



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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AMERICA'S NATURAL SPONGE INDUSTRY TO BE FEATURED IN FILM

The signing of a contract with the Sponge and Chamois Institute for the production of an industry-sponsored sound-color film which will feature America's natural sponge industry was announced today by the Department of the Interior.

The contract provides that the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service will produce and distribute the film. Tarpon Springs, Florida, home of the natural sponge industry in the United States, will be the locale of the picture.

Tarpon Springs is a community of Greek sponge fishermen. It is rich in the tradition of an old and colorful industry. Filming will start on Epiphany, the day upon which the sponge season traditionally opens with religious and festive ceremonies. Scenes will include sponge divers in action, underwater shots of the sponge colonies and the picturesque wholesale sponge market. The picture will be 14 minutes in length and will be available on a free loan basis. The production is being financed by the natural sponge industry.

The natural sponge has several specialized uses. About one fourth of the output is used by the pottery industry. Professional painters, decorators and cleaners use about half of the annual production. Householders and various amateur users take the rest.

The industry was established in Tarpon Springs in 1849. Its peak production was 486,000 pounds in 1936. A blight which started in 1938 and which persisted for a number of years all but ruined the resource. In recent years sponge production has been on the up-grade.

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