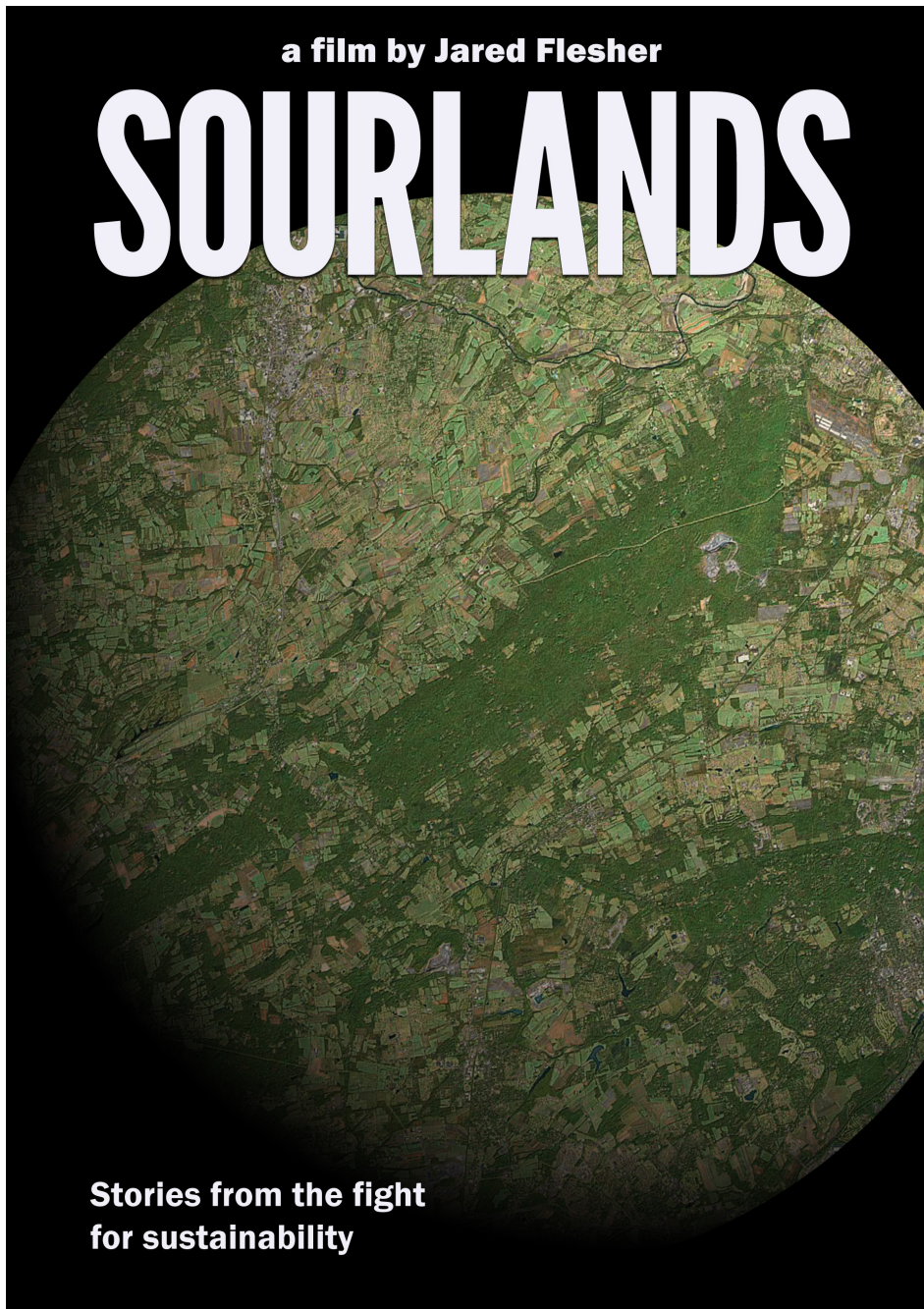


# PRESS KIT



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# SOURLANDS SYNOPSIS

The largest city in the United States is, by far, New York.

Philadelphia is the fifth largest.

Separating them is New Jersey, the most densely populated state.

