



PUBLIC HERALD STUDIOS PRESENTS

# INVISIBLE HAND

**A FILM BY MELISSA A. TROUTMAN & JOSHUA B. PRIBANIC**

Projected 80 minutes

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## **LOGLINE**

INVISIBLE HAND is the world's first documentary film about the creation of 'Rights of Nature.' The defining battle of our times where nature, democracy and capitalism face off in rural America.

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Produced by award-winning actor Mark Ruffalo, INVISIBLE HAND takes you behind the curtain of the global economy where 'Rights of Nature' becomes "capitalism's one true opponent."

In the fall of 2014, for the first time in United States history, an ecosystem filed to defend itself in a lawsuit claiming its 'right to exist' in Grant Township, Pennsylvania. For attempting such a radical act, Grant's rural community of 700 people were sued by a



corporation, then by the state government, and are now locked in a battle to defend the watershed they call home through civil disobedience. The water they drink, the Rights to Nature laws they've passed are all on the line in this exclusive story.

Half a continent away in Standing Rock, North Dakota, the same industry threatening Grant Twp. is using militarized force against indigenous tribes and allies fighting to protect Mother Earth. The two, Grant Township and Standing Rock, are joined in an international fight to protect more than just water. They fight for their community, democracy, and for Nature as a living entity unto itself.

In the end, "Who will speak for Nature?"

## **FULL SYNOPSIS**

For the first time in United States history, in the fall of 2014, an ecosystem filed to defend itself in a lawsuit claiming its 'right to exist' in Grant Township, Pennsylvania. But watersheds can't hire lawyers or speak, so how can they defend their rights?

How do watersheds have rights?

There are no gas stations or stores in Grant Township, Pennsylvania. There is no post office, and no public water supply. When a corporation proposed injecting toxic waste underground there, the people of Grant Township passed a Community Bill of Rights banning waste injection and giving legal Rights to Nature.

Since then, Grant has been sued by Pennsylvania General Energy (PGE), an oil and gas corporation with tons of fracking waste to unload. PGE sued the township claiming that it has the "right" to inject toxic fracking waste without the communities consent. The Pennsylvania state government also sued the people of Grant Township, claiming an abuse of power.

Across Pennsylvania, and worldwide, communities are fighting in the same battle against the kings of corporations. In the anticipation of losing this battle, Grant Township took another radical turn and became the first community in history to enact a law legalizing civil disobedience in (c. 2016).

Tying the frontline fight in Grant Township to the conflict in Standing Rock, North Dakota, *INVISIBLE HAND* presents a new outcome of the "invisible hand" used by free market economists and capitalists in their promotion of self-interest and the exploitation of nature for profit — the creation of 'Rights of Nature.'



Narrated by award-winning actor Mark Ruffalo and directed by the alarming, award-winning filmmakers Joshua B. Pribanic and Melissa A. Troutman, *INVISIBLE HAND* takes you inside the struggle behind the curtain of our daily economy to reveal a new future for democracy and Nature.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENTS**

### **Melissa A. Troutman**

When I began investigating water contamination related to fracking in 2010, I had no idea it would lead me to a new rights movement. In 2014, I reported on [Grant Township](#), a tiny community in rural Pennsylvania fighting to keep a toxic waste injection well out of their watershed. They passed a local law elevating the community's rights above the rights of corporations. They also bestowed Nature with certain rights, including the right to thrive and flourish. In 2016, they became the first community to legalize civil disobedience. None of it was "legal" – but that was part of the point.

When I started reporting about fracking, I naively assumed that if pollution occurred it would be dealt with – especially water contamination because, after all, we drink the stuff. I thought the problem was that our elected public officials simply didn't know about it.

Our legal system is rigged to favor private property, corporations above citizens, above life, above our own government. It's a system that allows private interests to harm innocent people without their consent, commodifies and destroys Nature, and threatening our survival as a species and planet.

It wasn't always this way, and it doesn't have to stay this way. It has taken decades and countless losses to secure even the most basic rights for slaves, women, and indigenous. Change requires courage and persistence.

