

TELLURIDE

# MOUNTAINFILM \*ON\* \*TOUR\*

## FOR STUDENTS



### **Delta Dawn**

Directed by: Pete McBride  
2014 USA | Duration: 17 minutes

#### **Film Summary**

Many people have taken river trips down the Colorado River, but few know the final miles of the river like photographer, explorer and filmmaker Pete McBride. In the spring of 2014, U.S. authorities released a "pulse" of water that temporarily brought the river back into Mexico and, of course, the inveterate McBride followed the water to its end, this time on a standup paddleboard. On this strenuous SUP (stand-up paddleboard) expedition, he finds ecosystems returning to life and people partying along the shore because, as McBride puts it, "It's been a long time since the river kissed the sea."

**Teachers:** *This film could be helpful in studying water conservation issues, watershed studies, desert ecology and the geography of the Southwestern United States.*

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### Filmmaker Interview



*"I also hope they realize that we can make a difference by standing up to the challenges and voicing our concerns."*

– **Pete McBride** | Director

**Q:** How did you learn about the release of water from the Colorado River, and why did this story appeal to you?

**A:** *I heard about it from the U.S. State Department and other environmental groups. The Mexican State Department used my book during the negotiation process and I did a lot of talks around it so I was kept in the loop.*

**Q:** When editing the film, was there anything you wished you could have included the final cut?

**A:** *I saw two coral snakes that swam right past me. They are quite dangerous and very agitated in flooded situations so I didn't have time to get my camera — and get to a safe distance at the same time. That would have highlighted some of the drama and challenges we faced.*

**Q:** When you made the film, did you have a specific audience in mind?

**A:** *I actually never intended to make a film. We just wanted to make the paddle and see if we could reach sea. Later, I realized, we were the only people in the world to have taken paddleboards down the Colorado River to the sea — and potentially might be the last ever (if the river continues to remain dry, hopefully not) so I decided to make a film from what little footage I had (just two cameras — Nikon and GoPro). My audience was the general public and river lovers alike.*

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**Q:** Is there a specific action you hope people are inspired to take after seeing this film?

**A:** *I hope they realize that rivers need our help. They are getting sucked dry all over the world, which has huge ramifications for ecosystems, water tables, agriculture, wildlife and more. I also hope they realize that we can make a difference by standing up to the challenges and voicing our concerns. This pulse flow would not have happened if a few of us had not spoken up.*

**Q:** The film touches on your relationship with your father. What role do you see parents playing in their children's lives when it comes to artistic pursuits or environmental activism?

**A:** *I think parents can play huge roles by just letting kids pursue what they want, and supporting them. They don't have to force art or environmentalism on kids, just make them aware of what is out there. That is what my parents did and I found my own way in those fields and gratefully my parents and I share similar views on it all. I am lucky they were supportive and I am even luckier I got to work with my father on this project. We became great friends in the process.*

**Q:** What are some of the challenges you encountered in the making of this film?

**A:** *Not enough footage due to the challenges of being self-supported on a paddleboard. Keeping the cameras dry and working was another challenge. Keeping our spirits up during tough times and staying safe was also part of it.*

**Q:** Why did you decide to include this film in Mountainfilm for Students?

**A:** *I think it is an important film for students to see.*

**Q:** Is there any update on the next "pulse" of water for the Colorado River? Would you consider repeating the journey you completed in *Delta Dawn*?

**A:** *There is hope that this will happen again in three years but in light of the drought, it might be tough. Fingers crossed.*

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**Q:** What does working in a documentary format allow you to do that other film formats (like Hollywood-style narrative) would not?

**A:** *It lets you tell more personal stories and follow more unusual techniques. It also lets you do more raw storytelling — you don't have to produce every scene.*

**Q:** What's the next big adventure or film project on the horizon for you?

**A:** *I am walking the length of the Grand Canyon (600 miles) for National Geographic — to highlight the beauty of that natural wonder and the challenges that are growing around it.*

**Q:** Any parting thoughts for Mountainfilm for Students?

**A:** *Follow your passions – stay positive. Positive energy is very powerful.*

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### Tags

Adventure

Colorado River

Geography

Government

History

Landforms

Physical Education

Science

Southwest Water Issues

Stand-up Paddleboarding

Water Conservation

### Pre-screening Activity

Discuss the definition of water conservation and why it is important. Ask students to imagine a local water conservation issue, and how they might explore that issue through an adventure. What does the presence or absence of water conservation efforts create?

