

# A FIERCE GREEN FIRE

THE BATTLE FOR A LIVING PLANET

Directed by Mark Kitchell

USA, 2012, 110 min, Color & B/W



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## FESTIVALS & SCREENINGS

**Sundance Film Festival 2012**  
World Premiere – *January 2012*

**Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital**  
**(Closing Night Film)**  
Washington, DC Premiere – *Forthcoming: Sunday, March 25, 2012*

*More festivals and screenings will be announced in February.*

## EARLY PRAISE FOR THE FILM

"Oscar-nominated filmmaker Mark Kitchell (*Berkeley in the Sixties*) **winningly spans the broad scope of environmental history in this comprehensive doc**, connecting its origins with the variety of issues still challenging society today. Broadcast exposure is likely with theatrical release a distinct possibility."

– Justin Lowe, *The Hollywood Reporter*

**"Sweeping and timely."**

– Judy Fahys, *The Salt Lake Tribune*

**"Brilliant. Should be assigned viewing for all of us, especially those political leaders currently manning the helm of spaceship earth."**

– Jay Meehan, *Park Record*

**"Inspiring. Stirring."**

– Mina Hochberg, *Outside Magazine* "Best of Sundance 2012"

"Rarely do environmental-themed films come with the ambitious scope of 'A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle for a Living Planet'...which **aims at nothing less than the history of environmentalism itself.**"

– Mark Olsen, *Los Angeles Times*

"A Fierce Green Fire is **a sweeping history** of environmental activism in the past half-century."

– Jascha Hoffman, *Nature*

**"Historically significant."**

– Naomi Wolf, *The Guardian*

"The material is vast, and it's an incredibly dynamic film. **It's shaping up to be the documentary of record on the environmental movement. I think it'll be hugely successful.**"

– Cara Mertes, Director, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program

"While it sounds like a tall order to encompass more than half a century of environmental activism history in one film, Kitchell somehow manages to do so in a way that feels **comprehensive and vibrant** enough to inspire new converts."

– Basil Tsiokos, *what (not) to doc*

## **ABOUT THE FILM**

A FIERCE GREEN FIRE: The Battle For a Living Planet is the first big-picture exploration of the environmental movement – grassroots and global activism spanning fifty years from conservation to climate change. From halting dams in the Grand Canyon to battling 20,000 tons of toxic waste at Love Canal; from Greenpeace saving the whales to Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers saving the Amazon; from climate change to the promise of transforming our civilization, the film tells vivid stories about people fighting – and succeeding – against enormous odds.

It's not easy being green. Environmentalists have been revered and reviled, for being killjoys and Cassandras. Every battle begins as a lost cause and even the victories have to be fought for again and again. Still, environmentalism is one of the great causes of the twentieth century, and one of the keys to the twenty-first. It has arisen at a juncture in history when humans have come to rival nature as a power determining the fate of the earth. It's the battle for a living planet.

A Fierce Green Fire focuses on activism; it's about movements more than issues. It's a more engaging approach, full of drama and passion. It's also a more open-ended approach than cant and rant. We emphasize synthesis, bringing together all the pieces of the environmental picture to explore connections, resonance, larger visions and deeper meanings. Never before has a film told the full story of environmentalism. Our hope is it will be a defining film that reaches and teaches a huge and hungry audience.

*"The material is vast and it's an incredibly dynamic film," says Cara Mertes, head of the Sundance Institute Documentary Film program. "It's shaping up to be the documentary of record on the environmental movement. I think it'll be hugely successful."* (Quoted in Bruce Barcott's On Earth profile, "Lights, Camera, Activism")

### **A Fierce Green Fire unfolds in five acts, each with a key story and a compelling character:**

- David Brower and the Sierra Club's battle to halt dams in the Grand Canyon
- Lois Gibbs and the Love Canal residents' struggle against 20,000 tons of toxic chemicals
- Paul Watson and Greenpeace's campaigns to save whales and baby harp seals
- Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers' fight to save the Amazon rainforest
- Bill McKibben and the collective effort to address issues of climate change

