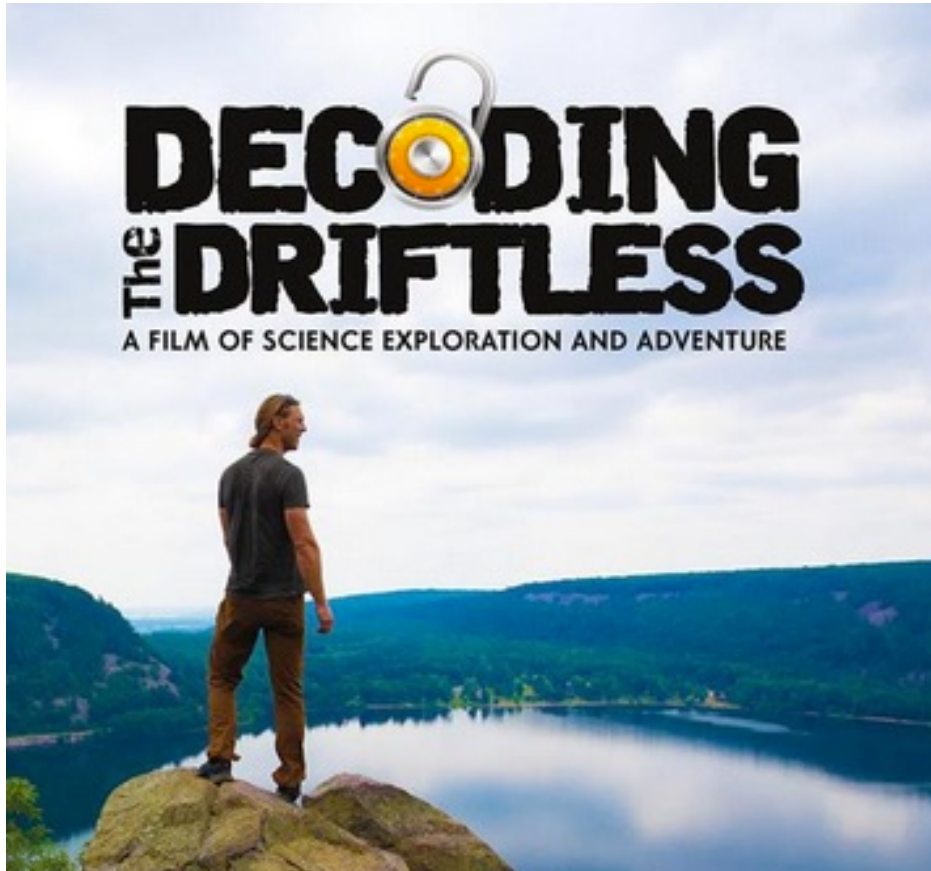


Group pushes Driftless knowledge, conservation

By Nate Jackson | The Country Today | Mar 3, 2019



The documentary "Decoding the Driftless" was produced by Emmy Award-winning filmmakers George Howe and Tim Jacobson of Sustainable Driftless and Rob Nelson of Untamed Science.

ALMA — George Howe quoted Senegalese forestry engineer Baba Dioum, saying, "In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught."

Howe, of Sustainable Driftless, a 501©(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring resource conservation, vibrant communities and sustainable growth in the Driftless Region, is working to make sure people are taught about, understand, love and conserve the Driftless Region of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois.

"No matter what conservation groups are doing, if the general public doesn't have a foundational awareness of what we have here and how precious it is, they are always going

to be limited with talking to a small group of people,” Howe said Feb. 28 at a presentation of his group’s film, “Decoding the Driftless,” at the Buffalo County Bluff Prairie winter management meeting at the Alma Rod & Gun Club. “We need a broad base of awareness that inspires people to connect with nature. Once they connect, they’re going to come back.”

With the help of Swedish filmmaker Jonas Stenstrom of Untamed Science and six-time Emmy-winning wildlife cinematographer Neil Rettig, Sustainable Driftless made “Decoding the Driftless” to focus on the origins, diversity and resources of the Driftless Region. In 2014, the group won a regional Emmy for their documentary “Mysteries of the Driftless.”

“I’ve spent my whole life doing things to try to reach people and motivate them to care about conservation,” Howe said. “I came to the realization that people just don’t know. They’re busy, and they just haven’t had that experience or that golden moment to connect with nature.”

Howe said his group is working to get the new film in schools and libraries in the region. They are working on a cut of the movie for public television as well as podcasts, short videos and a website with links to places shown in the film.

“We felt this film was the first big project that needed to be in place,” Howe said “It’s like building a house; you need a good foundation.”

To put the film in schools, Howe’s group has created resources such as teacher materials, discussion guides, laboratory exercises and field trip ideas to help schools teach students about the Driftless.

“Teachers are busy,” Howe said. “You need to meet them and offer resources.”

The 61-minute documentary takes a look at the past 500 million years to uncover how the region formed and has evolved and why the region is the only “island driftless region” in the world. Interviews with regional experts examine the archaeology, paleontology, geology and biology of the Driftless.

“People often ask me, ‘What’s the biggest threat to the Driftless Area?’” Howe said. “I say, ‘The same thing that’s the biggest threat to the whole world.’

“Fortunately, because the Driftless Region is so diverse, it’s more resilient than a lot of habitats and eco-types. But I’ve seen plenty of studies and models that show even if we stop all fossil fuel burning right now, we’re still going to lose some species and habitats. All we can do is do what we can and try to educate people.”

Since unveiling the documentary last September, the film has been shown to tens of thousands of people, Howe said.

“And we’re really just getting started,” he said.

For more information visit www.sustainabledriftless.org.