

A RIVER BETWEEN US

A film by Jeff Martin and Jason A. Atkinson



Synopsis

A River Between Us isn't simply a feature documentary, it's a cinematic call to action on behalf of the largest restoration project in American history. And by restoration, the film's first priority is people—restoring and rebuilding relationships amongst the vast communities living throughout the Klamath River basin, and hopefully, far beyond its borders. Because ultimately, *A River Between Us* isn't about fish or water rights or even a forty-year water war, it's about the harm people do to each other, and by extension, the damage people have done to one of this country's greatest wild rivers.

At the crux of this problem are four dams along the Klamath's over-allocated basin, all built between 1918 and 1962: Copco 1, Copco 2, J.C. Boyle and Iron Gate. However, these dams provide no water for irrigation and only one produces any energy of note. In fact, their primary purpose is symbolic; and whereas some view the dams as symbols of an era of freedom and prosperity, others view them as symbols of poverty and demise; and these violently opposing views have defined this controversy for generations. Granted, the term is thrown around, but still, the Klamath conflict is the very definition of a toxic relationship, and in human terms, just look at the cause and effect of this crisis. Cause: anger, resentment, distrust; effect: scarcity of water, florescent green algae beds, dying fish, birds, cattle and crops—vast destruction of life and livelihoods, entirely manmade.

Now the good news. Dividing the states of Oregon and California, by virtue of being the longest and most controversial, although otherwise forgotten, river in the U.S., the Klamath now presents America with its greatest conservation opportunity in history. By taking an entirely new approach to conservation, one which views community as a crucial part of the natural habitat, this film shows people as an extension of the river, not a controlling interest of the river. And in sharp contrast to the prevailing culture of political gridlock and partisanship, which renounces compromise as a sign of weakness, *A River Between Us* reveals compromise in its truest form: as an act of unity and our greatest show of strength.

Which is exactly why, over the past two years of production, having traveled the entirety of the river and completed a total of seventy individual interviews, our crew has done everything in our power to foster respectful discourse between people with long-held views and violently opposing agendas. These groups include farmers, who need the river's water; Pacific Power, who manage all four dams; founders of the Klamath Basin Rangeland Trust, who problem-solve and advocate for best practices and maximum use of the water; historic and modern fisherman; members of the Native Tribes, who've lived and worked along the Klamath for centuries; federal, state and local politicians, who balance and manage the issues year by year; environmental experts, who think we should completely start over; and leaders working for a compromise to protect fish and farmers from the Endangered Species Act.

Considering decades of battles that finally resulted in forty-two organizations coming together to sign a landmark agreement in the hopes of rehabilitating the Klamath, the strongest voice in the documentary is reason. On that note, what most

distinguishes *A River Between Us* is that we have tangible conservation goals and a political team with the experience, strong bipartisan relationships, and a sound plan in place to achieve those objectives. Far beyond grassroots on the riverbed, our goal is to use this film to raise awareness of this crisis in order to start a national dialogue that will be heard loud and clear from Requa, California all the way to Washington, D.C. in 2015.

Water is the oil of our times; a limited natural resource, precious. So, in terms of the timeliness of this film and these critical issues, as backdrop, consider the dire straits of the Colorado River, not to mention the record-breaking drought that has created a state of emergency in California, with wild fires now blazing year-round and no end in sight. Sadly, the era of water wars has only just begun, particularly in the West.

What *A River Between Us* demonstrates, the real takeaway of this documentary is that the single greatest tool of conservation might very well be the human capacity for forgiveness. This is a film about people, after all—people who believe a better tomorrow must start today and that now is the time to seize this historic opportunity. Discussing the significance of this initiative in a recent interview, Filmmaker/Producer Jason A. Atkinson explained its urgency: “The Klamath represents who we are. If we do nothing, then that’s who we are. If we stay divided, then that’s who we are. If we restore one of the greatest rivers in America, then that’s who we are.”

The Klamath River: this is who we are.

Timeline of significant events directly impacting the Klamath conflict.

1862: Homesteader Act in Oregon

1908: President Theodore Roosevelt establishes the Lower Klamath National Refuge, nation's first waterfowl refuge

1918: Copco 1 Dam constructed by California-Oregon Power Company

1925: Copco 2 Dam constructed

1946: Second wave of homesteaders comprised of World War II veterans

1954: Klamath Termination Act terminates federal recognition of and services to the Klamath Tribes. The U.S. acquires 800,000 acres of Klamath tribal land.

