
A DOCUMENTARY MOVEMENT

Rivers of Life

Format Bible

*How the series works · what repeats · what must
change*

Created by Tan

Feature chapters · Returning series format · Rights of Nature

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For commissioners · impact funders · co-producers · nations

The ownable format

Rivers of Life is a returning documentary format. Each chapter is a self-contained feature (or feature-length special) that can premiere alone, festival-tour alone, and still accumulate as a series brand. The engine is constant. The river is not.

What always returns

- ◆ THE CARAVAN — Two RVs (or equivalent mobile home base); rotating band of artists, guides, philosophers, musicians, local companions.
- ◆ THE PILGRIMAGE — Departure from urban/settled life toward the river; road as character.
- ◆ THREE CURRENTS — A-story journey · B-story interviews · C-story limnology metaphor.
- ◆ TWO-EYED SEEING — Science and Indigenous knowing held as co-equal eyes.
- ◆ THE WATERFALL MOMENT — Or equivalent climax: the place where personhood arguments dissolve into presence.
- ◆ HUMAN CONFLUENCE — Travellers meet, merge, clash, and part — mirroring the river.
- ◆ GUARDIAN / NATION PARTNERSHIP — Formal respect and collaboration with those who already know the river as kin.
- ◆ TITLE LANGUAGE — Poetic voice-over, river vocabulary, gold-on-ink brand continuity.

What must change each chapter

- ◆ The river, its legal status, and its cultural-legal story.
- ◆ Local languages, place names, and guardians — never extractive, always specific.
- ◆ The composition of the caravan (core + local tributaries).
- ◆ The political and ecological stakes (mercury, dams, mining, restoration, first recognition, etc.).
- ◆ Visual signature of place — light, water color, season, soundscape.

Episode / chapter length

Preferred	Feature documentary (75–100 min) or 2×50 special
Alt	60-min hour for broadcaster cut + festival feature
Cadence	1–2 chapters per year once financed
Catalog	Evergreen; each chapter stands alone

Visual & sound religion

- ◆ Palette: ink (#04090d), deep river, teal, glow (#7fd8d4), gold (#dcb977), silver text.
- ◆ Camera: patient wide frames of water; handheld intimacy on the road; aerial as revelation not tourism.
- ◆ Sound: river as score bed; minimal score that never explains emotion; silence denser than music at turning points.
- ◆ Type & brand: Cormorant Garamond / literary; labels in gold uppercase tracking.

- ◆ Motifs: confluence, RV as vessel, mask/ceremony objects, waterfall, map of personhood rivers.

Editorial principles

- ◆ No white-savior narrative. Guardians and nations are not subjects of pity; they are co-authors of meaning.
- ◆ Personhood is the door, not the destination. The film ends past the legal slogan.
- ◆ Transparency of process — discovery over forced grand narrative.
- ◆ Relationships on the road are as important as the river; the caravan is the experiment in being-with.
- ◆ Avoid nature-as-backdrop B-roll. The river is a character with agency.

Deliverables per chapter

- ◆ Festival feature cut + broadcast/streamer cut if needed.
- ◆ Trailer + vertical social assets.
- ◆ Chapter microsite page (as Magpie has now).
- ◆ Impact kit: discussion guide, guardian contacts, rights-of-nature explainer.
- ◆ Logged selects for future compilation / companion book.