### **Featured are:**

- The incomparable Lois Gibbs, still fighting for all the Loises;
- Paul "I-work-for-whales" Watson;
- Bill McKibben, author, activist and founder of 350.org;
- Paul Hawken and Stewart Brand, alternative ecology visionaries;
- Martin Litton, at 92 still thundering about how you've got to have "hatred in your heart";
- Carl Pope and John Adams, longtime heads of the Sierra Club and NRDC;
- Bob Bullard, environmental justice advocate, who closes the film on a universal note, saying *"There's no Hispanic air. There's no African-American air. There's air! And if you breathe air - and most people I know do breathe air -- then I would consider you an environmentalist."*

## **FILMMAKER STATEMENT**

**By Mark Kitchell, Producer, Director, Writer of *A Fierce Green Fire***

Like *Berkeley in the Sixties*, my previous work which has become one of the defining films about the protest movements of the 1960s, *A Fierce Green Fire* started with the idea that a big-picture synthesis of environmentalism was needed. It's the biggest movement the world has ever seen, yet so broad and diffuse that we lack a larger sense of what it was about. This film is meant to take stock, explore the historical meaning of the environmental movement, where we've come from and where we're heading. It was a hugely ambitious undertaking, and has proved to be the greatest challenge of my career.

In making the film we had two big concerns. One was what to include and what to leave out. The second was shaping the film -- how to connect the diverse parts, eras and issues; structure it all into a cohesive and coherent story; find the arc of the environmental movement. All of these things we labored over from first to last. The first iteration of this film was a six-part series.

After a few years of trying to launch it, Edward O. Wilson, the eminent conservation biologist and advisor to the film, told me we were never going to get something so big funded; and, if we did, no one would want to watch that much. He suggested a smaller, more entertaining film that focuses on five of the most important and dramatic events and people. That proved to be the key.

Those five main stories -- David Brower and the Sierra Club halting dams in the Grand Canyon; Lois Gibbs and the people of Love Canal battling 20,000 tons of toxic waste; Paul Watson and Greenpeace saving the whales; Chico Mendes and the rubbertappers saving the Amazon forest; and (what else could we end on?) the twenty year struggle to deal with climate change -- are emblematic of parts and eras of the environmental movement. So we built five acts into an hourglass shape. Each begins wide, with origins and context. Next we narrow in on the main story, more fully told. Then we open up again, to explore ramifications and evolution of that strand.

The film went through two rounds of shooting interviews, gathering archival material, scripting and editing a rough-cut. At first we were just trying to make things work. Some stories, like biodiversity, fell out. We had to put off the last act on climate change until there was more funding. We worked on the acts in pieces and I wasn't sure it would all connect, become the synthesis I had in mind. By May of 2010 we had a first cut of the full film. It showed a lot of promise. The middle acts were working well but the first and last acts needed to be taken further.

The fine-cut phase in 2011 was tortured. We got a Sundance Documentary Fund grant, but it ran out and we had to stop. Then a deal for completion funds fell through and we had to stop again. It was only upon acceptance to the Sundance Film Festival that finishing the film came together. We had a 135-minute cut that I thought was final. But the consensus came back that it was too much. In an amazing three weeks, two great editors working with me cut the film down to 110 minutes. For the first time we shaped the film as a whole. We took a couple more stabs at an ending, and finally came to something just right. It was deeply gratifying to behold all the favors and contributions everybody brought to my baby. And in the end, I think, I hope we succeeded in capturing that big-picture synthesis of the environmental movement. How well we explored the meanings of environmentalism and how useful it is going forward remain to be seen. But it's exciting to see the world taking interest. It's time for that next step of the environmental journey.

