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For The Olympian

A scene from Melissa Young's film about the relationship between Bainbridge Island and a town in Nicaragua, "Islas Hermanas," which shows at noon Saturday as part of the Olympia Environmental Film Festival.

Film fest has environmental theme

Schedule features 12 films and videos shown Friday and Saturday

ROSS RAIHALA, THE OLYMPIAN

"This is an opportunity to get a vivid sense of these environmental issues."-- Melissa Young, film producer, member of Hazel Wolf board of directors

OLYMPIA -- Sheer inspiration drove the creation of the Olympia Environmental Film Festival.

After attending last year's Hazel Wolf Environmental Film Festival at Sleeping Lady in Leavenworth, Taylor Pittman realized such an event was ideal for Olympia.

"There was such a great diversity of people and such an energy," says Pittman, an information and education specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Bringing it to Olympia would give people here an opportunity to mix these outstanding films with local efforts. Truly, this is thinking globally and acting locally."



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The Olympia Environmental Film Festival will make its debut with a dozen films and videos scheduled for Friday and Saturday at the Capitol Theater.

A variety of subjects are tackled, from organic farming in Cuba ("The Greening of Cuba") to the protection of national forests ("Roadless Washington").

"The sign of a really quality environmental film is when, within the space of the film, it raises the issue but also looks at solutions," says Sam Stegeman, the Seattle-based director of the Hazel Wolf festival. "It gives a portrait of the people (involved) and offers alternatives that might work in the future."

And moving images capture attention in a vital fashion, says Melissa Young, producer of the film "Islas Hermanas" and member of the Hazel Wolf board of directors.

"I think that film or video can bring an immediacy and sense of reality to issues in a way that the written media cannot," says Young, who lives on Whidbey Island. "This is an opportunity to get a vivid sense of these environmental issues."

Young's work "Islas Hermanas" examines the 13-year relationship between the people of Ometepe, Nicaragua, and Washington's Bainbridge Island. Through a cooperative effort between the two communities, organic coffee from Ometepe has been sold in the United States, with profits funding clean water and schooling projects in Nicaragua.

"It's a wonderful example of how people are using an environmentally friendly product to help promote an international grassroots relationship," Young says. "And it's a contrast to some of the images conjured up by globalization on a major scale. This is a small, people-to-people effort."

Another film, "Taking a Second Look: Communities and Dam Removal," follows towns in Wisconsin, California and Maine as they choose to return local waterways to natural, free-flowing states.

Karen Meyer of Portland produced the piece, which encompasses the initial concerns and fears of townspeople as well as the results after the dam was removed.

"They all faced the same fears and questions," Meyer says. "And there was usually a knee-jerk reaction to keep the dam in place. But the results were far better than people thought possible. Rivers came back in a matter of months and water quality improved greatly."

Meyer has watched her work influence other communities across the country. And that sense of education and advocacy lies at the heart of the Olympia



Environmental Film Festival.

"A town in Pennsylvania was considering a problem dam and the city council was undecided," Meyer says. "They watched the video program as part of their research and they ended up voting 5-0 in favor of removing the dam. And in their report, they directly referenced the video.

"It's been tremendous."

Ross Raihala covers music and entertainment for The Olympian and can be reached at 754-5406 or OlyRoss@aol.com.

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