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BIFF 2013: A final watery frontier

'The Last Ocean' presents international call to save an ocean ecosystem from fishing

By Abby Faires - February 14, 2013



A penguin in the Ross Sea

media credit: Photo by John Weller

Nearly seven years ago, John Weller and Peter Young traveled to the southern tip of Antarctica and started filming *The Last Ocean*. By capturing the pristine beauty of the Ross Sea, Weller and Young were documenting one of the last intact marine ecosystems on earth.

Their goal was to stop the fishing of a key predator in the Ross Sea ecosystem: the Antarctic toothfish. Part of what is so extraordinary about the Ross Sea ecosystem is that it is still fully intact. It's healthy, and it's thriving. Fishing for the toothfish, however, could change everything.

"Interconnectivity in an ecosystem is an incredibly complex thing," says Vicki Goldstein, founder of the Colorado Ocean Coalition. "You can't just pull something out."

Sold as Chilean Seabass in fish markets around the world, the Antarctic toothfish has become such a lucrative catch for international fisheries that many now refer to it as white gold. But by targeting the Antarctic toothfish, fisheries are not simply removing one animal from the Ross Sea. They are removing an entire species, which has a cascade effect on all other animals in that ecosystem.

"I'm sure most people have gone into a restaurant, tried it, and thought it was absolutely delicious, but they have no idea what is really going on behind the scenes," says Goldstein.

For Weller and Young, *The Last Ocean* is about taking people behind the scenes to unmask the corporate fishing industry and the loss of an entire ecosystem — an ecosystem whose "creatures rode the continent down as Pangaea spread over 100 million years ago," says Weller.

"Traveling by boat, you get a real sense of how far it is from humanity," Young says of the Ross Sea. "You get a sense that this is our last pristine, untouched stretch of ocean on the planet, and you get a sense of how ridiculous it is that we send boats all the way down there to catch Antarctic toothfish to feed the wealthy, dominant and rich people of the world."

Weller, Young and ecologist Dave Ainley, founders of the Last Ocean Project, are now pushing the 25 member states of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to end all fishing in the Ross Sea.

The project "is not about locking up the Ross Sea and banning people from it," says Young. It's just about shifting placing value on a unique ecosystem.

"This place is spectacularly beautiful," says Mark Spalding, president of the Ocean Foundation. "It is Serengeti-like in its quality of life, which, none of us really think of the Antarctic as being full of life, but it is."

Spalding and the Ocean Foundation have worked with Weller to raise and disburse funds for the project.

For Young and Weller, *The Last Ocean* is a wake-up call. It's a film to "make us understand this beast that we're all part of: the global economy," says Young. "We need to be conscious of it."

Weller says he believes the Ross Sea is "one of the only places on this earth that we [as humans] have not intrinsically changed because of our industry."

If the global community can work together to stop fishing in the Ross Sea, Weller, Young and their fleet of scientists say the ecosystem can be saved.

"It's a film to provide hope," Young says. "I'm an optimist, and that's what's kept me going for the last six years."

The Last Ocean will premiere at 12 p.m. Feb. 15 at the First United Methodist Church. See www.biff1.com for more information.

This story is part of our complete coverage of [BIFF 2013](#).

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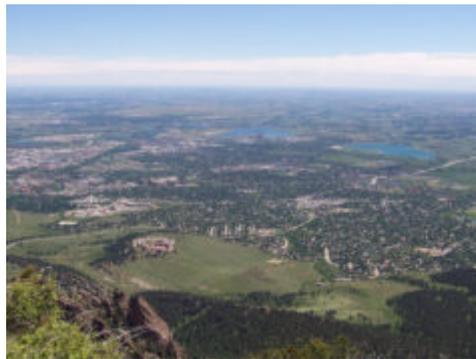
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