Today, a rights movement that began in Pennsylvania about a decade ago is now spreading across the globe. What was started by a small borough in eastern Pennsylvania has inspired countries like Ecuador to add "Rights of Nature" to their their national constitutions.

*INVISIBLE HAND* will acquaint you with this movement – a revolution to create a new laws that truly protects us and the places we call home.



## Joshua B. Pribanic

In college I rented *The Corporation* (2003) from a local video store who paraded a gateway to great films, in no small way, they altered minds shelf-to-shelf. I can remember how watching that documentary caused me to think about the antithesis of corporate personhood. That the free market and capitalism who birthed corporations didn't stop there, and unbeknownst to itself, it was establishing 'Rights of Nature' as a result of its environmental exploitation; manufacturing its undoing.

As much as *INVISIBLE HAND* speaks to Rights of Nature it speaks to Human Rights. If rights can be given to a corporation, why not an ecosystem? Are we willing to say as a society that because we cannot interpret or comprehend the voice or language of the environment, that it ceases to speak? And if we establish society alongside Rights of Nature, will it render Human Rights obsolete?

The idea of rights and how important they are to democracy stayed with me. In 2011 I gave my first speech to Bowling Green State University about Rights of Nature mainly in relation to conventional agriculture and genetic engineering. Less than two years later I found those rights spread out on an open table in rural Grant Township, Pennsylvania. Furthermore, this small community of fewer than 800 people used Rights of Nature to radically shift power and began to beat back one of the largest corporate institutions in the United States. It was then for me that the film *INVISIBLE HAND* had its foundation after years of putting the idea to a canvas. The phenomenon created by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* and perpetuated by 20th century free market advocates and capitalists — 'invisible hand' (something Smith referenced as human) — was being replaced by a hand of the environment: it had changed from machine to paw, to hoof, to the wing of the ecosystem.

As corporations in the 21st century have taken over much of the American political system, the people of the United States cannot compete eye-to-eye with the corporate citizen. Out of all these overwhelming concepts — free markets, rights of nature, human rights, corporate personhood — you come to a final question, "Will democracy survive?" and even more jarring "Do Human Rights survive if Rights of Nature is enacted?"

This is not a film about taking sides. It's a film about seeing the whole picture, about seeing all sides of an idea and witnessing the elephant in the room before it's extinct. I think *INVISIBLE HAND* is showing us a new world that when face-to-face with the costs



of capitalism Rights of Nature becomes the battle cry of democracy. My hope is that wherever you are, this film can speak to your fight.

## **ABOUT THE SUBJECTS & KEY INTERVIEWS**

### **Art Pearl**

Art Pearl has been around for a while. Highly acclaimed as a scholar of democracy, he taught at New York University, Howard University, Oregon University, University of California Santa Cruz and Washington State University Vancouver. He's also taught in California prisons and served as Director of New York's Division for Youth. A principal speaker at the only White House Conference on Teaching the Disadvantaged, Pearl also chaired the National Institute for Teaching of the Disadvantaged. In politics, he ran for governor of Oregon and lost by a close margin. He was elected three times to the Santa Cruz Board of Education, the second time with the highest vote ever recorded. Pearl was given a Martin Luther King, Jr. Lifetime Award and an award from the University of Oregon for his work in advancing social justice.

### **CELDF (COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL LEGAL DEFENSE FUND)**

Begun as a traditional public interest law firm to defend the environment, CELDF sought to protect communities from projects such as incinerators and waste dumps which cause environmental harm. It now "coordinates attacks" on an unjust system of law that legalizes destruction.

### **Chad Nicholson**

Chad Nicholson is Pennsylvania Organizer for the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) and works with communities facing industrial threats in all corners of the Keystone State. 2015 brought numerous challenges, including CELDF's work defending two communities in federal court (including Grant Township). With colleague Ben Price, Chad co-authored the Pennsylvania Community Rights Cookbook, a 700-page volume on the history of people's movements, and the tragic rise of corporate power in Pennsylvania. The Cookbook serves as the curriculum for 2-day Community Rights Workshops, which have trained hundreds of graduates to assert their community's rights over corporate control.

