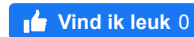




Documentary recounts Texas history through eyes of river



By [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) - Spring 2015 Mar 24,
2015

BLOG



Broken tree limbs float at the bottom of Spring Lake. Underwater excavations have found prehistoric artifacts. Photo courtesy of Paul Collins and Anlo Sepulveda

WASHINGTON – A [Texas blind salamander](#) rests peacefully on an underwater rock. The amphibian’s opalescent skin shines from the sun’s rays above.

Slender green strands of [Texas wild rice](#) undulate in an underwater rhythm.

These are scenes from “[Yakona](#),” a documentary that experiments with the model through its use of

a musical score and no dialogue or narration.
“Yakona” means rising water.

The movie took viewers at the National Museum of the American Indian on a journey Saturday from prehistoric times through the present day from the perspective of the San Marcos River in San Marcos, Texas. The film premiered at last year’s South by Southwest Festival, where it won an audience award.

San Marcos filmmakers [Paul Collins](#) and [Anlo Sepulveda](#) were joined at the [Environmental Film Festival](#) screening by Texans [Tony “Two Hawks” Molina](#), an actor in the movie, and Gary Perez, a researcher.

The movie’s dreamlike effect was captured entirely with underwater cameras, shot from the bottom of the river up.

The filmmakers used a score by Justin Sherburn to capture the underwater environment and to study the relationship between humans and the San Marcos River.

It is traditionally believed by the Tonkawa tribe, who lived along Spring Lake, the river’s headwaters, and whose language the movie’s title is derived from, that the San Marcos River is conscious.

Collins and Sepulveda, a digital video specialist for Texas State University, began collaborating on the movie more than a decade ago because of their personal bonds with the San Marcos River.

Spring Lake, formed by more than 200 artesian springs at the headwaters of the San Marcos River, is home to eight federally endangered species, including the Texas blind salamander and Texas wild rice. Some archaeologists believe this to be the longest continuously inhabited site in North America.

In the beginning, Collins and Sepulveda sought guidance from American Indians in south Texas to

paint an accurate portrayal of the area's historic events in "Yakona."

The creation story of the Coahuiltecan people detailed in a painting on a 4,000-year-old rock near Comstock, Texas, intrigued them.



Fish swim in Spring Lake, formed by hundreds of springs at the headwaters of the San Marcos River, in the film "Yakona." The movie takes viewers on a historic journey from the eyes of the San Marcos River in San Marcos, Texas. Photo courtesy of Paul Collins and Anlo Sepulveda

So, the duo met in 2012 with Perez, sacred sites director for the [Indigenous Cultures Institute](#), who for years has been trying to decipher the symbols and figures on this rock, known as the White Shaman panel.

"That's where our people were born," Perez said of the panel's findings.

The film also shows south Texas' fraught history of violence and racism. Soldiers fighting on the riverbanks, collapse into the water and die.

Much of the violence that occurred in 19th century south Texas is said to be attributed to the Comanche's hatred of white Texans.

The [Battle of Plum Creek](#), a tributary of the San Marcos River, was the result of a deadly fight between Comanches and Texas Rangers. John Coffee Hays, after whom Hays County is named and

where San Marcos is the county seat, led the rangers to victory over the Comanches that pushed the tribe west.

“Yakona” is as much about the history of south Texas as it is about the people who live there now.

“John Hays is not here, but I am,” Perez said.

Molina, an Apache, said he was approached by Collins and Sepulveda at a 2012 powwow to be featured in the movie.

Later that year, Molina found himself in the cold waters of the San Marcos River, a year-round recreational and spiritual haven for San Marcos residents and tourists.

The unnamed Comanche warrior Molina plays in “Yakona” dies in the San Marcos River after being shot by a Texas Ranger.

Molina said this was an important role for him to play because of his heritage. He used his mother’s kitchen knives for tomahawk practice and learned how to [play the flute](#).

A breeze blew the feather intertwined with Molina’s shoulder-length, dark hair as he recalled childhood memories as he stood outside the National Museum of the American Indian.

The Washington screening of “Yakona” was the first time those associated with the movie had been to the city, and Molina marked the occasion by playing his flute. He said it was an honor to have been invited by the Smithsonian to play.

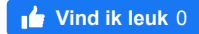
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About [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) - Spring 2015

Jordan Gass-Pooré is a Spring 2015 reporter for the SHFWire from Texas State University.



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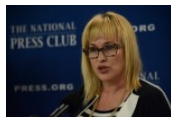
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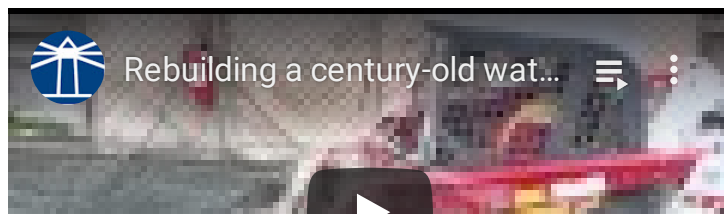


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