1958: J.C. Boyle Dam constructed

1961: Iron Gate Dam constructed

1964: Klamath River flood

1973: President Nixon signs the Endangered Species Act

1978: Salmon Wars

2001: Water shutoff/Bucket Brigade Protest

2002: Klamath River "fish kill"

2009: Oregon and California sign the KBRA/KHSA (Klamath Basin Rangeland Agreement/Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement)

Background Information

As the fifth generation to be raised on the Klamath River, Producer Jason A. Atkinson has been fly fishing since he was old enough to hold a rod. In fact, as they neared the end of their lives, his grandparents, Big Tom, an Eisenhower Republican, and Grandma Nita, a Reagan-hating liberal, entrusted Jason with the restoration of their beloved river. Which is why Jason considers *A River Between Us* to be a family story, a western story, and an American story, in no particular order.

A Teddy Roosevelt-style Republican, notably, before taking a sabbatical from politics in 2012 in order to make this film, Jason Atkinson was a three-term Senator and Gubernatorial candidate from Oregon. Having invested much of his career in supporting the agriculture communities throughout his home state, he is also the first Republican to ever receive a 100% approval rating from The Oregon League of Conservation Voters. That said, Jason's greatest conviction is that conservation is not political, and in keeping, our crew is as bipartisan as they come — here's hoping this documentary isn't the only bipartisan production of 2015.

Filmmakers

Jeff Martin, Director, Producer, Writer

Jeff is a longtime creative who has dedicated the last eight years of his career to developing and producing films that inspire, challenge and transform. He comes to *A River Between Us* having just produced *UnDivided*, a powerful documentary about the unlikely friendship of an at-risk urban high school and an affluent suburban church, and which was just selected for the 2014 Los Angeles Justice Film Festival. He is also Producer of the award-winning film *Lord, Save Us From Your Followers*. In 2012, Jeff Martin and Jason A. Atkinson co-founded ItMatters, an Oregon-based creative company specializing in emotionally honest stories tailored to wide audiences with the intention of creating social movements and impacting culture (www.itmatters.tv).

Jason A. Atkinson, Producer, Host/Narrator, Writer

During his fourteen years in the Oregon House and Senate, Jason A. Atkinson carved a niche in the areas of renewable energy policy, natural resource, conservation policy, international trade development, and tax reform. He also co-authored one of the most progressive new energy citing bills in America, the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards for Oregon. A contributor to *The Huffington Post*, Jason is the author of *What We All Wish Politicians Understood*, co-author of *The Recovering Politician's Twelve Step Program to Survive Crisis*, and his second book, *Inside Out*, stories of the

unsung heroes of Oregon's 21st-century conservation movement, will be published in September 2014. A Rodel Fellow of the Aspen Institute, he has worked in Iraq and Kurdistan, taught policy and history at the university level, guest lectured and spoken in conferences, keynotes, forums, and now serves as trustee on numerous boards.

Jim Standridge, Cinematographer

With more than thirty years of experience in film and video production, Jim Standridge is a recipient of many awards including 4 Emmys, 32 Tellys and 18 ACE awards in cinematography and editing. Jim's career highlights span the globe, including documentaries, corporate film/videos, commercials and infomercials including: Sears, Pepsi, Intel, Ford, Weyerhaeuser, Nike, Doritos, Amtrak and extensive work for Hewlett Packard.

His television experience also extends to segments for national shows such as: *NOVA*, *The CBS Evening News*, *CNN*, *A&E*, *Cops*, *Hard Copy*, *Oprah*, *MTV*, *VH1*, INSP Networks Long Format Documentaries: *UnDivided*, *Lord Save Us From Your Followers*, *Future Quakes* "Unlocking the Mysteries of Bay Area Earthquake Faults" (U.S.G.S.) Delta Revival "Restoring a California Ecosystem" (U.S.G.S.), *The Rockabilly Legends* (Jerry Naylor Productions/PBS) *The Transylvania Trophy* (Ukraine/Warn), *The Camel Trophy* (Chile & Argentina/Warn), and *The Mobile Office* (Europe/Hewlett Packard).