### **Thomas Linzey, Esq.**

Thomas Linzey is an attorney and Executive Director of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) – a nonprofit law firm that has provided free legal services to over five hundred local governments and nonprofit organizations since 1995. He is a



cum laude graduate of Widener Law School and a three-time recipient of the law school's public interest law award. A co-founder of the Daniel Pennock Democracy School – now taught in twenty-four states across the country, Linzey is also the author of *Be The Change: How to Get What You Want in Your Community* (Gibbs-Smith 2009). He assisted the Ecuadorian constitutional assembly in 2008 to adopt the world's first constitution recognizing the independently enforceable rights of ecosystems, and is a frequent lecturer at conferences across the country. His work has been featured in the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Mother Jones, the Nation magazine, the film 11th Hour, and in 2007 he was named as one of Forbes' magazines' "Top Ten Revolutionaries."

### **Ben Price**

Ben Price is the National Organizing Director for the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) where he has spent thirteen years advising and organizing nearly 200 communities in the adoption of community bills of rights. These local laws codify the right of local community self-government, the rights of the natural environment, the right to clean air and water, and other rights, while prohibiting corporate activities that violate those rights. Ben served as adviser to Pittsburgh City Council members and assisted in drafting Pittsburgh's Protection from Natural Gas Drilling Ordinance, the first city law to ban fracking in the United States.

### **Justin Rowland**

Justin is a member of the Standing Rock Indigenous Youth Council and a founding member of the Oceti Sackowin Camp near Standing Rock, North Dakota.

### **Grant Township Supervisor John Perry**

John Perry grew up on a dairy farm and served in the United States Air Force during Vietnam. John met his first partner in Buffalo, NY and lost his partner to AIDS in 1992. John later remarried and moved to East Run, where he lives with his partner Billy. "Life was wonderful" until an oil and gas company decided to put an injection well right next to John and Billy's property. They motivated, became politically active, and John was elected a Grant Township Supervisor in 2014. He has been involved in the legal battle to enforce the community's rights ever since.

### **Grant Township Supervisor Stacy Long**

Stacy Long lives in East Run, Pennsylvania with her husband, Mark and their cat, Fattie. A graphic designer by trade, Stacy is also president of the East Run Hellbenders Society and a board member of the Pennsylvania Community Rights Network. She was elected to serve as a Township Supervisor in Grant Township in 2015, diving head-first into a battle to protect the township's rights against a corporation trying to force a fracking waste disposal site into the community.



### **Judy Wanchisn (Grant Township resident)**

Born in East Run, Pennsylvania and raised in Grant Township all her life, Judy Wanchisn earned her BS and MS degrees at Indiana University (IUP). Judy taught school for 26 years, and like all of the residents in Grant Township, relies on a private water well that uses groundwater from within the Little Mahoning Creek Watershed. Life was “pretty normal” until the fall of 2013, when an oil and gas company proposed injecting toxic waste from fracking in the community more than a federal lawsuit from PGE. Judy co-founded the East Run Hellbenders Society to mobilize the community, which passed a Home Rule Charter in November 2015 to assert local control of the decision-making process and give legal rights to Nature. For that Charter, Grant Township is being sued by the corporation and the state government.

### **Ken Ward**

Ken is a full-time climate activist with international appeal as a ‘valve turner’ — a group that organized the partial shutdown of tar sand oil into the United States. He spoke with Public Herald Studios about his experience with civil disobedience.

