

# Patagonia Rising

A film by  
**Brian Lilla**

88 minutes, color, digital, English & Spanish w/English subtitles, 2011



## **FIRST RUN FEATURES**

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## **Short Synopsis**

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Over the past century more than 45,000 large dams have redefined river corridors around the globe with disastrous results. Descending the Baker River from the Northern Patagonia Ice-cap to its terminus at the Pacific Ocean, *Patagonia Rising* investigates a controversial plan to build five large hydroelectric dams in Chile's famed wilderness. Stopping off at Patagonia's most remote frontier ranches, this engaging story brings voice to the iconic South American cowboys, Gauchos, caught in the crossfire of future energy demands. Chile could become a leader in sustainable energy development, or it could continue down the road to squandering the pure watersheds of Patagonia. Juxtaposing the pro-dam business sector with renewable energy experts, *Patagonia Rising* brings intimate awareness to this global conflict over water and power.

## **Long Synopsis**

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Deep in the heart of Chile's Patagonia region flow two of the world's purest rivers, the Baker and Pascua. Fed by vast glacial systems, these free-flowing watersheds drive biodiversity in temperate rainforests, estuaries and marine ecosystems. They also are the life source for Patagonia's most tenacious residents, the Gauchos. Five huge dams are planned for these rivers...but at what cost? The award-winning documentary *Patagonia Rising* captures the heated battle between those who wish to exploit the rivers and those who wish to preserve the rivers and surrounding lands, as well the traditional lifestyle of its inhabitants.

Isolated and largely undeveloped, the gorgeous Patagonian landscape is dotted with remote ranches run by Gauchos, the cowboys of South America, who endure Patagonia's relentless winds and harsh, dark winters in the river valleys. Now a multi-national energy corporation has begun plans to build major hydroelectric dams on the Baker and Pascua rivers that would permanently alter the Patagonian landscape. Promoted as a renewable energy source, damming these major rivers would make floodplains out of river valleys, force many ranchers off their land and wreak havoc on the massive ice fields and watersheds already under stress from global warming.

In the past three years increased flooding due to climate change has redefined the Baker River's floodplain and created death traps to families living in its path. For the Arratia clan, the loss of family, farmlands and live-stock has been tragic. Living directly below the Colonia Glacier, Juevenal Arratia was nearly killed by a flood while riding his horse. Downstream one of his nephews drowned while another remained trapped high inside a barn.

*Patagonia Rising* captures the heated debate between Chile's energy corporations, who claim hydroelectric dams are necessary to serve Chile's increasing energy needs, and renewable energy experts, who claim Chile's needs could be met by more sustainable sources and conservation and decry the irreversible damage the dams would do to the environment, as well as the debate between Patagonians themselves.

Globally, 45,000 major dams have been built over the past century, and have caused the once-teeming ocean life near the deltas of these rivers dwindle. *Patagonia Rising* calls into question the wisdom of blocking the world's major waterways. As Lilla's camera takes in the striking natural beauty of Patagonia's Andes mountains and plains, *Patagonia Rising* looks at water, power and whether power from the dams would be worth the high price.

## **Filmmaker Bios**

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### **Director**

Brian Lilla is an Oakland, California filmmaker whose evolving success hinges on his creative ability to merge marginalized people with honest and intimate storytelling.

Lilla's last documentary, *Tale Of Two Bondage Models*, screened to sold-out audiences at the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival and went on to show at international festivals around the globe. In 2004 Lilla directed the documentary *Ghetto Fabulous*, following the daily lives of young black men known as the Falcon Boys, and unveiling the talents, struggles, and truths of living in the face of murder, poverty, and crime. Lilla made his directorial debut in 2000 with *20 To Life*. Now, returning to his mountaineering roots, Lilla turns his attention to *Patagonia Rising* and the global topics of water and power.

### **Producer, Sound Mixer**

Greg Miller is a San Francisco, California filmmaker committed to documentary storytelling. Greg's 2007 documentary debut, *La Revolución Comunicativa*, exposed Venezuela's burgeoning community radio and television movement. Through building relationships with locals in urban and rural communities he was allowed intimate access to the Venezuelan people who are revolutionizing broadcast media. Screening in film festivals and political conferences across the United States and Canada, *La Revolución Comunicativa* won Best New Documentary at a festival premiere in Monterey, CA in February 2008. Greg currently works as a location sound mixer on programs for PBS, the History Channel, MTV, and documentaries slated for theatrical release. Passionate about exposing stories that amplify the voices of the overlooked and misrepresented, Greg brings his attention back to South America and the voices rising from Patagonia.

## **Director Statement**

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Fifteen years ago I was in Patagonia and the place blew my mind. When I was approached to direct a documentary that could potentially impact the decision to not build the dams, I immediately jumped on board. How I went from making super-8 skateboard films to getting caught up in an international controversy over water and power still has me baffled. Before filmmaking much of my life was focused on having a good adventure. Directing *Patagonia Rising* allowed me to keep that adventure alive. Through the process of making the documentary, I learned so much regarding the human relationship to rivers. My greatest hope is that this experience transcends to audiences and makes a positive impact on the choices we make regarding water and power.

## **Making Of *Patagonia Rising***

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*Patagonia Rising* required filmmaking in one of the most remote regions of the planet. Outfitted in a 16 foot inflatable raft, a 3 person production team spent 10 days floating the Baker River from the Northern Patagonia Ice-cap to its terminus at the Pacific Ocean. Some of the ranches along the river take four days to get to by horse or boat. Every time we unexpectedly arrived at a ranch, a sheep would get slaughtered for the next three meals. It was a complete time warp. Some families had no electricity. Recharging camera batteries and downloading media was only possible if a ranch had a solar panel. Besides limited power, the production was at the mercy of shooting in one of the rainiest places on the planet. The camera should have died several times due to water damage.

After floating the river, the production joined a climate change expedition climate on the Northern Patagonia Ice-cap. The production team hiked 40 miles to reach the ice. Of all the challenges, one of the greatest was getting an interview with HydroAysen, the company proposing the dams. Four hours before flying out of Chile, the production was granted an interview with the general manger of the dam project. By the end of our trip, the production shot 40 out of 42 days. Releasing *Patagonia Rising* in 2012 is perfect timing as the Chile is now taking the decision to build the dams to their supreme court.