

Director's Statement

a personal journey into the wild

Background

I inherited two things from my grandfather – a love of the wilderness and a mine. His passion for fishing in British Columbia's vast backcountry was only surpassed by his fascination with the glitter of metals in rock. Our own family mine never produced anything except options to dig more holes. But it was next to another mine that DID produce silver, and that was enough to fuel years of dreams and speculation.

In a curious twist of fate, my own love of the wilderness and the ongoing saga of our family mine prepared me to better understand the stories which would emerge at the core of **KONELINE: our land beautiful**.

For the last 20 years I have explored the mountains of British Columbia's northwest, deep in the hereditary territory of the Tahltan First Nation. It's a staggeringly beautiful landscape with wildlife so abundant hunters refer to it as the *Serengeti of the North*. The mining industry also calls it the *Golden Triangle* because the forces of nature have melted the earth's core and folded these mountains to create massive deposits of copper and gold. Millions of years ago, the stage was set in the northwest for the biggest controversy of our modern times – how to mine the riches of this earth without destroying the planet itself.

In the south where I come from people talk about it. In the north, they live the debate. In both places, rhetoric easily breeds stereotyping. At a time when there needs to be a meeting of our minds, instead a dangerous polarization has set in. The different viewpoints have never been farther apart.

As a filmmaker from the south, an outsider, I questioned what I could possibly bring to the northwest, a land I had come to love deeply.

Finding art, finding story

I began by asking everyone I came across the same question, "What brings you here? And if you were born here, why do you stay?" Diamond drillers (Native and white) or elders blockading against them, guide outfitters or linemen installing the Northwest Transmission Line — they all had the same answer: it was their love of the land that kept them in the mountains of the northwest.

My longtime colleague and producer Betsy Carson and I began to consider what would happen if we brought a curious and open heart to the creation of **KONELINE**, rather than a polemical argument. What if we attempted to capture the poetry of *everyone* who would address our camera – no matter what side they were on? What if we as filmmakers were open to being surprised with what our camera found? Perhaps we could surprise our audience too?

A big challenge immediately confronted us. Access. Big industry was dubious...and so were the more militant members of the Tahltan First Nation. Bruised by the rhetoric of the debate,

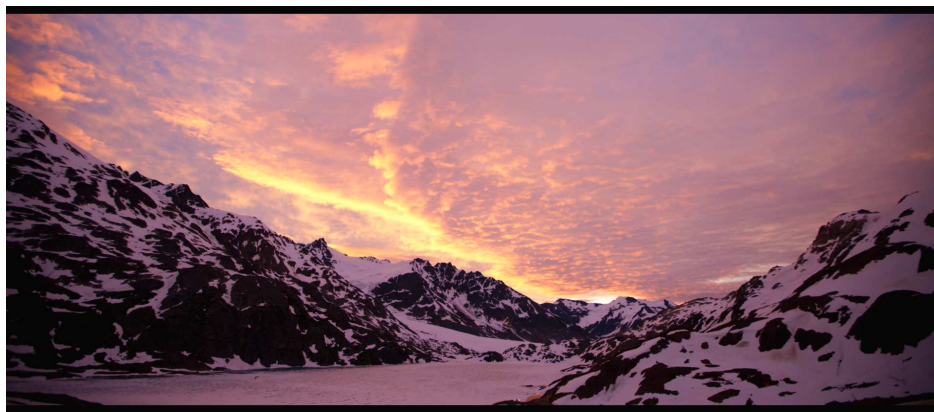
almost everyone was equally leery of our camera. There were however the brave few who first allowed our camera into their lives.

A key turning point both in terms of access and our art occurred early in the first shoot when we were filming the construction of the Northwest Transmission Line. We were framing the world's largest helicopter flying 16,000 pound towers over the mountains. Shooting in slow motion with an 800 mm lens, the towers caught the light, gleaming like gigantic silver crosses flying over valleys and peaks. On the ground the crews of linemen battled the furious backwash wind of the chopper blades. The men struggled to wrestle the towers into place, dancing in slow motion with the impossible weight. Later that day, we showed the linemen our footage on a monitor set up on the tailgate of our truck. They were able to see their work as it had never been portrayed before. Word spread and our access grew.

Behind the camera we were finding a visual language which framed the familiar in an unfamiliar way. We found ourselves shooting in the abstract, not to be “arty”, but rather to portray different ways of seeing. During that first tailgate screening, both the film crew and the linemen were able to see the elegance of engineering, the brawn of the physical work and both the beauty and the devastation of the landscape they all loved. There was no need for narration – it was all in the frame.

Director of Photography Van Royko headed up our camera team which shot over four seasons (and included additional photography by Patrick McLaughlin, Jordan Paterson and Grant Baldwin.) To capture the spirit of this very big country the camera crew utilized many tools and techniques usually reserved for narrative drama. We shot in a wide screen format and in 4K, often in slow motion, using dollies and long lenses, drones and helicopters. In the cutting room, editor Michael Brockington constructed the story associatively – like a piece of music, the land itself becoming a central character.

The shooting and editing of this project has demanded that I move into what for me is a new kind of documentary storytelling – an art film with politics. **KONELĪNE: our land beautiful** is a cinematic poem dedicated to the extraordinary women and men of the northwest and the land they move across. It is my hope that the poetry of their lives will be heard through the rhetoric of our times.



Sunset over Bruce Jack Lake and mine, Northwest BC