There's a lot at stake on a few, big, slow, brown rivers in the deep South. The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Basin is becoming the canary in the coal mine for a looming East Coast water crisis. The Hanson brothers grew up in Atlanta beside the Chattahoochee River. In March 2013, they returned and paddled, together and separately, the 542 miles of the basin from its source in the Appalachian Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico to tell the story of an endangered and essential water resource. The Hanson Brothers received a 2013 Mountainfilm Commitment Grant to help make *Who Owns Water.*

*Directed by David Hanson, Michael Hanson & Andrew Kornylak*

For more information on the filmmakers or to see other tour destinations and films, visit [mountainfilm.org](http://mountainfilm.org).
Discussing the Film:

The following questions are intended to spark discussion and activities related to both the content and storytelling elements of this particular film.

1. What were some of the most interesting images from Who Owns Water? What sights and sounds do you remember the most about the film?

2. Do you think the Hanson Brothers are interesting subjects for the film? Why or why not?

3. Do you think it’s fair for people to own pieces of the Chattahoochee River? Do you think the river’s flow should be diverted to provide water for people downstream in Atlanta?

4. David and Michael mention that their parents never imagined them living on a river as adults. What do you think your parents hope you do as an adult? What do you think they worry about when it comes to the way you live your life?

5. What waterways are important to your community? Do you know where your tap water comes from?

Extensions:

1. **WATCH**: Visit the film’s site [http://www.whoownswater.org/](http://www.whoownswater.org/) to find out where the film is playing next, check out a photo stream from the Hanson’s trip, or tweet them.

2. **WATCH**: If you enjoyed the unique interviews of the subjects along the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers from Who Owns Water, check out more like them from the Hanson brothers’ other documentary project, Modoc Stories: [http://www.modocstories.com/stories/](http://www.modocstories.com/stories/). Also, if you’d like to see more of photographer Michael Hanson’s work, it’s on his blog: [http://www.michaelhansonphotography.com/blog/](http://www.michaelhansonphotography.com/blog/).


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4. **DO:** Teachers: Create a project to trace where the drinking water comes from in your community. Check out local waterways and try to map hydroelectric dams, treatment plants, etc. Arrange a field trip to a local river or watershed to discover local plant and animal species.

**Filmmaker Conversation:**

**Michael and David Hanson, co-directors of Who Owns Water**

**Why did you choose to highlight environmental issues in this film?**

**Michael:** Environmental films are important to me. I think that we want to have stories that are both environmental and stories about the people that are affected. It’s everything involved in the river. At the heart of the film, the attractive part of this river is the variety of people and landscapes that it connects.

**David:** We want stories with some sort of meaning behind them. We’ve tried to stay away from big red flag environmental issues. We didn’t run around talking about climate change in some of these conservative areas of the south. Those things are real and scientific, but we wanted this film to be accessible and digestible by the people who are in the movie and who use that watershed, rather than a broader audience that comes at it with ingrained environmental beliefs.

**What was the filming process like? How did you create the story?**

**Michael:** David paddled the Chattahoochee river in 2009. He met most of the people we ended up filming. We had a few points we were going to stop. But we both knew that, paddling the river, a significant portion was going to be what we found along the way. We had a basic skeleton of the story of the river, but the filming was really organic. We were separated for two weeks and we were paddling, so we really had to balance that with actually filming. Luckily, the river didn’t have a ton of rapids. Lucky it was a slow muddy river. It helped us to a slower pace, which helped us to find people along the way.

**David:** Yeah, like meeting Jim McDaniels, the canoe outfitter, was total serendipity. The Flint River portion was wide open, knowing these rivers were interesting corridors into new opportunities. Andrew, our co-director and editor, would sometimes drive in and spend a day or an overnight when we would have specific things in mind, but otherwise the filming process was run-and-gun.

**How difficult is it to make a film where you are the central characters?**

**David:** I don’t necessarily like being in front of the camera, but I do like paddling the river. Ted Turner’s son, Rhett Turner, did a documentary in that third person style, but personally we really like the adventure of it. If I’m going to spend time filmmaking about a river that I love, then I wanted to have an adventure. Our point of view was effective, but it was also a more practical method for us. I think it helped viewers relate to our story, of two brothers going back to our hometown river. I don’t want

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to make films about myself doing things. We haltingly went into it knowing that, but we got a lot of feedback, and there was a consistent call for more of our voice in the movie.

**Michael:** Neither one of us likes being in front of the camera. We didn’t want the film to be just about adventure, but you couldn’t ignore the adventure of paddling 542 miles. We were the cartilage that connected all the vertebra, or weight of the story, together. It’s a lot easier for people to be interested in what you’re doing when you arrive in a canoe with a camera in your hand.

**Talk about some people you met along the way. What experiences were your favorite?**

**Michael:** I like Ricky and Rusty. They’re such a unique set of people. There’s a joy in how the river is linked to their friends and the way they live their lives. It was so different. Our trip attracted people’s curiosity. People offered everything from food to rides around dams. There were so many people who were willing to help. I had no bad experiences. There were so many people who just wanted to be part of our trip.

**David:** The Jim McDaniel experience. It’s like this portal opens up and you get to see this live-action daily experience. Personally, I loved paddling during the moment when the sun goes down, and searching for a little camp spot. It’s cool to see that the people who live on the river care just as much about the river as we do, without being sponsored by a big outdoor company.

**Do you think the film has had an impact? Do you feel it is successful?**

**David:** I do think it’s successful. I mean, what do you expect out of your first documentary film? We didn’t expect to get into Tribeca. We didn’t want to preach to the choir on this thing. We wanted something accessible. We wanted to just get into this place, highlight these people and let them speak. We’ve gotten good feedback, and schools are using it. It is very fun and gets just enough into these topics so that teachers can build around this story.

**Michael:** I agree. The fact that Mountainfilm has chosen it for their educational tour. As a freelance artist you just have to be ok about how you feel about it and where it goes. I’m proud of it, which is the bottom line for me. It is having some impact and it’s still going.

**What piece of advice would you give to a student who wants to get into filmmaking?**

**Michael:** Pick projects that you want to do, whether they make it to a huge audience or not. It can be challenging and time consuming, but if you feel satisfied with it, then it’s worth doing. I could say the same thing about photography. If you’re passionate about the subject and story, then everything else that comes out of it is the icing on the cake. I just spent a week photographing Amish characters in Maine and I loved the process. I loved telling that story. The rest of it comes pretty easily after that.

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David: Apprentice. Start from the bottom. We’ve both been in media forever; myself as a writer and Michael as a photographer. You don’t have to invest huge money in this. You’d be shocked if you heard the tiny budget we used to make this film.

What are you working on next?

Michael: I’m working in Ohio, Florida and Maine taking pictures with Amish communities. The Amish don’t believe in having their picture taken. We’re looking into something on the lower Mississippi for our next project.

David: Our big project would be this lower Mississippi story, and how do we have to look at wilderness in the future? It’s not really a protected wilderness, but there’s a great character there who’s an artist, river guide and teacher of Delta River youth. I think it could be a really cool story that doesn’t get talked about much in the environmental world.