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## BAD RIVER – Review by Liz Braun

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 Liz Braun
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A handful of Indigenous environmentalists and land stewards may be the only thing standing between the next Enbridge oil pipeline failure and the waters of Lake Superior.

*Bad River* is a small but mighty documentary about the formidable Lake Superior Ojibwe who live in Northern Wisconsin and have done so for millennia. Members of the Bad River band are currently embroiled in a legal battle against Enbridge and hope to evict the corporate behemoth from their land before an oil spill occurs.

But that's not entirely what *Bad River* is about. Despite the legal case at its centre, the documentary is actually an introduction to the history and culture of a remarkable and resilient people who protect a large swath of Lake Superior shoreline — the freshwater future of the planet, more or less.

Directed and written by Mary Mazzio, the film has more than 50 members of the Bad River band on camera discussing their beloved land and their past, particularly what it's taken to overcome attempts at annihilation and assimilation.

Mazzio manages to offer a concise history of the last two hundred years (give or take) in the conflict between settlers and Indigenous people, with the help of archival footage, expert interviews and, in places, narration from actress/activist Quannah ChasingHorse and actor/filmmaker Edward Norton.

Present-day residents of Bad River (and various Indigenous academics) talk about the history of the land and its people: how they were ordered to leave in 1850, despite existing treaties, and then sacrificed another 13 million acres to keep their home in the treaty of 1854. Then, as one Band member says, when they couldn't exterminate us, they tried to assimilate us; several elders describe their family members' experiences at the residential schools where language and culture were to be eradicated.

The intergenerational trauma continues.

In *Bad River*, Mazzio does not neglect to introduce the absolute beauty of the area more than one resident describes as paradise; she is careful to present the people, their history and their land before getting into the legal battle with Enbridge and exactly what the Bad River residents now face. After two major flooding events in the area and the consequent soil erosion, a section of Enbridge pipeline sits fully exposed, hanging above the ground and very much at risk of rupture. Line 5 is an aging pipeline that runs through the reservation, and as the film makes clear, it's not a matter of if, but when, a spill occurs.

(And when you Google Line 5 and see how it snakes south, cutting right between Lakes Michigan and Huron, you really won't ever sleep again at night.)

On top of everything else that the Bad River band is facing, they now are dealing with division within, as Enbridge puts forth offers of jobs and money in the area, pitting local people against one another.

The fight continues. *Bad River* ends with Indigenous elders and others talking about their role in protecting the land and the water, and their hope that future generations will likewise be able to enjoy the unspoiled lands they call home.

It is profoundly moving.

Moving enough, one hopes, to motivate Enbridge to acknowledge the much bigger environmental picture and act accordingly.



Liz Braun

Liz Braun has contributed entertainment stories in print and on radio and TV in Canada for 30 years. She served as film critic for the Toronto Sun and for the Postmedia chain of newspapers.