FRIENDS OF DUKE LAKE

a short documentary film

by Lindsey Aranson

OFFICIAL SELECTION Pittsburgh Independent Film Festival 2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION RIVER VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL 2026

OFFICIAL COMPETITION SELECTION Oil Valley Film Festival 2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION Altoona Reel Film Festival 2026

MTN CRAFT FILM FESTIVAL OFFICIAL SELECTION 2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION Black Bear Film Festival 2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION READING FILM FEST 2026

PRESS KIT

SYNOPSIS

A tight-knit community in rural southwestern Pennsylvania is forever changed when Duke Lake, a beloved spot cherished by generations of families, is drained due to mining damage. *Friends of Duke Lake* follows determined Greene County native Shelly Richardson, along with her sister Brandy Tuttle and local artist Colleen Nelson, as they lead a decades-long effort to preserve the lake's memory and restore Ryerson Park despite bureaucratic delays and irreversible damage. After twenty years of waiting and disappointment, can the community find hope in a new vision for the park?

YOGA
WATCH THE TRAILER

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Friends of Duke Lake is my thesis film for my MFA at American University, where I studied social and environmental documentary. I set out to find an untold story where I could raise awareness and make a meaningful impact. Through my producer's work with the Center for Coalfield Justice, I learned about Ryerson Station State Park and the annual DRYerson Festival, which commemorates the loss of Duke Lake. Seeing the lakebed twenty years after its draining, still clearly outlined and overgrown with tall grass, was surreal. It was a visible absence, an open wound still carried by the community in Greene County. When I learned that the long-awaited restoration may finally be on the horizon around the twentieth anniversary, I knew this was the moment to document the story of Duke Lake.

Drawing from extensive archival materials preserved by the park and residents over decades, I developed a tactile visual approach inspired by these physical records to immerse viewers in the collective memory of Duke Lake and Ryerson. While the story is rooted in the consequences of longwall mining, I found that the central focus shifted toward holding the state accountable for restoring the park. As restoration begins to move forward, I hope the film validates the community's grief, inspires urgency and accountability, and encourages audiences to support the restoration of Ryerson Park as a place to connect with nature and one another.

– Lindsey Aranson

FILM SPECS

TITLE: Friends of Duke Lake

DURATION: 16:02

RELEASE YEAR: 2026

COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION: United States

GENRE: Documentary Short

SCREENING FORMAT: MP4, MOV, DCP

ASPECT RATIO: 16:9

LANGUAGE: English

CAPTIONS: Open and Closed Available

SOUND FORMAT: Stereo

STUDENT FILM: Yes, American University

CREATIVE TEAM

LINDSEY ARANSON

DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, EDITOR

Lindsey is a documentary filmmaker specializing in post-production. She views documentary as a form of activism and has made films about environmental justice, gun violence prevention, mental health advocacy, and queer pride. Lindsey holds a BA in Film and Media Production from the University of Pittsburgh. This film marks the completion of her MFA in film and media arts from American University, focusing on social impact and environmental filmmaking. See more of her work at lindseyaranson.com.

ALEX DOWNING

PRODUCER

Alex is the Director of Communications with the Center for Coalfield Justice. He is passionate about telling the stories of people living on the front lines of fossil fuel extraction in Southwestern Pennsylvania. His work with CCJ has helped uplift the voices of residents facing health impacts, property damage, and water access issues due to fracking and coal mining in Washington and Greene Counties. Alex holds a BA Public Relations and Strategic Communications from American University and a MS in Environmental Studies from Point Park University.

SARAH KING

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Sarah is a director of photography and camera operator for documentaries focusing on nature and ecology. Her goal is to produce visually striking imagery that revitalizes our spirit to respect our animal neighbors and the ecosystems we share. She holds a BFA in Filmmaking from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts with a concentration in Cinematography and an MFA in Film and Media Arts from American University concentrating in Environmental and Wildlife Filmmaking. See more of her work at sgkingg742.wixsite.com/-portfolio.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Directed, Produced, and Edited by
LINDSEY ARANSON

Produced by
ALEX DOWNING

Director of Photography
SARAH KING

Location Sound
ERIN DRAXLER
BRIAN TERRILL

Sound Design and Mix
WILL ROTHERMEL

Featuring
SHELLY CARTER RICHARDSON
JEREMY REKICH
COLLEEN NELSON
BRANDY CARTER TUTTLE

American University Capstone Advisor
LARRY ENGEL

American University Capstone Professor
LAURA WATERS HINSON

Produced in partial fulfillment of Master of Fine Arts degree
American University School of Communication, Film and Media Arts, 2026

HI-RES IMAGES

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POSTER & THUMBNAIL

STILLS

BTS

IMPACT PARTNER

The Center for Coalfield Justice (CCJ) fights for coalfield communities through advocacy, education, and organizing. Over the last two decades, CCJ has been an important voice for the community in the fight to restore Ryerson Station State Park.

As an impact partner for Friends of Duke Lake, CCJ is providing support for production, film festivals, and community outreach.

CONTACT

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Friends of Duke Lake

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