

# SOC's Center for Environmental Filmmaking

## 2007 Annual Report

By Chris Palmer, Director

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This report gives an overview of what the Center for Environmental Filmmaking accomplished in 2007.

Dean Larry Kirkman and I founded CEF three years ago on the belief that films and new media are essential educational tools in the struggle to protect the environment. Our mission is to train filmmakers to produce films and new media that are effective at producing change.

The world is facing immense environmental challenges. We are fouling our own nest to an unprecedented degree. Powerful images and films (as we saw with *An Inconvenient Truth*) can play a key role in raising the importance of conservation.

CEF's work falls into four areas:

- Partnerships with well-established organizations that give students the opportunity to produce professional films
- World-class filmmakers coming to the AU campus to teach and mentor students
- Innovative and enriching programs and classes
- Advocacy for the ethical treatment of wildlife and the environment worldwide.

What follows is more detail on CEF's activities in those four areas.

**First**, we give students the opportunity to do professional work for partners such as Maryland Public Television, NOAA, the National Parks Service, the American Prairie Foundation, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and other organizations. We are now developing new projects with the National Geographic Society and Friends of the Earth. Larry Engel and Sandy Cannon-Brown have been pivotal in these efforts.

**Second**, we bring outstanding filmmakers to campus. On most Tuesday nights, we hold an event with Filmmakers for Conservation in the Wechsler Theater at which a renowned filmmaker shows clips from his or her films and talks about how and why the films were made. In the fall, Boyd Matson, Rhett Turner, Kathy Milani, Susannah Smith, Dan Basta, Dave Hamlin and others visited campus to packed audiences.

This coming Spring semester, CEF is organizing over fifteen different events with executives from National Geographic, PETA, REI, Free Range Studios, NWF, Animal Planet, Friends of the Earth, and EarthEcho International. We are also showing many

films, some as part of the Environmental Film Festival, including the premiere of a new IMAX film on the global crisis in fresh water called *Grand Canyon Adventure* (produced by the MacGillivray Freeman Films Educational Foundation).

**Third**, we provide innovative programs like *Classroom in the Wild* and *Environmental and Wildlife Film Production* taught by Sandy Cannon-Brown. In Sandy's class, students produce a half-hour film for Maryland Public Television called *EcoViews*. Brigid Maher's class produces the motion graphics for the program. The students are challenged to work at a professional level to produce a broadcast-quality program worthy of PBS and, thanks to Sandy and Brigid, they always succeed.

*Classroom in the Wild* in Florida is in its third highly successful year, and Larry Engel, Sarah Menke-Fish and John Douglass plan to launch CIW/Australia and CIW/Alaska in 2008. *Classroom in the Wild* is an intensive outdoor workshop held in wilderness areas in which students camp out and learn how to meet the challenges—sometimes extreme challenges—of natural history field production.

We also launched the Student Short Film Festival with Philippe Cousteau and Sandy Cannon-Brown. This event is held every March as part of the Environmental Film Festival. It has been a big success and is now in its third year. CEF and EarthEcho International award prize money to the producers of the winning films. We showcase the talents of emerging “green communicators” to promote environmental causes and empower individuals to make a difference. CEF also awards a cash prize annually to the best environmental film in the Visions Festival at AU.

**Fourth** and finally, we advocate for the ethical treatment of wildlife and the environment, through articles, conferences and festivals—and we give awards, grants and sponsorships to pursue those goals, too. A recent example of this was Larry Engel's and my attendance in October at the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival where we were both active giving several presentations and workshops. We are involved in a significant way in half a dozen major festivals every year, including Wildscreen and the Environmental Film Festival. Larry and I will both be making presentations at Realscreen in January.

Larry and I are actively pursuing alliances with other environmental film programs, including Montana State University. We will be connecting both through production and the web in a highly acclaimed web presence called LifeOnTerra.com.

Professor Sarah Menke-Fish and graduate students conducted workshops with AFI and the Montgomery County Public Schools on Environmental Documentary Filmmaking. MCPS students and teachers continue to work with American University film and video graduate students throughout the documentary production.

Under John Douglass's and Larry Engel's leadership, graduate students may now concentrate their studies in environmental and wildlife filmmaking through CEF.

And in a joint CSM/CEF project, Larry Engel is chairing an ad hoc committee within the Film and Media Arts Division that is dedicated to developing the “best practices” for green filmmaking and to making SOC’s film program the first in the nation to go green. Sandy Cannon-Brown is leading the research this spring semester. Pat Aufderheide, John Douglass, Maggie Stogner and Ann Williams are also part of the committee. We are going to define standards for "green" production for students in university film programs and professional documentary producers.

I want to thank Dean Larry Kirkman and Prof. John Douglass for their support and help. And I want to thank Maggie Stogner, Sandy Cannon-Brown and Larry Engel—the three Associate Directors of CEF—for their invaluable contributions.

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