

## A River Runs Through Us: Water-Themed Movies on Tap for the Environmental Film Festival

Written by Mike Schulz

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"I think in this country, and particularly for those of us living on a huge river, we take water completely for granted," says Kathryn Allen, chief organizer for the Quad Cities' annual Environmental Film Festival. "We turn on the tap, and it's always there, and it's always drinkable. We don't think about it."

Yet when it came time to schedule features for this year's festival, Allen states that she and fellow event planners were hard-pressed to *not* think about it.

"Living on the third-largest river in the world," says Allen, "we had been thinking about water because it's so important to our community, and also because we felt that socially, and politically, water is likely to become one of the most precious resources - and *debated* resources, and perhaps *controversial* resources - in our future."

"We try to emphasize sustainability with the festival's films," continues Allen, "and it was our good fortune that numerous good movies were released this past year on the subject of water."

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Taking place at Augustana College on Saturday, March 28, the fourth-annual Environmental Film Festival (sponsored by Augustana, the Eagle View Group of the Sierra Club, and *Radish* magazine) will showcase five documentary features from 2008:

*Grand Canyon: River at Risk*, *Flow: For Love of Water*, *Liquid Assets*, *Addicted to Plastic*, and  
*The Return of the Cuyahoga*

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Including the presentation of nine other, similarly themed shorts, the festival's lineup is an informative and engaging (and *free*) primer on the uses and abuses of the planet's water resources, covering such topics as privatization, pollution, the condition of our national water infrastructure, and cleanup. And while, during our conversation, Allen frequently references the inherent hopefulness in the films, she's certainly cognizant of the stigma associated with environmentally conscious docs.

"Sometimes people say, 'Oh, these movies ... it's a downer to see them, because they're all about the *problem*.' And, you know, often their message is not cheerful - that's true. But my take on that is we have to understand the problem before we know what actions to take."

Many local moviegoers are no doubt already acquainted with the optimistic bent of one Environmental Film Festival presentation: [Grand Canyon Adventure: River at Risk](#), which recently played for several months at the Putnam Museum & IMAX Theatre. Directed by Greg MacGillivray, the feature focuses on water-conservation issues while following a research team on a 15-day river-rafting excursion, and Allen describes it as "such a beautiful movie, even though it does talk about the problems of the Colorado River, a river that no longer flows to the ocean.

"But it is beautiful and hopeful," she adds, "and we had hoped - you know, not really believing it could *happen* - that we could get this movie for our festival. It turned out, however, that it was released just last month on DVD, so we contacted the producers and they said yep, we could use it for our film fest, so we're thrilled.

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"It won't be in IMAX or 3D," says Allen with a laugh, "but we get to show it."



The festival's other four features are likely less well known to area audiences. [Flow: For Love of Water](#), says

Allen, "is about environmental justice. And in

justice. It's a global perspective on water resources, with a focus on countries where clean water - for drinking and bathing and so forth - is becoming less and less available.

"In Africa and South America," she continues, "there have been efforts in the past to completely privatize water, where people were not even allowed to keep their own *rainwater*. Of course, the people did rise up against that, but that's not to say it will never happen again. And we need to consider clean water a basic, fundamental human right. The director, Irena Salina, really takes a hard look at this issue, and it is a most revealing movie."

As, says Allen, is Stephanie Ayanian's and Mark Cooper's [Liquid Assets](#), which the festival organizer describes as "all about the infrastructure of the water system in this country - drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater. We never think about them unless a water main breaks in the wintertime or something, but our water systems are mostly underground, and we've got an aging infrastructure that has to be addressed. Most of our water's infrastructure is very old, like 100 years old, and that's true here in the Quad Cities.

"So we have the extreme good fortune," Allen continues, "of having Greg Swanson, the head of the water department in Moline, hosting the film. He has worked in water infrastructure for his entire career - over 30 years - and he really knows everything about how water here is handled, and how it's treated when it gets to your house, and what happens once it *leaves* your house ... . I think people will learn an enormous amount."

