

Big river on the big screen

Kate Aley – Pontiac Journal

HULL:

Water – it comes out of the ground and out of the sky and pours away--- seemingly infinite, endless. Yet all over the world, thousands of people are facing severe water shortages that threaten crops, livestock and lives.

Water safety, water quality and water conservation is more important than ever before. Now showing at the Museum of Civilisation IMAX cinema is “Grand Canyon: River at Risk”, depicting a voyage down one of North America’s most iconic rivers, the Colorado. Filmed by celebrated Canadian anthropologist, author and photographer Wade Davis and narrated by Robert Redford, the film features conservation activist and environmental lawyer, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., with songs and music from the Grammy Award-winning Dave Matthews Band.

Taking full advantage of the extraordinary clarity and size of the IMAX process, the film takes the viewer through the beauty of the Grand Canyon, the pulse thumping drama of the Colorado River rapid systems and more than once... the sickening sight of lakes, dams and reservoirs languishing, dramatically emptied by water shortages.

“75% of the Colorado River’s water comes from the Rocky mountain snow pack,” explains Mr. Davies during the film. “But due to the unintended consequences of messing with nature, Lake Powell – which serves 30 million people, has lost half its volume in only 8 years.”

At this point, a helicopter view of a pair of kayakers graphically illustrates the tragic turn of events: the paler shade on the sheer rock banks, which marks the usual water level, towers eerily over their heads.

Speaking to journalists after the showing was Ottawa Riverkeeper, Meredith Brown.

“The Riverkeeper’s role is to educate, to advocate and to work with government bodies to ensure effective regulations are written and upheld,” she explained. “The issues that face the Ottawa River are serious: the public and the politicians are becoming more aware of the importance of our water’s health, yet seven out of ten people here still don’t know that their drinking water comes from this river. There is a disconnect -- there seems to be little understanding of where the water comes from that they use and where it goes after they use it. Yet it is the public that create change, so it is vital that they be educated.” The Riverkeeper program is a way for local people to work on local issues, to express concerns and to take action on them. “Ideally it is the people: the cottage associations, the municipalities and the environmental organisations, that need to take responsibility for their

rivers and waterways,” added Ms. Brown. “The Ottawa river used to be a cold fast salmon river, but logging and damming have made a huge impact. It is a cleaner river than in the 60’s and 70’s, but there are still things going into the water that we don’t know about and have no idea of what the long term consequences will be as a result of.”

Ms. Brown encourages anyone concerned about a region of the river or having witnessed an act of destruction or pollution to call the Riverkeeper hotline at 1 – 888 – 9KEEPER or go to ottawariverkeeper.ca for more information.

“There is not one single government agency with the mandate to enforce protection for the Ottawa River,” she adds in conclusion. “There are only 8 or 10 environmental enforcement officers for the entire province. Therefore public awareness and education is the only way that we can find solutions to our River’s problems.”