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Jackson Wild scholarships aim to diversify film community

Scholarships brought nearly 20 filmmakers from underrepresented groups to Wild Summit.

By Cody Cottier

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Chilean filmmakers Rodrigo Farias Moreno attended this year's Jackson Wild Summit as a Vulcan Visiting World Filmmakers scholar. That program seeks to change who's making conservation films, giving creatives from locales often shot by out-of-town filmmakers a chance to tell their own story.

COURTESY PHOTO

As the waters and beaches of Chile — like those around the planet — are increasingly besieged by trash, Rodrigo Fariás Moreno is there to document it.

The Chilean filmmaker didn't jet off to another continent to capture environmental crises thousands of miles away. He saw the need for conservation storytelling in his own backyard and has spent the past decade working to protect the oceans he grew up beside.

"I haven't traveled a lot in the world," he said. "I just want to continue doing this job."

For that he received the Vulcan Visiting World Filmmakers scholarship, from Vulcan Productions, to attend this year's Jackson Wild Summit. The new program sponsors filmmakers from Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia and India who focus their work on environmental issues in their homelands.

Rocky Collins, director of production for Vulcan Productions, said that although the films featured at Jackson Wild have always come from around the world, the people filming them have mostly come from North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

"It's an issue of fairness," Collins said. "It's not right for the world to profit from extracting images of animals in countries where local filmmakers don't have the same opportunities or access to resources. Sometimes, local filmmakers can't even see the films shot in their country."

Changing that will be better not just for the filmmakers themselves, he argued, but for audiences as well. With their firsthand understanding of the regions they inhabit, locals can often do a better job than filmmakers unfamiliar with the places they're documenting.

"People know more about their communities and countries than people who aren't from there," Collins said. "One of the messages we heard from all the Visiting World Filmmakers was you can't separate threatened communities and endangered animals. Solutions need to address the needs of both."

Along with Moreno, another three filmmakers joined Jackson Wild this year through the scholarship: Jahawi Bertolli and Faith Musembi, of Kenya, and Akanksha Sood, of India.

A second new scholarship program, Jackson Wild Emerging Filmmakers, run by the Summit, also aims to diversify the filmmaking community. With 14 up-and-coming creatives from a mix of races, genders and cultures, Jackson Wild wants to help underrepresented groups break into filmmaking.

"Each talented individual is sure to leave their imprint on the media landscape in a positive and impactful way," Executive Director Lisa Samford said in a news release. "We are honored to help empower our scholars as they continue in their careers."

After spending the past week at the summit, Moreno said he learned more than in two or three years of film school. With the knowledge he gained from listening to other filmmakers, and the relationships he has begun to build, he hopes to provide a stronger voice for protecting his native coastline. And he hopes more of his peers across the world will find a chance to do the same.

“Everybody has different things to say, everybody lives in different countries,” Moreno said. “That global thinking is super necessary to the world, because we are not alone in this world. Everything we do has a consequence for all the planet.”

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Cody Cottier covers town and state government. He grew up with a view of the Olympic Mountains, and after graduating Washington State University he traded it for a view of the Tetons. Odds are the mountains are where you'll find him when not on deadline.