



Special to Orlando Business Journal

Off the Map host Hunter Reno drags her kayak into the water to begin her journey paddling the Indian River Lagoon for the first program in the series.

# Off the Map charts new course through Florida

By **CINDY BARTH** Managing Editor

ORLANDO — Filmmakers Bill Belleville and Bob Giguere have spent years using public television to tout Florida's natural wonders.

Now, the two men are taking their message to a new audience: The first segment of a 13-part series on Florida waterways will air on the Sunshine Network, a cable outlet, later this spring.

"Most of our previous work aired on PBS, where you knew going in that these folks already had concerns about the environment or else they wouldn't be watching," Belleville says. "Sunshine Network offers us a broader audience, maybe one less familiar with our subject matter."

## Water world

Dubbed *Off the Map*, the 30-minute programs will follow host Hunter Reno as she paddles the waterways in a kayak.

In all, Belleville and Giguere's Equinox Documentaries Inc. will trace 13 fresh-water rivers, estuaries and lagoons stretching from the Panhandle to the Keys. "We wanted to capture a good representation of the entire state," Belleville says.

Along the way, Reno, an avid Miami outdoorswoman and conservationist who has also hosted national programs on The Travel Channel, will interview people who have some connection to the waterway.

## OFF THE MAP



**Program:** A 13-part series tracing Florida waterways

**Producers:** Equinox Documentaries' Bill Belleville and Bob Giguere

**Funding:** The first episode is funded by the Indian River Lagoon Program, a joint management project with support from the St. Johns River Water Management District and the National Estuary Program.

**Air date:** Spring, on the Sunshine Network

**Web site:** [www.equinoxdocumentaries.org](http://www.equinoxdocumentaries.org)

The segments also feature underwater footage shot by Giguere.

The expected film scenery should be nothing less than breathtaking, Belleville says — right down to Reno, a Lands' End model.

"Hey, if we can get people to watch and pay attention to the pretty woman paddling down some of the state's rivers, then maybe we can introduce them to other pieces of information they might not be aware of," Belleville says.

## Heading south

For the first episode, the filmmakers started at the Indian River Lagoon, beginning at Ponce Inlet and heading 150 miles southward to where the system ends near Jupiter Inlet. "We're really excited about kicking off the series with the Indian River Lagoon because it's a very rich and complex system," says Belleville.

"It is, in fact, our country's most biologically diverse estuary."

Besides the 13 waterways, Equinox also plans to make a stop at the Smithsonian Field Station in Fort Pierce and spend time at the aquariums there, where permission has been given to set up and shoot the habitats depicted in the tanks.

The anticipated cost per episode: "About \$35,000, which means we will be figuring out ways to double up on our creative responsibilities," Belleville says.

The pilot is funded by the Indian River Lagoon Program, a joint management project with support from the St. Johns River Water Management District and the National Estuary Program.

The filmmakers are now pitching the series idea to other potential sources of grant money.

And, although a definite air date has not yet been set, Sunshine Network Public Affairs Director Steve Hull says he anticipates showing the first program sometime in the next six weeks.

The idea behind the series intrigued him, he says, because it offered an opportunity to see parts of Florida far off the beaten path.

"Our viewers will be presented not only with a chance to educate themselves about the natural habitat of Florida, but also to see something that is fun to do — and reasonably cheap," he says.