



“Tuhaymani'chi Pal Waniqa” (The Water Flows Always)



Directed by: Gina Milanovich and Nils Cowan | 20 min. | United States | 2023 | Documentary

Produced by: Sean Milanovich, Matthew Leivas Sr. and Nils Cowan



Trailer: [Watch](#)

Film: [Website](#)

Photos and Key Art: [Download Press Selects](#)

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Short Synopsis

In the first of a series of global films highlighting Indigenous Peoples from the Wayfinders Circle initiative, water and culture bring together a father and daughter as they fight to protect their Indigenous homelands in Southern California.

Long Synopsis

In the first of a series of global films highlighting Indigenous Peoples from the [Wayfinders Circle](#) initiative, water and culture bring together a father and daughter as they fight to protect their Indigenous homelands in Southern California. Directed by Gina Milanovich (Cahuilla, Cupeño) and Nils Cowan, *Tuhaymani'chi Pal Waniqa (The Water Flows Always)* follows a Cahuilla, Cupeño father and daughter attempting to reconnect in a journey through their Indigenous roots in the ancient springs of the Mojave Desert, just as a new water-mining project threatens their very existence.

About the Production

Tuhaymani'chi Pal Waniqa (The Water Flows Always) premiered in May 2023 as an official selection in the Academy Award-qualifying [Seattle International Film Festival \(SIFF\)](#).

Directed by Gina Milanovich (Cahuilla, Cupeño) and Nils Cowan, the film represents the power of collective filmmaking between Indigenous communities and creative storytellers, influenced by Indigenous guardianship since time immemorial of the region now known as Southern California.

The film seeks to raise awareness of the problems faced by Indigenous tribes in Southern California regarding the water mining project from the Cadiz company. “Our connection to water is really profound. We know our water, we know the land. It's very healing. Healing to the soul, healing to our spirit. It does wonders for our wellbeing. And that's why we go out there. The Western world has treated water as a commodity, but we know in our Indigenous communities it's not. And it's so much more than that water is we treat water as our relative,” shared Sean Milanovich, Ph.D. (Cahuilla), Vice President of the Native American Land Conservancy, and one of the producers of the film.

The film addresses the efforts of protecting water resources and the sacred places of Indigenous nations, permeating the relationship between father and daughter seeking to strengthen their bonds and ancestral roots within their sacred territory. Co-director Gina Milanovich takes part in the production, behind and in front of the cameras, generously allowing the audience to follow her journey connecting with her ancestral lands. “The part of the story where we focus on the relationship between my dad and I was an opportunity for us to reunite, and I hope we can inspire anyone who recognizes the importance of exchanging and learning with these important figures in our lives, who are guiding us and are still here with us today,” said Milanovich.

The production is part of a series of films of the [Wayfinders Circle](#) – a global network of Indigenous Peoples from around the world who work to strengthen self-determination in managing their lands and territories and maintain cultural and spiritual continuity through intergenerational transmission. It is a partnership between the [Wayfinders Circle](#) conveners ([Nia Tero](#), [Pawanka Fund](#), the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners) and the [Native American Land Conservancy \(NALC\)](#) – a member of the Wayfinders Circle that protects and restores sacred sites and areas in their ancestral lands, provides educational programming for Native American youth and the general public, and conducts scientific studies on cultural, biological, and historical resources on sacred lands.

“Having this documentary film involving Tribal members, community members...coming together, celebrating all these beautiful things...is so good,” shared Sean Milanovich. “The water can teach us, the water can help us, the water heals us.”

Impact Campaign

Along with the film festivals’ distribution, an impact campaign is accompanying the rollout of the film. The Native American Land Conservancy (NALC) has identified community and educational screenings as top priorities. Collaborating with various tribal nations and existing water councils in the region, NALC will lead community screenings, as well as organize educational and cultural events throughout 2023 and 2024, with support from the Wayfinders Circle Alliance.

The campaign's central focus is to raise awareness and foster understanding of the issue of water mining in sacred Indigenous lands. It aims to engage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, locally and nationally, by showcasing the Indigenous relationship to the desert, highlighting the cultural significance of the land and water, and emphasizing the intrinsic beauty and power of water beyond its commodification.

