographs.

"I'll be photographing problems, where the marsh is really sinking," Lockwood said.

His wife, Sue Lockwood, will be with him, teaching — answering e-mailed questions from 20 classrooms around Louisiana, and posting articles and lesson plans in a newsletter format on the Web.

Each school can ask one question a week.

"Any other school in the world can tune in and see it. But they won't be able to ask questions," Lockwood said.

"Only 20 is all we have time to interact with," Gary won't live on the houseboat but will join it periodically, and she plans to work the same areas at the same times.

Once the book is ready — about two years from now — the exhibit will open at LSU's new art museum, currently under construction.

It will travel for two years. The itinerary hasn't been set, but they want the second stop to be Washington.

"I just did a reconnaissance flight — Mississippi River to Lake Charles, to Grand Isle and Lafourche," he said. "It's just amazing how fragile and how scattered the patches of marsh are there in Barataria Bay. It's like a big lake coming down to New Orleans."

"It's just so fragile."