### Introducing the Film

1. Ask students what they already know about the Colorado River. Fill in key information as needed:
  - a. The Colorado River's location on a map.
  - b. The Southwest's distinguishing geographical features (e.g., canyons, rivers, remote areas, etc.)
  - c. Population and water use of areas around the Colorado River relative to other rivers.
2. Review vocabulary: river delta
3. If students aren't familiar with documentary film, review the characteristics that distinguish documentaries from other film formats.
4. Give students an assignment for viewing (e.g., looking for how the subjects solve a particular water issue or what the students notice about the film's messages about the environment). Be sure they know why you are showing them this particular film (and how it connects to other work they are doing or topics they are studying).

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### Discussion Question Categories

#### General/Open Prompts

1. What are the main messages of this film? Do you agree or disagree?
2. Name one thing you saw in the film that inspired you, one thing that made you mad or sad, and one thing you want to know more about.
3. Imagine going home and telling a friend or family member about this film. What would you say?
4. What is one lesson you learned from the film that you wish everyone in your family or community or school knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?
5. What did you learn from the film about the tools needed to bring attention to an environmental issue?
6. What did you notice about water conservation in the Southwest?
7. If you could ask anyone in the film one question, who would you ask and what would you ask them? What is interesting to you about that question?
8. Would you recommend this film to a friend? Explain your reasons.

#### Exploring Self

1. What did you see in the film that made the strongest impression on you? What was it about that moment that moved you?
2. If you were going to send a text message to a friend about this film, what would it be?
3. In what ways are Pete or his friends like you or like someone you know? In what ways are they different?
4. Pete's father encouraged his love of the Colorado River. Do you think that your parents understand the things you like to do? What might Pete have said to gain his father's support for his trip in *Delta Dawn*? How might this apply to conversations you could have with your own parents?
5. What similarities or differences does Pete share with you and your friends? How do you approach new experiences and the challenges that come with them? Do you think trying new experiences is brave? If so, why?

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6. What life lessons can be learned from the choices made by Pete in this story?  
How can you apply the lessons in the film to your own life?

**Exploring the World**

1. Before viewing the film, what did you know about water conservation? In what ways did the film affirm or challenge your ideas regarding water conservation?
2. What similarities do you notice between Pete and his companions and you and your friends?
3. Does the geography of the Colorado River make paddleboarding (or river rafting) easy or difficult? Explain why or why not.
4. In what ways do all river deltas have an impact on the environment?

**Exploring Filmmaking**

1. What questions do you think the filmmaker was trying to answer? How do you know?
2. In one word, how did the film make you feel? What techniques did the filmmaker use to make you feel that way?
3. What important perspectives do you think are missing in the film? What additional voices would you have included and why?
4. Describe the symbols (conventional or other) used in this story, both those that have meaning outside of the story and those that have meaning only within the story. What does each stand for?

**Exploring Social Issues**

1. Pete's calls the Colorado River "the hardest working river." Do you agree?
2. In what ways are Pete and his companions "outsiders" in Mexico? What are the advantages and disadvantages of trying to impact a river community far from home? How does it complicate things that the outsiders are white, financially secure Americans and the people they are trying to help may not be the same?
3. What do you think school or your class would be like if you had a teacher like Pete? What could you do to make your school or community more water-conservation conscious?

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4. Pete points out the ways the Colorado River came back to life in the delta. Did this film change your perceptions of big rivers and their importance to humans and the environment?
5. Would a water conservation program work to improve life for you, your environment and your community? If so, what program could you envision?

**Sense of Wonder**

1. How do you think Pete and his companions felt when they reached the ocean after their challenging paddleboarding trip? What do you suppose they were thinking when they looked out at the ocean for the first time?
2. What do you think Pete learned from his experience about himself and about his relationship to the river?

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### Extensions



#### Watch

Short Documentary: *Snow to Ski: The Ganges* | Pete McBride

<https://vimeo.com/100221937>

Stunning Photos and More Documentary Films | Pete McBride.