Directly between New York and Philly — and all those people — there is a forest that has survived the bulldozers of development. The locals call this place the Sourland Mountain, or sometimes simply “the Sourlands.”

SOURLANDS, the documentary, tells the story of this green oasis from the perspective of its remarkable citizens.

## CHAPTER ONE: FARMERS

The Sourland Mountain has never been a good place to farm, due to its thin, rocky, and often wet soil. But for hundreds of years, that hasn't stopped some from trying. For farmers without money to buy land in the fertile valleys nearby — some of the most expensive farmland in the entire country — a homestead on the mountain was often their only option.

Aubrey Yarbrough, age 29, and without land of her own, is the latest farmer to try her luck here. SOURLANDS follows Aubrey through one summer of farming on borrowed farmland. It is a summer that becomes defined by record-setting rainfall, extreme heat, and the destruction of Hurricane Irene. Farming has always been a difficult way to make a living. Aubrey learns first-hand that the challenge becomes magnified on marginal soils in an era of global climate change.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE FOREST

A deep forest is exactly what many neotropical songbirds are looking for. That's why every spring birds fly to the Sourlands from as far as South America to breed and raise their chicks. For these threatened birds, the Sourland Mountain is one of the last safe places in the neighborhood.

SOURLANDS tells the story of the forest's ecological importance, as well as the grave threats it faces.

According to local conservationists, much of the Sourlands forest is dying. An out-of-control deer herd has been eating every native plant in sight — halting the regeneration of trees — and paving the way for an invasion of deer-resistant foreign plants. As a result, wildlife that depends on native plants for food and shelter is in decline.

After the problem is explained, the story takes a turn toward solutions. SOURLANDS traces a journey from the native plant nursery, to the actions of the Invasive Species Strike Team, to the bowstring of a local deer hunter.

## CHAPTER THREE: ENERGY

The Sourland Mountain has long been a refuge for hobos, outlaws, and most recently, clean energy enthusiasts. In 2002, the New York Times dubbed one particular road in the Sourlands “Solar Alley” for all its solar panels.

SOURLANDS documents the steps locals are taking to reduce their carbon footprints — from cutting-edge demonstration projects to low-tech everyday solutions.

One resident, Mike Strizki, lives in the first house in the nation that is powered entirely by a combination of solar and hydrogen.

Another, Ted Borer, is the energy plant manager at nearby Princeton University. Ted is taking everything he knows about energy efficiency and applying it at home.

And a third, Savraj Singh Dhanjal, has started a company in his basement that makes home energy monitoring systems. The idea is simple: You can't improve something until you can measure it.

## THE CONNECTION:

In the end, these are all stories about the fight for sustainability.

Communities around the world have begun to rethink the paradigms they rely on for food, energy, and the preservation of a healthy place to live. The same is true of the people of the Sourlands. They have important stories to tell about their progress, as well as the work ahead. These stories, told from one notable green spot on a map, are universal and urgent.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

BY JARED FLESHER

Every morning, I read the newspaper as I drink a cup of coffee. I'm 29 years old.

A question that crosses my mind frequently these days is, "What will the world look like when I'm 79 years old?" It's such a big question that sometimes it makes my head hurt.

I make documentary films about the environment, so headlines about energy, agriculture, and ecology always catch my attention. Here are a few recent ones:

-In 2010, global carbon dioxide emissions increased by the largest amount ever recorded.

-NASA scientist James Hansen predicts that if a new oil pipeline is built from the U.S. to Canada's carbon-loaded tar sands, it will be "game over" for any chance of stabilizing the global climate.

As an environmental journalist, I often wrestle with the challenge of presenting the facts as I find them, while also leaving the audience with something to feel hopeful about. Hope seems to be what people respond to. False hope is easy, but real hope, that's what I'm always digging around for.

The story I'm working on now is a documentary titled "SOURLANDS." Here's the premise: Get out a map, and trace your finger from New York City to Philadelphia. The line you draw runs through the most densely populated place in the entire country. But along this line there's still one large chunk of glorious green — a forest that has survived development. The locals call this region "The Sourlands." It's a big green symbol of hope, guarded doggedly by citizens who care for it deeply.

For the documentary, I've decided to look at just this one forest, plus the community immediately surrounding it, and tell its story as best I can.

