



## Upstream Battle

Director: Ben Kempas, Germany, 2008, 97 minutes

Since the beginning of time, Pacific salmon have swum up the Klamath River to their spawning grounds. A few generations ago, there were a million salmon per season. Today there are only a few thousand. Four hydroelectric dams in northern California and Oregon have cut off their path and turned the water into a toxic soup. In 2002, as many as 70,000 salmon died from these conditions in one of the worst fish kills in American history. One of the most haunting images in *Upstream Battle* is that of salmon leaping out of the water, only to smack into the dam. Director Ben Kempas tells the remarkable story of the battle over the use of this river, in which average citizens struggle against a multinational corporation that appears as impenetrable as its dams.

One leader of the citizen's crusade is Merv George. He is a member of the Hoopa Valley tribe, whose people have fished the salmon since long before there was a California. George is a witty and charismatic embodiment of both the modern and the traditional. He plays in a rock'n'roll band, but also hunts woodpeckers to make ceremonial objects from their feathers. His wife Wendy equals him in charm, feistiness, and devotion to upholding Hoopa ways. Their tribe has managed to maintain its traditions while so many other pre-colonial people have lost theirs. But the Hoopa culture is largely based around fishing salmon. "If they're sick, we're sick," says George.

This quarrel could easily have been framed as a classic David and Goliath confrontation, but *Upstream Battle* is wonderfully nuanced, acknowledging the complexity of the situation. The other stakeholders in this ecosystem include farmers who rely on the water for irrigation; the neighbouring tribes of Yurok, Karuk and Klamath; and commercial fishermen who catch the salmon at sea. The film manages to humanize those on all sides, including the corporate employees whose own livelihoods are in flux over changing owners.

When the dam license comes up for renewal, George and his allies pursue a once-in-a-lifetime chance to force the new owner, billionaire Warren Buffett, into the largest dam removal project in history. It may seem like an upstream battle, but so are most battles worth fighting.

FILMMAKER IN ATTENDANCE

Followed by a public forum: *The Ecology of Films*.

## FORUM: The Ecology of Films

Today a growing number of documentary films address environmental crises around the globe. At DOXA this year, we have ecological films on the Alberta oil sands, wild horses, wild salmon, seed preservation, community gardens, mining, water, and people's relationship to trees. In this forum, filmmakers and environmentalists will discuss their inspirations, the potential of films making real change, and how filmmakers can increase the impact of their films, while not increasing the environmental impact of filmmaking.

### MODERATOR

As Climate Change Director, **Morag Carter** leads the David Suzuki Foundation's efforts to promote effective science-based solutions to climate change and energy issues. She has over 15 years experience in the areas of public health and environmental policy reform. Morag is a strategic leader and manager with significant political experience at the provincial, federal and international levels.

### PARTICIPANTS

**Warren Cariou** grew up in Saskatchewan and has worked as a construction worker, a technical writer, and a political aide. He teaches Aboriginal Literature at the University of Manitoba, where he is Canada Research Chair and Director of the Centre for Creative Writing and Oral Traditions. Cariou is of Métis, German, and Norwegian heritage. His writing explores the relationships between Native and non-Native communities in Western Canada. *Land of Oil and Water* is his first film.

**Ben Kempas** was born in Stuttgart and studied documentary filmmaking at the University of Television and Film Munich. He directed the feature-length documentaries *To Be a Nation Again* (1999) and *The Loch Long Monster* (2001) for television. *Upstream Battle* (2008) is his theatrical documentary debut.

**Jodie Martinson** studied filmmaking at the Berkeley Digital Film Institute in California. She has worked in environmental consulting and documentary filmmaking since 2006. *To The Tar Sands* is her first feature-length documentary. It was made from the back of her bicycle and screened to a sold-out crowd at the 2008 Calgary International Film Festival. Martinson's current projects include reporting from India on electronic waste for a documentary for PBS Frontline World.

**Neil McArthur** was born in Regina and spent part of his childhood in northern Saskatchewan. Currently a professor at the University of Manitoba, he specialises in the history of European philosophy and literature. His film *Out of the Way* premiered at the 2006 Calgary International Film Festival. He is a member of the Winnipeg Film Group (WFG) and has trained in film and video production through the WFG and SAW Video in Ottawa.

This forum follows the screening of *Upstream Battle*.  
*Forum is free of charge.*