Additionally, the campaign seeks to amplify the visibility of the Native American Land Conservancy's vital work in protecting Indigenous lands and cultural resources. It strives to mobilize local Indigenous groups against issues related to industrial water extraction and corporations that exploit Indigenous natural resources. Specifically, the campaign targets the Cadiz water exploitation in the desert's aquifer, rallying support from local communities to combat these challenges.

Directors’ Statement

“As a collaboration between communities and creative storytellers, this film represents months of collective effort built on many centuries of work by the Indigenous Ancestors of the region now known as Southern California. When we first learned of the illegal efforts to mine the water underneath the Mojave Desert, we were more dismayed than surprised. Those feelings soon turned to creative energy as we witnessed the galvanizing force this threat was having among Indigenous Peoples of the area. With both of us deeply motivated to tell stories about underrepresented viewpoints that can have a real impact on environmental issues, we quickly bonded over an approach that would weave together two storylines: An investigative look at the Cadiz water mining project; and the experiences of a father and daughter reconnecting with their traditional homelands and practices. We have been blessed many times over by the relationships and memories made while co-creating this story and can only hope that by bringing it to the Indigenous communities of the Mojave and to international audiences, we can make a difference in protecting sacred lands and waters everywhere.” – Gina Milanovich (Cahuilla, Cupeño) and Nils Cowan.

About the Filmmaking Team

- Gina Milanovich (Cahuilla, Cupeño), director, is a filmmaker who explores stories about the Mojave Desert ecosystem and the efforts of Tribal Nations in Southern California and Arizona to protect their land and water rights.

- Nils Cowan, director, is a documentary producer/writer with twenty years of experience working on award-winning original features and shorts. His work has focused on uplifting and amplifying underrepresented stories and perspectives.
- Sean Milanovich (Cahuilla, Cupeño), producer, serves on the Board of Directors for NALC partner organization, Paayish Neken, and is an enrolled member of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. He earned a Ph.D. in Native American History from UC Riverside in 2021.

About the Collaborators:



The Native American Land Conservancy (NALC) is a US-based nonprofit organization that purchases and owns land collectively, as a land trust, governed by local Native American leaders who have a historical, cultural, and spiritual connection to their ancestral lands and are seen as the legal/practical “owners” and stewards of their lands. The NALC combines Traditional Environmental Knowledge of the local Tribes with the Western scientific paradigm to protect and restore fragile desert ecosystems, Native communities, Native plants, endangered animals, and critical water resources.

- Website: www.nativeamericanland.org | Social Media: [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter/X](#)



The Wayfinders Circle is a new collaborative initiative and platform convened by the Pawanka Fund and Nia Tero, with the guidance of the Council of Elders of the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners (WUISP). The Wayfinders Circle supports and gathers Indigenous guardians from around the world who protect their lands, waters, and territories. It is also a learning network dedicated to investing in Indigenous Wayfinders and sharing possible pathways for human societies to achieve ecological, social, cultural and spiritual harmony.

- Website: www.wayfinderscircle.org | Social Media: [Instagram](#)



Nia Tero is a nonprofit working in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples who sustain thriving territories and cultures to strengthen guardianship of Earth and all beings. Nia Tero upholds a network of place-anchored partnerships with Indigenous Peoples supporting efforts to expand recognition and support for Indigenous guardianship globally.

- Website: <https://www.niatero.org> | Social Media: [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter/X](#) | [LinkedIn](#)



The Pawanka Fund is an Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Learning Initiative committed to the concept of intercultural philanthropy, based on ancestral practices of solidarity and reciprocity of Indigenous Peoples. Intercultural Philanthropy builds from the knowledge that Indigenous Peoples have our own learning processes, systems of knowledge and ways to integrate new information, values, and interpretations and to share them with younger generations.

- Website: www.pawankafund.org | Social Media: [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter/X](#) | [LinkedIn](#)



World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners (WUISP) is an open voluntary alliance of Indigenous spiritual practitioners, shamans, healers, sacred sites guardians, cultural activists, holders of traditional Indigenous knowledge and values, Indigenous organizations and clans committed to working together with the common goal of achieving the mission and vision for protection of Mother Earth and strengthening of pristine ties human-nature- culture for the survival and wellbeing of generations to come.

CREDITS

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Senior Producer
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NILS COWAN

Impact Producer
MARIANNA OLINGER

PRODUCED BY
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