## SYNOPSIS – ACTS 1-5

- Act 1 focuses on the conservation movement of the '60s, the Sierra Club, David Brower and the battle to halt dams in the Grand Canyon. It grows out of three earlier battles to halt dams: Hetch Hetchy, which was lost; Dinosaur Monument, which was won; and Glen Canyon, which was sacrificed. Saving the Grand Canyon looks like a lost cause until David Brower places ads denouncing the dams. The IRS retaliates and the uproar becomes front-page news. Opposition grows until Congress bows to pressure – canceling and finally prohibiting dams. It is the biggest victory yet, a pivotal battle that brings the flowering of conservation. However, Brower is soon forced out of the Sierra Club. He is coming to a larger vision, just as Earth Day heralds a new environmental consciousness.
- Act 2 looks at '70s environmentalism around pollution, focusing on the battle led by Lois Gibbs over Love Canal. We connect Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring* to the golden era of legislation and groups like NRDC that arose to enforce regulations. But it takes Love Canal to put toxic waste on the map. Lois Gibbs leads angry housewives in a two-year battle to save their children from 20,000 tons of toxic chemicals. They are relentless, protesting and conducting health studies and demanding relocation, even taking EPA officials hostage until President Carter agrees to buy them out. However it's just the beginning. President Reagan counterattacks. Grassroots activists fighting toxics in their own backyard arise all over the country; and environmental racism gives birth to an environmental justice movement.
- Act 3 is about alternative ecology strands, with the main story being Greenpeace's campaign to save the whales. We begin with going back to the land, building ecological alternatives and exploring renewable energy. Greenpeace starts by protesting nuclear bombs. But it is putting themselves in front of harpoons to stop whaling that launches Greenpeace on the wildest ride of any environmental group. Soon they are fighting on every front all over the world. Paul Watson, thrown out of Greenpeace for tossing a sealer's club in the water, is reborn as Sea Shepherd and takes on whalers. Radicals and mainstream come together for a moratorium on whaling – one of environmentalism's greatest victories, yet a battle that must be fought again and again.
- Act 4 tells of the rise of global issues in the '80s. It focuses on the struggle to save the Amazon, led by Chico Mendes and the rubbertappers. They campaign for extractive reserves. The pivotal battle comes in 1988 over a plantation called Cachoeira. Chico wins – but is assassinated. His death proves to be the turning point, to an era of reserves that now total a third of the Amazon. Yet deforestation still threatens to turn the Amazon into a semi-desert. We expand to look at movements of the global south like Chipko in India; Wangari Maathai's Greenbelt Movement in Kenya; and Bolivia's water wars -- then close with questions of equity and sustainability.
- Act 5 concerns climate change. First we look at its scientific origins. Then comes a twenty-year story of frustration from Rio to Kyoto to Copenhagen. We explore opposition; how the movement failed to deal with the issue; and the role of disasters like Hurricane Katrina in bringing it back. COP15 ends in breakdown and our focus shifts from top-down politics to bottom-up movements. Paul Hawken relates his *Blessed Unrest* revelation: two million groups working on environmental and social justice issues. We explore environmentalism as civilizational transformation, then close with the need for hope and the realization that we have all become environmentalists.

## **INTERVIEWEES IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE**

### **Stewart Brand**

Publisher of the Whole Earth Catalog and the Co-Evolution Quarterly, recently wrote "Whole Earth Discipline" exploring paths to the future.

### **Paul Hawken**

Author of "The Ecology of Commerce", "Natural Capitalism" and "Blessed Unrest", eco-entrepreneur and explorer of the frontiers of environmentalism, now pursuing new solar technologies.

### **Tom Turner**

Author and editor at Friends of the Earth and Earthjustice, a protégé of David Brower who is now writing his biography.

### **Doug Scott**

Conservation activist and organizer of Earth Day, who was legislative director for the Sierra Club and formed the Campaign for American Wilderness, now part of the Pew Environment Group.

### **Martin Litton**

Brower's main ally in conservation battles from Dinosaur Monument in the '50s to the Grand Canyon and Redwood National Park in the '60s.

### **Jerry Mander**

Ad man whose ads turned the tide on dams in the Grand Canyon, wrote "Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television" and other books, founded the International Forum on Globalization and led WTO protests.

### **Philip Shabecoff**

NY Times environmental journalist, founded Greenwire, wrote "A Fierce Green Fire" on which this film is loosely based, as well as "Earth Rising"; "A New Name for Peace"; and "Poisoned Profits" with his wife Alice.

### **Lois Gibbs**

The archetypal angry housewife with sick children, who led Love Canal residents in a two-year battle to combat toxic waste, then started Center for Health, Environment and Justice to help other Loises -- thirty years on the frontlines of grassroots activism.