## **APPEARANCES**

### **Milton Friedman**

Milton Friedman ([/ˈfriːdmən/](#); July 31, 1912 – November 16, 2006) was an American [economist](#) who received the 1976 [Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences](#) for his research on [consumption](#) analysis, [monetary](#) history and theory, and the complexity of [stabilization policy](#).<sup>[4]</sup> With [George Stigler](#) and others, Friedman was among the intellectual leaders of the second generation of [Chicago price theory](#), a methodological movement at the University of Chicago's Department of Economics, Law School, and Graduate School of Business from the 1940s onward. Several students and young professors who were recruited or mentored by Friedman at Chicago went on to become leading economists; they include [Gary Becker](#), [Robert Fogel](#), [Thomas Sowell](#),<sup>[5]</sup> and [Robert Lucas Jr.](#)<sup>[6]</sup>

Friedman's challenges to what he later called "naive [Keynesian](#)" theory<sup>[7]</sup> began with his 1950s reinterpretation of the [consumption function](#). In the 1960s, he became the main advocate opposing Keynesian government policies,<sup>[8]</sup> and described his approach (along with mainstream economics) as using "Keynesian language and apparatus" yet rejecting its "initial" conclusions.<sup>[9]</sup> He theorized that there existed a "[natural](#)" [rate of unemployment](#), and argued that employment below this rate would cause inflation to accelerate.<sup>[10]</sup> He argued that the [Phillips curve](#) was, in the long run, vertical at the "natural rate" and predicted what would come to be known as [stagflation](#).<sup>[11]</sup> Friedman promoted an alternative macroeconomic viewpoint known as "[monetarism](#)", and argued that a steady, small expansion of the [money supply](#) was the preferred policy.<sup>[12]</sup> His ideas



concerning [monetary policy](#), [taxation](#), [privatization](#) and [deregulation](#) influenced government policies, especially during the 1980s. His [monetary theory](#) influenced the Federal Reserve's response to the [global financial crisis of 2007–08](#).<sup>[13]</sup>

(Source: Wikipedia)

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

### Mark Ruffalo - Executive Producer

Mark Alan Ruffalo (/ˈrʌfəloʊ/; born November 22, 1967) is an American actor, filmmaker, and social activist. He made his screen debut in an episode of [CBS Summer Playhouse](#) (1989), followed by minor film roles. He was part of the original cast of [This Is Our Youth](#) (1996), for which he was nominated for an [Independent Spirit Award](#). Following were his roles in [13 Going on 30](#) (2004), [Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind](#) (2004), [Zodiac](#) (2007), and [What Doesn't Kill You](#) (2008). In 2010, he starred in the psychological thriller [Shutter Island](#) and the comedy-drama [The Kids Are All Right](#). For the latter, he received nominations for the [SAG Award](#), [BAFTA Award](#), and an [Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor](#). He also co-starred in the mystery films [Now You See Me](#) and [Now You See Me 2](#) as FBI Special Agent Dylan Rhodes.<sup>[1]</sup>

Ruffalo gained international prominence by portraying the [Marvel Comics](#) character [Bruce Banner / Hulk](#) in the [Marvel Cinematic Universe](#) (replacing [Edward Norton](#), who headlined [The Incredible Hulk](#), released in 2008), beginning with [The Avengers](#) (2012) and later reprising the role in [Iron Man 3](#) (2013), [Avengers: Age of Ultron](#) (2015), [Thor: Ragnarok](#) (2017), [Avengers: Infinity War](#) (2018) and its [untitled sequel](#) (2019).

(Source: Wikipedia)

### Joshua B. Pribanic - Director/Editor/Producer/Writer

Joshua B. Pribanic is an investigative journalist, photographer, artist and award-winning filmmaker who co-founded Public Herald (est. 2011), a nonprofit for investigative journalism, and co-directed the recently acclaimed documentary *TRIPLE DIVIDE* and *TRIPLE DIVIDE [REDACTED]*. He currently operates as the Editor-in-Chief for Public Herald. For his production and directing of the documentary feature *TRIPLE DIVIDE* (released March 2013), Pribanic gained international attention for his reporting on fracking shale gas in the United States. The film showcased a number of exclusive stories and exposed abuses to the public interest leading to regulatory accountability on the local and state level. *TRIPLE DIVIDE* appeared in film festivals nationwide, and thus far has received an audience stretching over 30 countries, while continuing to remain relevant and screening in communities, colleges and festivals. Pribanic's 2014 project *INVISIBLE HAND*, a feature-length documentary, kicked off with an exclusive report that



led to the production of the The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's first-ever segment on fracking. The project is accompanied by an open source public records website, [publicfiles.org](http://publicfiles.org) or a.k.a. #fileroom.

