

SCREENS

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The Indiana Forest Alliance hosts a film festival to inspire protection of the Midwest

"This isn't just a flyover state. We have wild nature here. We have forests and creatures and waters worth protecting."

By Sam Watermeier



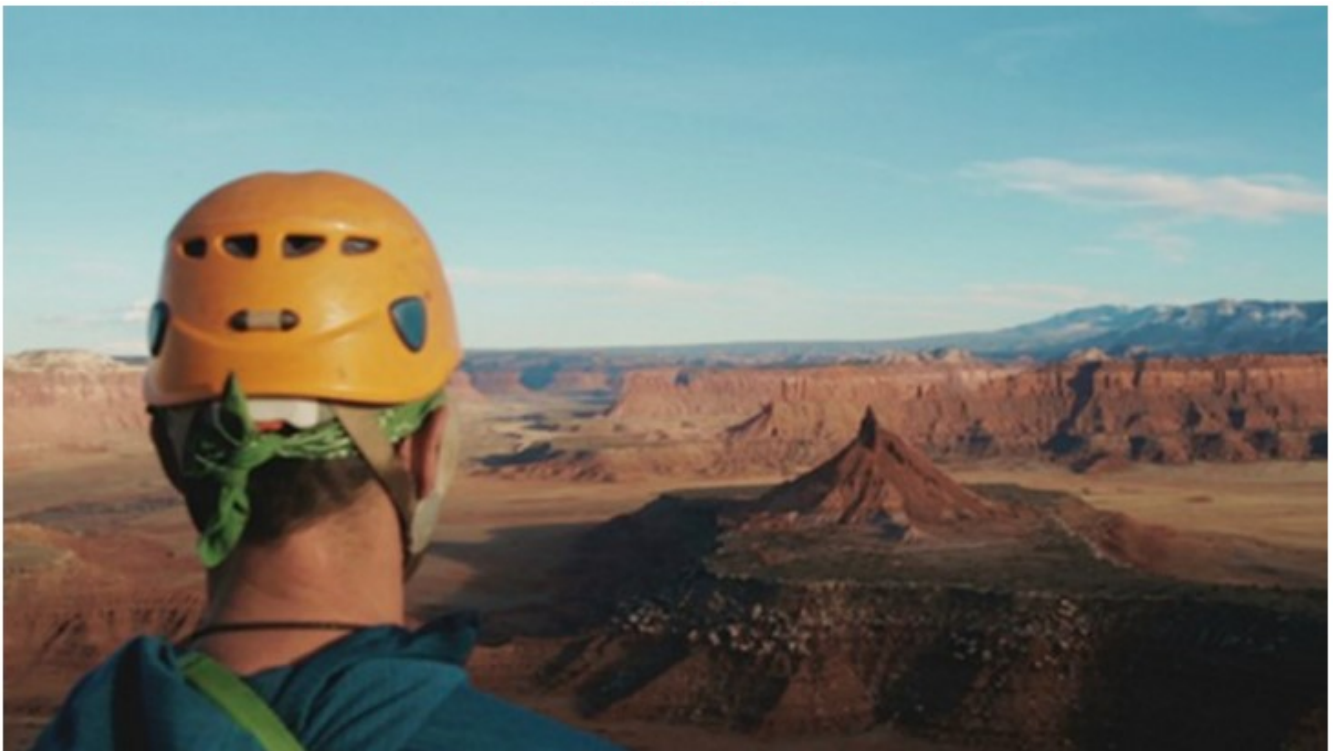
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Defined by the Line follows climber Josh Ewing and his quest to save the areas where he climbs.

Last year's first annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival started with a snafu. Problems with the Blu-ray player prevented the **Indiana Forest Alliance** from showing many of the film selections. The solution? Free wine for attendees! This year will have all the booze and hopefully none of the technical difficulties.

This festival has been around for quite some time. The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL, pronounced "circle") launched it in 2003 to shed cinematic light on natural resources and build a community committed to environmental issues. It went on to grow into one of the largest film festivals of its kind, spreading from its roots in California to places all across the country. (As its website states, the festival reaches roughly 39,000 people every year.) Since it started, Wild & Scenic aimed to bring its films to not-for-profit organizations like Indiana Forest Alliance as the festival hit the road.



This year, Indiana Forest Alliance formed a committee to select a lineup from a roster of 200 films. "We ranked them on a scale of one to five with five meaning 'hell yes,'" says Paul Bryan, development director for the Indiana Forest Alliance.

The selection includes **12 films**, all of which will "strike a chord with people who enjoy nature and are concerned about the condition of the great outdoors," Bryan says. The lineup is not only great for nature-lovers. These films are also thrillingly cinematic,

brimming with breathtaking imagery that film fanatics will greatly enjoy seeing on the big screen.



Several of the films focus on individuals swept up by the majesty of nature. *Defined by the Line* follows climber Josh Ewing, whose love for the surreal landscape of Utah's Bears Ears region led him to fight against its degradation. "Just loving a place isn't enough," Ewing says. "You've got to have a willingness to protect it." He thinks of the land as a piece of himself. "This is me," he says as he scales the rough yet ravishing surface of a steep slope – one of the film's many striking images. It's an exhilarating short film filled with visual marvels and kernels of hope, which we desperately need in the arduous, ongoing battle to raise awareness and conserve nature.

"A lot of us have a hard time even thinking that our actions can make a difference, that we can chip away at making something happen," Ewing says, as if reaching out to audience members who are hesitant to take a stand. By the end of the film, you'll undoubtedly feel inspired to protect the natural wonders near your home.



Indiana Forest Alliance's ultimate goal with this festival is to open people's eyes to the natural beauty in the heart of the Hoosierland.

"This isn't just a flyover state," Bryan says. "We have wild nature here. We have forests and creatures and waters worth protecting."

Most of the films capture the grandeur of places out west, but one of them highlights the magic of a creature that you can also find right here in Indiana. *The Last Dragons* is a portrait of the hellbender, the largest salamander in North America. An endangered species in Indiana, this ancient amphibian currently resides in the fast-flowing waters of the Blue River, hiding under the rocks surrounding it during the day. This fascinating creature will enchant audiences of all ages, Bryan says.

Indiana Forest Alliance aims to attract audiences from all walks of life. Buying a ticket to the festival automatically makes viewers members of the organization.

"We want people to be inspired," Bryan says. "We want this festival to encourage them to join us in fighting for the wild places near and dear to our hearts."

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Did you know the largest salamander in North America is found in Indiana? *The Last Dragons* film explains their life in the Blue River.