### **John Adams**

Founder of the Natural Resources Defense Council, led it from a law firm for the environment to one of the most influential environmental groups.

### **Carl Pope**

Executive Director of the Sierra Club, who began campaigning for the Clean Air Act and led efforts up to the recent Stop New Coal campaign.

### **Robert Bullard**

Pioneering environmental justice advocate and author of "Dumping in Dixie" as well as other books and the study, "Toxic Waste and Race."

**Stephanie Mills**

Campaigner on population issues, bioregionalist, editor and author of “Whatever Happened to Ecology?” and “The Post Carbon Reader.”

**Paul Relis**

Led the Santa Barbara Community Environment Council, pioneered alternative technology, led changes in recycling and sustainable use.

**Lee Swenson**

Anarchist and pacifist who led the Farallones Institute, an incubator of ecological alternatives.

**Amory Lovins**

Physicist-turned-activist, who pioneered the “soft path” of conservation and renewable energy, founded Rocky Mountain Institute to work with business and government, wrote “Natural Capitalism”, “Winning the Oil Endgame” and just published his magnum opus, “Reinventing Fire.”

**Rex Weyler**

Draft dodger who helped found Greenpeace, was part of the early whale and seal campaigns, wrote the defining history of Greenpeace and is still active in many causes

**Paul Watson**

Another founder of Greenpeace, who dreamed up the baby harp seal Campaign, was kicked out of Greenpeace for going too far, and has grown stronger ever since as the Sea Shepherd Society

**Wolfgang Sachs**

A founder of German Greenpeace and Die Grunen; a member of the Wuppertal Institute, Germany’s green think tank; author, critic and expert around development and equity issues; sustainability and justice.

**Thomas Lovejoy**

Conservation biologist, coined “biodiversity” and debt-for-nature swaps. At WWF he conceived Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project, long-running study in Amazonas state of biodiversity loss. Now head of Heinz Center for Science, Economics & Environment.

**Adrian Cowell**

Journalist who made the defining films about the Amazon, “The Decade of Destruction.” He was close to Chico Mendes, and helped bring him to the world’s attention. Recently deceased.

**Barbara Bramble**

Longtime head of National Wildlife Federation’s international affairs Center, she was an early campaigner against the destructive impacts of development and helped to reform World Bank environmental policies. That was how she met Chico Mendes and became a key US ally.

**Vijaya Nagarajan**

Professor and author, who has worked on campaigns in India and worldwide on sustainable development, equity, justice and religion.

**Jennifer Morgan**

Climate activist, she began with WWF International in Europe, led their efforts from Kyoto to Copenhagen, and now she is head of the Climate and Energy Program at the World Resources Institute.

**Stephen Schneider**

Pioneering climate scientist at National Center for Atmospheric Research and Stanford, author and advisor to presidents. Recently deceased, this is one of the last interviews with him.

**Bill McKibben**

Author of “The End of Nature,” the first popular book about global warming. He moved to activism after a decade of frustration, founded 350.org with his students, and built it into a leading organization battling climate change worldwide. Stopping Keystone XL is his latest victory.

**Joe Romm**

Author of “Hell and High Water” and leading blogger at Climate Progress. He was Assistant Secretary of Energy working on efficiency and renewables in the Clinton Administration.

**Mark Hertsgaard**

Author of “Hot: Surviving the Next Fifty Years” and “Earth Odyssey.” Longtime journalist for The Nation on environmental issues.



## ABOUT THE TEAM



**Mark Kitchell**  
**Director/Producer/Writer**

Mark Kitchell is best known for *Berkeley in the Sixties*, which won the Audience Award at the 1990 Sundance Film Festival, was nominated for an Academy Award, and won other top honors. The film has become a well-loved classic, one of the defining documentaries about the protest movements that shook America during the 1960s. In the twenty years since that film he has worked in non-fiction television, made films for hire, taught at UC Santa Cruz, done freelance production and developed *A Fierce Green Fire*. Kitchell's career began with *Grand Theft Auto*. He went to

NYU film school, where he made *The Godfather Comes to Sixth St.*, a cinema verite look at his neighborhood caught up in filming *The Godfather II* – for which he received another (student) Academy Award nomination.



