VenturaCountyStar

Film highlights Ventura River watershed and how it affects people

By Zeke Barlow
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Before water makes it way through the labyrinth of pipes and canals and dribbles out your tap, do you know from which river it originated? Or where it goes when it disappears down your drain?

If not, you're not alone.

"I think the majority of people do not know where their water comes from," said Paul Jenkin, a local environmentalist and occasional filmmaker.

Jenkin, along with photographer Rich Reid, are trying to educate people on water, watersheds and why people should care about them. The pair made a 30-minute movie, "Watershed Revolution," which premiers Saturday in Ventura. The filmmakers look at the Ventura River, the issues affecting it and the people trying to help it.

They hope the movie highlights the delicate balance of living in the desert that is Southern California with decreasing water supplies.

"We like to surround ourselves with green lawns and we live in a desert," Reid said.

Jenkin had been giving slide shows on the issues facing the Ventura River for years, and decided he wanted to diversify his presentation. Reid, a former instructor at Brooks Institute of Photography, borrowed a high definition camera from the school and the pair headed out to the river.

The film features Jenkin and six other activists in the work they do along the river. It highlights Rick Bisaccia as he patrols the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy; Sara Benjamin as she educates children on the value of a wetland; and Ben Pitterle as he encourages people to get involved in a conservation project.

The movie shows how Ventura is different from other cities in Southern California in that it doesn't get any water from the state — all its water comes from the Ventura River and Lake Casitas. It's a blessing and a responsibility, Jenkin said. Residents need to learn about the river's challenges, such as pollution, habitat restoration and endangered species.

Reid shot some of the film using time-lapse photography, which shows the clouds and river and stars moving over many hours compressed into just a few moments. He trekked with all his gear, a car battery and an umbrella to remote locations, setting up his cameras to take hundreds of photos over an eight-hour time frame. One cold night, his equipment froze. Another time, he was hoping to catch a rainbow in front of the Matilija Dam and had to go back three times to get the right mixture of light, mist and color.

The result paid off — with dramatic images of the intersection of people, wildlife and water.

The real message of the movie plays out in the first few minutes of the film.

The opening sequence asks a number of people on the street if they know where their water comes from or what a watershed is. The people are mostly clueless that a watershed is the land area that drains to a particular river.

"I think in general people are fairly disconnected from those basic fundamental life sources that we depend on — food and water," Jenkin said. "Things are pretty easy for us in this spoon-fed society."

They hope to get the movie into various film festivals up and down the coast to show how Ventura can be a model of how to protect an ever-precious resource.

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