<http://www.petemcbride.com>



#### Read

*Saving the Colorado River Delta* | National Geographic

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/special-features/2014/12/141216-colorado-river-delta-restoration-water-drought-environment/>

EPA's Page for Educators Regarding Water Conservation | EPA

[http://www.epa.gov/WaterSense/our\\_water/learn\\_more.html#tabs-6](http://www.epa.gov/WaterSense/our_water/learn_more.html#tabs-6)

Water Conservation Tips and Facts | National Geographic

<http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/water-conservation-tips/>

*Epic Drought in West is Literally Moving Mountains* | Scientific America

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/epic-drought-in-west-is-literally-moving-mountains/>

Incredible Photos of the Drought in the Colorado River Basin | Huffington Post

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/02/drought-colorado-river-basin\\_n\\_6986248.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/02/drought-colorado-river-basin_n_6986248.html)

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*The Art of Storytelling* by StoryCorp and Humans of New York | TED  
<http://ideas.ted.com/the-art-of-storytelling-according-to-the-founders-of-storycorps-and-humans-of-new-york/>



Do

Global Water Supply Lesson Plans – Grades 1–12 | Action for Access  
<http://www.actionforaccess.mohistory.org/activities.php>

PBS Water Conservation Lesson – Grades 6–12 | PBS  
[http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ess05.sci.ess.watcyc.lp\\_waterconservation/water-conservation/](http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ess05.sci.ess.watcyc.lp_waterconservation/water-conservation/)

Storytelling Activities for Teens – Grades 9–12 | Dream Productions  
<http://dreamonproductions.com/wordpress/PDF-ACTIVITY-PACK-FOR-TEENS.pdf>



**Book Recommendations (NF: Nonfiction, F: Fiction)**

**F** | Grades 5–8

*A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story*, by Linda Sue Park  
[http://www.amazon.com/Long-Walk-Water-Based-Story-ebook/dp/B004GB1T8G/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438636541&sr=1-1&keywords=a+long+walk+to+water](http://www.amazon.com/Long-Walk-Water-Based-Story-ebook/dp/B004GB1T8G/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438636541&sr=1-1&keywords=a+long+walk+to+water)

**F** | Grades 7–12

*Parched*, by Georgia Clark  
[http://www.amazon.com/Parched-Georgia-Clark-ebook/dp/B00IU4H2HC/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438636413&sr=1-1&keywords=parched](http://www.amazon.com/Parched-Georgia-Clark-ebook/dp/B00IU4H2HC/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438636413&sr=1-1&keywords=parched)

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**NF** | Grades 8–12

*Running Dry: The Global Water Crisis*, by Stuart A. Kallen

[http://www.amazon.com/Running-Dry-Nonfiction-Library-Binding/dp/B00ZVOT6BY/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438636017&sr=1-3&keywords=the+global+water+crisis+running+dry](http://www.amazon.com/Running-Dry-Nonfiction-Library-Binding/dp/B00ZVOT6BY/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438636017&sr=1-3&keywords=the+global+water+crisis+running+dry)

**NF** | Grades 9–12

*The Colorado River: Flowing Through Conflict*, by Pete McBride & Jonathan Waterman

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Colorado-River-Flowing-Conflict/dp/1565796462>

*Running Out of Water: The Looming Crisis and Solutions to Conserve Our Most Precious Resource*, by Peter Rogers and Susan Leal

[http://www.amazon.com/Running-Out-Water-Solutions-Conserve/dp/0230615643/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1436308116&sr=8-1&keywords=running+out+of+water](http://www.amazon.com/Running-Out-Water-Solutions-Conserve/dp/0230615643/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1436308116&sr=8-1&keywords=running+out+of+water)

*Running Dry: A Journey from Source to Sea Down the Colorado*, by Jonathan Waterman

[http://www.amazon.com/Running-Dry-Journey-Source-Colorado-ebook/dp/B0036S49UU/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438635140&sr=1-1&keywords=running+dry+a+journey+from+source+to+sea+down+the+colorado+river](http://www.amazon.com/Running-Dry-Journey-Source-Colorado-ebook/dp/B0036S49UU/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438635140&sr=1-1&keywords=running+dry+a+journey+from+source+to+sea+down+the+colorado+river)