**Marc N. Weiss**  
**Executive Producer**

Marc Weiss is best known as creator and Executive Producer of P.O.V., the award-winning documentary series now preparing for its 25th season on PBS. He has been a leader in the independent media movement for forty years as a filmmaker, journalist, organizer and innovator in the use of the internet to engage people on social issues -- with P.O.V. Interactive in the mid-'90s and Web Lab in 1997. In 2011, Marc produced *When Strangers Click* with Robert Kenner and *Gun Fight* with Barbara Kopple, both for HBO.



**Ken Schneider**  
**Editor, Fine-Cut Phase**

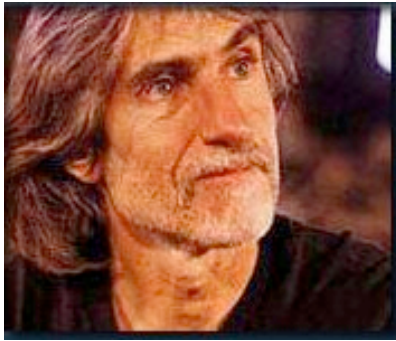
Ken Schneider has lots of distinguished documentaries to his credit: *Have You Heard From Johannesburg?*; *Sowing the Seeds of Justice*; *Orozco: Man of Fire*; *Freedom Machines*; *Ralph Ellison: An American Journey*; *The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It*; *Born in the USA*; *Regret to Inform*; *School Colors*; *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin*; and many more. With his wife Marcia Jarmel he produced and directed *Speaking in Tongues*.

**Veronica Selver & Jon Beckhardt**  
**Editors, Rough-Cut Phase**

Veronica Selver, a veteran, and Jon Beckhardt, a newcomer, co-edited the rough-cut. Veronica directed the seminal film about gays in America, *Word Is Out*. She also made *KPFA on the Air* and *Raising the Roof*. She has edited some great documentaries: *On Company Business*; *You Got to Move*; *Coming Out Under Fire*; *Blacks and Jews*; and *Berkeley in the Sixties*. Jon is a

graduate of Oberlin. He worked as animator on Mark Kitchell's previous project, *Integral Consciousness*.

*A Fierce Green Fire* was his first big editing assignment.



**Vicente Franco**  
**Cinematographer**

Vicente Franco's credits include: *The Storm That Swept Mexico*; *Waiting to Inhale*; *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*; *Speaking In Tongues*; *The Judge and the General*; *California and the American Dream*; *Thirst*; and *Freedom on My Mind*. He also produced and directed three films with Gail Dolgin: *Cuba Va*; *Daughter From Danang*; and *The Summer of Love* for American Experience.

**Original music for the film came from:**

- **George Michalski**, a high school friend of Kitchell's who has worked with Barbra Streisand and has numerous gold records.
- **Sonya Kitchell**, Mark Kitchell's niece, a songwriter and singer who has worked with Herbie Hancock, recorded five albums and has another due soon.
- **Garth Stevenson**, who plays bass for Sonya Kitchell and others, and is a budding composer
- **Randall Wallace**, a supporter who stepped in to help with scoring in the rush to finish.

## **CREDITS**

Producer, Director & Writer

MARK KITCHELL

Cinematographer

VICENTE FRANCO

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Jim Iacona	Dan Escobar
Andy Black	Shawn Adams
Gerald Saldo	Reid Riddell

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MARC N. WEISS

Associate Producer  
Tamara Badgley-Horowitz

in association with Whitewater Films

sponsored by San Francisco Film Society

Narrator

DAVID DENNY

Music

GEORGE MICHALSKI  
RANDALL WALLACE  
GARTH STEVENSON  
SONYA KITCHELL

Inspired by the book

A FIERCE GREEN FIRE  
by Philip Shabecoff

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Stephen Schneider  
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Philip Shabecoff  
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MICHAEL ROBINSON FLEMING – Assistant On Line Editor  
KIM AUBRY – Post Production Supervisor  
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