In ecosystems around the world, human-created imbalances are driving countless species to extinction. Although the Sourlands' forest remains a beautiful place, I've learned that it too is an ecological battlefield. Invasive plant species (brought in by people) are outcompeting native plants species, and a marauding deer population (whose near extinction, followed by population explosion, was caused by humans) is finishing off native plants that survive the invasion. What this means for the forest is that many animals can't find food and shelter, and many trees can't regenerate. As one Ph.D. biologist put it to me, "If you can't regrow a tree in a forest, you've got a problem."

Another part of the documentary follows the exploits of a few young organic farmers who are farming on land just

outside the forest. They were hammered this year by extreme weather. July 2011 was the second hottest month in New Jersey history; August 2011 was the wettest month in New Jersey history; and October 2011 saw the biggest October snowstorm in New Jersey history. Overall, 2011 was the wettest year ever in New Jersey, not to mention the third hottest.

One of the characters in the documentary is originally from Kansas. This past summer, Kansas and the rest of the Southwest experienced a grueling, record-breaking drought.

Many scientists believe human-induced global climate change is driving much of this extreme weather. Based on years of reading up on the subject and trying to educate myself, so do I.

So that's some of the bad news.

**What gives me hope** is many of the people I meet in the Sourlands region. For reasons that aren't quite clear, a spirit of sustainability has caught on here. The most effective people I meet are often those who have chosen one specific problem and decided to do what they can to improve the situation. I've followed around conservationists who are taking small steps to restore balance to the forest ecosystem. I've followed farmers who are improving their soil one cover crop at a time. And I've met engineers and entrepreneurs who are teaching others how to reduce their energy use one watt at a time.

The environmentalists I meet and interview are rarely naïve. They seem to understand the big scope of the environmental problems we face. What is heartening is that these folks do what they can anyway, usually with a gritty sense of optimism. I believe this is a lot better than doing nothing.

James Hansen, the scientist I mentioned earlier in this essay, has been criticized by some for crossing the line from being strictly a scientist to becoming an outspoken environmental advocate. I leave you with a recent quote from Dr. Hansen:

"Einstein said to think and not act is a crime. If we understand the situation, we must try to make it clear. I decided six or seven years ago that I did not want my grandchildren to look back in the future and say 'Opa understood what was happening, but he didn't make it clear.'"



# PROJECT PERSONNEL

## Jared Flesher

DIRECTOR AND EDITOR

Jared Flesher is an award-winning reporter, photojournalist, and documentary filmmaker. His work has been published by The New York Times Online, The Wall Street Journal Online, The Christian Science Monitor, Grist, the Columbia Journalism Review, New Jersey Monthly, Edible Jersey, Inside Jersey, and many other publications.

Jared's first feature documentary, *The Farmer and the Horse*, was released in August 2010. It has aired more than 40 times on PBS in New Jersey and is distributed nationally on DVD by Chelsea Green Publishing and Passion River Films.

Jared graduated magna cum laude from the University of Richmond with a degree in journalism.

## Christian Schuller

CO-PRODUCER

In 2010, Christian Schuller produced, directed, shot, and edited his first documentary short, *Growtown Motown*, which won multiple awards at film festivals. He now holds a staff job at a video production company, where he hones his skills on all production fronts.

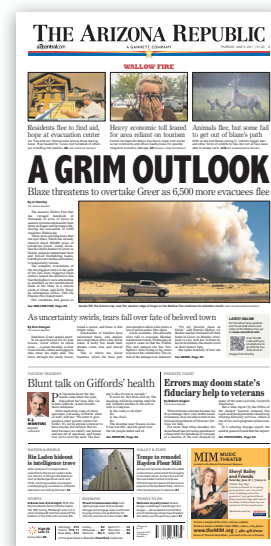
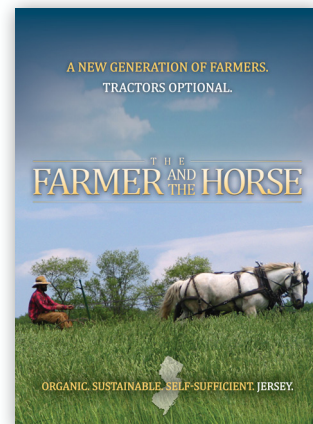
Christian graduated from Marist College with a degree in public relations and journalism.

