



San Francisco Green Film Festival spotlights rising oceans, climate ‘outlaws’ and green awakenings in Detroit and China

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By [Brett Kessler](#) and [Barbara Kessler](#)
Green Right Now

San Francisco’s [Green Film Festival](#) kicks off this week, with 40 films from around the world and dozens of directors and speakers slated to appear at showings from March 1-7.



Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed

Several of the screenings will be US or world premieres, such as the [opening night’s preview](#) of [The Island President](#) by Bay Area filmmaker Jon Shenk.

The Island President, which opens in theaters March 28, tells the story of Mohamed Nasheed, president of the Maldives, a South Pacific nation that could vanish as climate change forces the oceans to rise. Climate activists will be familiar with Nasheed, who has spoken firmly and eloquently about the moral imperative to curb global warming. Those unfamiliar with the predicament of the Maldives, the lowest lying nation in the world, will get a glimpse of what’s ahead for the country, and subsequent coastal cities everywhere, if world leaders fail to curb carbon pollution.

Shenk, who has a master’s in documentary filmmaking from Stanford University and has twice been nominated for Emmys, spent a year with Nasheed. Shenk, producers Richard Berge and Bonni Cohen, and Steve Hipskind, Chief of the Earth Science Division, NASA Ames Research Center will speak at the opening screening March 1 at the San Francisco Film Society Cinema at 1748 Post St.. You can buy tickets for the screening and after party [here](#).

The second annual festival also will feature US premieres of foreign films, such as *Waking the Green Tiger*, a chronicle of China’s rising eco-awareness, and *Just Do It: A Tale of Modern Day Outlaws*, which follows activists in Great Britain on a whirlwind of zany actions to stop polluters.

See snapshots of these two films, and two other fascinating works, *Urban Roots* and *Blood in the Mobile*, below. (Find the entire film line-up at the SF Green Film Festival [website](#).)

[WAKING THE GREEN TIGER: THE RISE OF THE GREEN MOVEMENT IN CHINA](#)

Waking the Green Tiger chronicles China's growing interest in preserving nature.



Waking the Green Tiger opens in Yunnan Province, a mountainous region of China that serves as a bucolic refuge from the pollution and congestion of major cities. We see visitors snapping pictures of the lush vegetation and clear skies, admiring the Tiger Leaping Gorge, an awe-inspiring canyon on the Upper Yangtze River. This scenic escape is home to more than half of China's plant and animal species – but also a quarter of the nation's untapped hydropower.

In 2004, the Chinese government proposed the construction of 21 hydroelectric dams along the Upper Yangtze, igniting controversy throughout the region. Director Gary Marcuse does a wonderful job locating this conflict against a historical backdrop unfamiliar to most Westerners, using a wealth of archival footage to show how China's myopic focus on industry and development under Chairman Mao set precedents for some of today's most ill-advised environmental policy. As part of the Great Leap Forward, the Chinese government promoted the maxim "man must conquer nature," pushing for rapid industrialization at the expense of environmental consciousness.

The result of this approach, as the film illustrates, is usually disastrous. In one of the most heartbreaking scenes, impoverished farmers displaced by the Manwan dam project shuffle through garbage in search of valuables they can exchange for money.

For the most part, though, the film is uplifting, following a group of passionate activists – including artists, journalists, and locals – as they mobilize support against the Tiger Leaping Gorge dam project. Again, Marcuse situates this movement within China's larger political context, connecting the transition to democracy to the rise of grassroots campaigns. The film is most inspiring when it captures the real-world impact of activism. A journalist-turned-filmmaker travels to poor communities showing her documentary about the negative impact of dam projects, stirring indignation in the hearts of rural farmers and craftsmen. A journalist puts his job on the line by writing candid articles that challenge the government's greenwashing rhetoric. In the end, the villagers of Yunnan Province are driven to take hostage government officials who flout the new progressive environmental policies, truly embracing the spirit of democracy.

Waking the Green Tiger manages the perfect balance between information and entertainment, condensing several decades of history into a rousing portrait of China's emerging green movement. It's a portrait of people, from the humblest of farmers to some of China's biggest government players, coming together to shape a new socially-and eco-conscious paradigm. — Brett Kessler

