



NGRREC Documentaries To Screen At UN World Water Film Festival

by Laura Inlow
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GODFREY - Two documentaries produced for and in conjunction with the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRRECsm) are hitting the national stage this month at the Inaugural World Water Film Festival in New York City.

“Mussel Grubbing: A Citizen Science Treasure Hunt,” focusing on the Illinois RiverWatch program’s citizen science work, will kick off the festival. The film’s star, Nina Carmichael, a volunteer and citizen scientist, will be a keynote speaker for the event.

“When we began planning ‘Mussel Grubbing,’ we were hoping to demystify the process of scientific research and to empower members of the local community to know that they can make a real contribution to science and environmental quality in their own neighborhoods,” said RiverWatch Director and Stream Ecologist Danelle Haake, who is also featured in the film. “The completed film has surpassed our expectations and is helping us grow our RiverWatch program.”

A Swarovski Waterschool film, “Kids on the River,” will also be one of 20 short and feature films in the showcase – all made by water advocates from around the world.

The World Water Film Festival (WWFF) is being hosted by the Columbia Climate School’s Water Center, March 19. The event is a part of United Nations (UN) Water Week, during which 440 water organizations will gather in New York City, March 22-23. It also coincides with World Water Day, March 22.

In addition to the films, the festival will feature workshops, guest speakers, and a four-hour “Women in Water Energy & Film” summit, led by Youth for Global Health & Social Justice founder, Dr. Sheryl Simmons.

“The human right to water should be more than talk,” Simmons said in a press release. “The World Water Film Festival allows it to be sight, sound and feeling where the right to water – the need for water –becomes an experience for everyone.”

Interim Director of Environmental Education Jen Mandeville will be attending the free event on behalf of NGRREC and Lewis and Clark Community College. Anyone wishing to experience it on their own will be able to access an online version of the WWFF on Eventive, March 19-26.

“I am excited for the world to meet our Waterschool students and learn more about the Waterschool program,” Mandeville said. “Hopefully this will be a launch for new Waterschools in our watershed. I can’t wait to see the other films and hear the voices and water perspectives of other students from around the world.”

Both NGRREC films, chosen from more than 130 submitted for the festival, were funded by “Let’s Talk About Water” grants from the Consortium of Universities for the Advancement of Hydrologic Science, Inc. (CUHASI).

“**Mussel Grubbing**” follows a group of citizen scientists along the Sangamon River in Champaign County, Illinois, as they conduct a mussel survey to determine the quality of the water along the watershed.

Carmichael, who is a self-proclaimed treasure hunter, describes the survey process, from digging into the silt to find the mussels to processing and categorizing them for the study. Not knowing what to expect, she said she was excited to be able to participate in not only the collection aspect of the project, but also the science. She learned a lot from the process too, which she describes in the nearly 7-minute film.

Malacologist Sarah Douglass, with the Illinois Natural History Survey, said the Sangamon River site is unique for the number of mussels present and the variety of species.

“That tells us that the animals are happy; that they’re able to thrive here,” she said.

She also explained the purpose behind the work – connecting the dots from healthy animals in the river to healthy water to healthy people.

The film, which can be found on RiverWatch’s YouTube channel, <https://youtu.be/V-308QE6roQ>, was created by Two Track Road Productions. It originally premiered to the public at NGRREC’s Neighbor Nights Event at the Confluence Field Station in January 2023.



“Kids on the River,” will be shown three times as part of the “Kids Block” portion of the film festival.

The film follows the experience of a group of about 15 high school students from East St. Louis – incoming freshmen through seniors – as they spend a week along the Mississippi River at NGRREC’s Field Station. The students featured are involved in Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s TRiO Upward Bound program for college-bound, low-income, first-generation students.

“We did a lot of hands-on, field-based water science work,” Mandeville said. “For many of those students, it was their first time on the river.”

East St. Louis’s riverbank is populated with walls, industry and former industry, so residents don’t have the connection to the river that people in communities that have created public access points to the river – like Alton, Grafton, etc. – tend to.

The one-week camp was a part of the U.S. Swarovski Waterschool, which has been based out of the Confluence Field Station for the past decade. Similar Camp Waterschool events are held multiple times throughout the year.

In addition to paddling the river, the students planted trees, tested water quality, studied macroinvertebrates in the labs and even created some art through “fish printing,” as well as various other activities that fall under the STEAM curriculum, Mandeville said. There was even a guest speaker who spoke about the importance of the Mississippi River and its role in the underground railroad.

“By the end of the week, there’s a real recognition of the importance of the river with these students,” she said. “Where they normally think of the river as an ‘other’ space because they’re disconnected from it, they learn to realize what an awesome and important natural resource they live right next to.”

Xyla Nixon, a Camp Waterschool participant and senior at Cahokia High School, said she was excited and shocked to learn their film had been chosen, but now realizes how important her experience at Camp Waterschool really was.

"My experience made me realize the Mississippi River is something that gives and also sustains life and is not only a body of water I happen to pass by," she said.

The 5-minute film can be found on NGRREC’s official YouTube Channel, <https://youtu.be/IA5oWJRk8GA>. It originally premiered to the public at the October Neighbor Nights event at the Confluence Field Station.

“Kids on the River” was produced by Route 3 Films, out of St. Louis. Owner Ryan Hanlon is also a Lewis and Clark Community College alumnus.

World Water Film Festival

The World Water Film Festival is an annual non-profit film festival started in 2022 under Founder and CEO

Robert Strand. The festival focuses on uplifting stories about the human-water relationship to inspire

equitable action. By combining art and activism, WWFF looks to a future with a strong relationship between filmmakers, organizations and the human population in support of building sustainable and cleaner water resources. Organization updates can be found on their website, worldwaterff.org, and on their Instagram, Facebook and TikTok pages @WorldWaterFF.

National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC)

Founded in 2002 as a collaborative partnership between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Lewis and Clark Community College, NGRREC is dedicated to the study of great river systems and the communities that use them. The center aspires to be a leader in scholarly research, education, and outreach related to the interconnectedness of large rivers, their floodplains, watersheds, and their associated communities.