### **Melissa A. Troutman - Director/Editor/Producer/Writer**

Melissa A. Troutman is an investigative journalist, photographer, artist and filmmaker who co-founded Public Herald (est. 2011), a nonprofit for investigative journalism where she currently serves as Executive Director. Troutman's work earned support from over 1,000 donating members of the public, the Investigative News Network (now Institute for Nonprofit News), the James L. Knight Foundation, Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, Mountain Watershed Association, 11th Hour Project, The Heinz Endowments, and Tesla Motors. Since first tackling the subject in 2010, Troutman has gained international attention for her coverage of fracking in Pennsylvania. She's writer, editor, director, producer of *TRIPLE DIVIDE* and *TRIPLE DIVIDE [REDACTED]*, which uncovered corruption in the handling of water contamination in rural Pennsylvania. Her first feature film, *TRIPLE DIVIDE* appeared in film festivals nationwide, has an audience spanning over 30 countries, and continues to screen in communities across the United States. Troutman's new documentary project *INVISIBLE HAND* [began in 2014](#) with her first story about a revolutionary battleground between corporate rights and democracy.

### **Victor Pribanic - Producer**

Victor is the founding member and attorney at Pribanic & Pribanic, a Pittsburgh-based regional trial practice law firm founded in 1984. He is a graduate of Bowling Green State University and Duquesne University School of Law and began his career as an Assistant District Attorney in Pittsburgh. Victor has been a life-long member of the American Association for Justice (formerly the American Trial Lawyers Association), the Pennsylvania Association of Trial Lawyers, the Academy of Trial Lawyers of Allegheny County and a variety of other professional organizations. He is a frequent speaker in the area of trial methods generally and within the medical negligence area.

A native of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, he can usually be found wandering around the country with his bird dogs or knee deep in a trout stream with a fly rod when he is not in the courtroom.

### **Travis Kerr - Producer**

Having recently graduated from UC Davis with an MFA in Lighting and Scenic Design, Travis lives in the Greater Pittsburgh Area. As a Collaborative Professional Storyteller in Scenic and Lighting Design for Stage, Television, and Film, Travis loves building relationships with other passionate artists to explore, challenge, produce and sculpt visual worlds for stories to live and breathe through. Bridging the gap between dreaming and reality, he communicates ideas to design, technical, and production teams in a way that embraces the strength of the venue, budget and story.



Some of his recent work includes Scenic Design for *The Dogs of War* (a new play by Josy Miller), Scenic Design for *The Bacchae* at UC Davis, Lighting Design for *Parodia* (a new opera composition by Pablo Ortiz), Scenic Designer for *The Haunt* at Wright Hall: *The Handless Maiden* at UC Davis, and Assisting John Iacovelli at various theaters; notably San Jose Rep, Mark Taper Forum, Pasadena Playhouse, Odyssey Theater III and Shakespeare Santa Cruz.

## **CREDITS**

Written & Directed by Melissa A. Troutman & Joshua B. Pribanic

Producers – Melissa A. Troutman, Joshua B. Pribanic, Victor Pribanic, Travis Kerr,  
Jonathon James Pribanic

Executive Producer – Mark Ruffalo

Directors of Photography – Melissa A. Troutman & Joshua B. Pribanic

Editors – Joshua B. Pribanic, Melissa A. Troutman, Andrew Geller

Composers – [Unannounced]

Sound Recording – Melissa Troutman, Joshua B. Pribanic, Aziz Lalani, John Nicholson,  
Andrew Geller

Graphic Design & Animation – Melissa A. Troutman & Joshua B. Pribanic

Colorist – Joshua B. Pribanic

Archival Fair Use Researcher – Andrew Geller

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