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Scene from "What Lies Upstream" (Hyrax Films)



by Rose Pacatte

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The PBS series "Independent Lens" will air a 2017 documentary next week about the largest water crisis to occur in the United States: "[What Lies Upstream](#)." It happened in West Virginia in January 2014, barely four months before news of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

Documentary filmmaker Cullen Hoback decides to investigate the leakage of the chemical [MCHM](#) into the Elk River; his task leads him to discover persons who are whistleblowers, others who are complicit in covering up toxins in the water and lobbyists who write laws to undo environmental protections. The chemical is mostly made of 4-Methylcyclohexanemethanol and is used in coal mining, to "wash" the burnable coal of dirt and other impurities.

As I mention in the [essay](#) on care for the Earth and a review of this film over at Be Media Mindful blog, it reminds me very much of the 2011 film "The Last Mountain". The two people who are common to both of these films are West Virginia Sen. [Joe Manchin](#), who voted against the [Stream Protection Rule](#) (and other environmental protections) and [Scott Pruitt](#), current head of the Environmental Protection Agency. So far, [according to The New York Times](#), as of October 2017, the Trump administration had overturned or was on the way to overturning 67 environmental protections rules put in place to raise standards for clean air and water and to protect people from known carcinogens and other toxins

It seems to me that this timely new film establishes that the current attention given to Pruitt's living situation in Washington, D.C., and pay raises for officials in the EPA, are miniscule compared to the environmental disaster ahead. They are distracting us from what Pruitt and this administration are really doing — dismantling environmental protections that are humanity's best hope for living in a healthy world.

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