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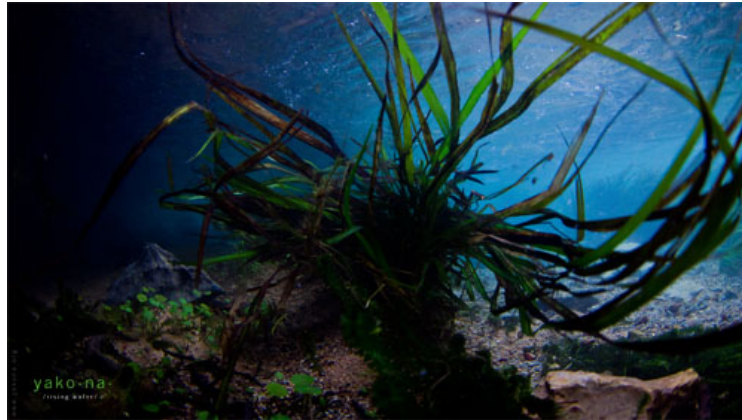
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Experimental Filmmakers Go With The Flow in 'Yakona'

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on February 14, 2012 - 2:30pm in [Local Indies](#)



The experimental documentary *Yakona* will take viewers on a visual journey from prehistoric times through the present day from the perspective of the San Marcos River. San Marcos filmmakers Paul Collins, [Anlo Sepulveda](#) and [Dean Brennan](#) started collaborating on the movie 10 years ago because of their personal bonds with the river. Now they're working to finish the movie in time to screen it in early 2013.

Sepulveda, a digital video specialist at Texas State University- San Marcos, remembers tubing down the river as a child on annual family vacations from Corpus Christi. However, he said his bond with the San Marcos River really began when he started working for Texas State and moved into a house along the river, where for four years, he would swim every day.

"I really started to see what was under the surface there," said Sepulveda, whose film credits include the Austin-shot *Otis Under Sky*, which premiered at SXSW in 2011 ([Jette's review](#)). "It's such a dynamic environment."

The trio have used imagery and score by Texas State alumnus Travis Austin to capture the underwater environment and to take what Sepulveda called a "nonjudgmental approach" to study the relationship between humans and the San Marcos River in *Yakona*.

The surreal, dreamlike effect was captured entirely with underwater cameras, filmed from the bottom of the river up. It was through Collins's initial experimental underwater filming that the group decided to move forward with a documentary about the San Marcos River.

"We wanted to create an experience for the audience that was as close as you're going to get (to the river) without jumping in yourself," Collins said.

Collins, a graphic artist in the Texas State Office of University Marketing, moved to San Marcos in 2000 to attend the university as an undergraduate. Although he was fond of the river when he was younger, he said he's discovered the magic of the environmentally sensitive Spring Lake and the uniqueness of the San Marcos River through filming *Yakona*.

Spring Lake is home to eight federally listed endangered species, such as the Fountain Darter, Texas Blind Salamander, the San Marcos Salamander and Texas Wild Rice. The San Marcos River has been a continuum throughout the course of history in the San Marcos Area. It is traditionally believed by the Tonkawa tribe, who lived along the San Marcos Springs and whose language the movie's title is derived from, that the San Marcos River has a conscience. The movie's title means "rising water."

Collins said the group spoke with the local Native American community about the film's concept. He said the Tonkawa tribe and its language are endangered, paralleling the themes in *Yakona*.

To film in the cleanest and clearest water in Texas in 2010, Spring Lake, the trio had to become not only dive certified, but attend the Aquarena Center Diving for Science authorization course. Despite having no previous diving experience, insufficient funds to purchase scuba and other necessary equipment, and a month to become dive certified and film at Spring Lake because of the removal of the Aquarena Springs theme park, the *Yakona* crew dove into the filmmaking process.

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Some of the film's challenges were alleviated through the grant they received as **2011 AFS Texas Filmmaker Production Fund** recipients, and scuba gear rental donations through The Dive Shop in San Marcos.

Brennan, Texas State Educational Technology Center digital video specialist, said he not only learned about the history of the San Marcos River and the endangered species that inhabit it through the scientific dive authorization course, but learned how to dive and hold a camera steady to film underwater.

"It's crazy when you're down there," he said. "It's unbelievable. People that don't dive will be able to see it up close and personal in the film."

Brennan said he, Sepulveda and Collins made *Yakona* to promote and conserve the San Marcos River by highlighting its intricacies.

"We know we can create respect and love by showing how beautiful the river is," Collins said.

The beauty of the San Marcos River played a role in Brennan's decision 4.5 years ago to accept a job at Texas State and move from Michigan to San Marcos. Bodies of water have influenced Brennan's decisions from an early age. He said his first word was "water." As a child, he spent the majority of his time fishing on his grandfather's boat on Lake Michigan.

Brennan said although he knew about the San Marcos River, he did not know a single person when he moved to San Marcos. He said the river helped him settle into the area.

"When I got here I was pretty much addicted," he said. "I went there every day."

The *Yakona* filmmakers hope viewers will become addicted to the San Marcos River too, when the movie is screened for the public in early 2013. They plan to start submitting *Yakona* to film festivals this fall, including **Sundance** and **SXSW**. Check out the film's trailer below.



I can't wait to see its

Submitted by Anonymous on February 15, 2012 - 10:34am.

I can't wait to see its release. This is a film whose beauty will stun.