## Chris George

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND MARKETING

Chris George designs the front page of *The Arizona Republic*, one of the country's largest newspapers, and oversees the paper's news design team. Chris also served as graphic designer for *The Farmer and the Horse*, creating graphics used in the film as well as cover art and promotional posters. He'll reprise this role as graphic designer for *Sourlands*, as well as help strategize on marketing and distribution.

Chris graduated from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in economics.



**Q: What inspired you to make *SOURLANDS*?**

**A:** Some of the most interesting people I know are living in Central Jersey, between New York City and Philadelphia, and fighting hard to make their small corner of the world a better, more sustainable place. All the big issues I'm interested in telling stories about, including global warming, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and massive species extinction, are all represented in and around this one last forest in Central Jersey called the Sourlands. So rather than plan to make a voyage to Antarctica or something, I took out my camera and started shooting.

**Q: What's the target audience for *SOURLANDS*?**

**A:** No matter where you live, if you love wildlife, care about the environment, dig renewable energy, or are intrigued by sustainable agriculture, then you're the target audience for *SOURLANDS*. If you're not so sure about some of these things, but want to learn what the big fuss is, you're also the target audience. Finally, if you think the MTV show "Jersey Shore" has no redeeming qualities, then you're probably going to love *SOURLANDS*.

**Q: What's your best piece of advice to a new documentary filmmaker?**

**A:** A lot of people talk about making a film, but the number who ever get started is much lower. Apparently, a great-grandfather of mine was famous for saying, in broken English, "You no starta, you no finish." So get started, no matter what camera you can afford, and begin to make your documentary.

**Q: Your first film, *The Farmer and the Horse*, was centered around the theme that technological advances were a double-edged sword for American farmers. How has technology affected documentary filmmakers?**

**A:** It's the same exact situation. Technology has made the process of making a documentary film much cheaper and much more efficient. So now everybody and their grandmother can make a documentary. That's a good thing, because it levels the playing field for lower-budget guys like me. But it also makes it much harder for anyone to make a living doing this, because there are tons of films being made and it's much harder to stand out from the crowd. I believe the secret to success, as Steve Martin once said, is to be so good they can't ignore you.

**Q: What are some of your favorite documentaries?**

**A:** The first documentary I remember ever watching was Ken Burns' *The Civil War*. I remember how epic and sweeping his style of storytelling felt, and I've never forgotten that. But my favorite documentary of all time is a film called *Murderball*, about guys who play wheelchair rugby. I don't have any particular interest in wheelchair rugby, but the film is a masterpiece of intimate, gritty, on-the-ground storytelling. So in my own work, I'm always trying to balance my desire to tell an epic, big-picture story with my desire to also do something really intimate and close-up.

**Q: You have a background in print journalism. What's the biggest difference between being a reporter and being a director?**

**A:** When I was writing for newspapers, I'd sometimes need to report and file three stories a day. It was fun, and one of the hardest jobs I can imagine. With filmmaking, I'll feel pretty good if I can finish one feature-length documentary per year. So it's a much different pace. There's a lot more riding, at least professionally, on one documentary than on one newspaper story.

**Q: The newspaper industry has taken a hit over the past few years. What's your take on the state of journalism?**

**A:** I'm concerned. I remember reading a report a few years back that the most disliked professions among the American public were lawyers, politicians, and journalists. I blame the cable news shows for that. But if you turn off the TV and pick up a newspaper or magazine, or turn on NPR, or turn back on the TV and watch 60 Minutes or Frontline, there's great work being done. I always feel better when more journalists are on the job, because often they're the only ones paying attention to what's going on. If we're not willing to pay for real journalism, we're going to lose it.

**Q: What are your hobbies?**

**A:** I love to read, and it helps clear my mind after long days of work. Recently, I particularly enjoyed 1493 by Charles Mann, and *Believing is Seeing* by Errol Morris. For exercise, I have an Australian Shepherd named Tillie and we do a prodigious amount of hiking in the woods. I'm not much of a cook, but I love going out for pizza.