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Two MAPS Student Films Win Regional Student High School Production Awards, Advance to Nationals

BILLINGS AND THE FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY, MONTANA — MAPS Media Institute is excited to announce that two student-produced films have won top honors at the 2025 National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Northwest Chapter (NATAS NW) Student Production Awards. NATAS NW is one of 19 regional chapters that make up the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, the organization that presents the Emmy Awards. NATAS NW recognizes excellence in television production across Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Alaska, celebrating both professional and student achievement in media arts.

These award-winning pieces, created in partnership with communities in Fort Belknap and Billings, will now move on as nominees for the National High School Student Production Awards, to be announced later this year.

According to Greg Thies, President, NATAS NW and Student Production Awards Chair "It is so great to see and recognize the great work the MAPS students produced again this year. NATAS NW strongly believes in investing in the future of our industry, promoting excellence, service to the community, and encouraging the next generation of television & visual storytelling talent by recognizing their outstanding work."

"Walking Between Two Worlds: The Urban Indigenous Youth Experience" took top honors in the Nonfiction Long Form category. Created in collaboration with Billings Public Schools' Indigenous Education Department and the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, this 24-minute documentary explores identity, resilience, and belonging among Indigenous youth in urban Montana.

"This film is important because it gave us a chance to talk about what it's like to grow up in a city but still be part of our culture. I want people to understand that you don't stop being Indigenous when you live off

the reservation," shared Kolbi Johnston, a Billings High School student and youth crew member on this project.

"This recognition shows what's possible when we trust youth to tell their stories," said Calli Rusche-Nicholson, Director of Indigenous Education for Billings Public Schools. "They're not just learning media—they're leading meaningful conversations about identity and community."

"Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Development: PSA (1 Minute)" won in the Public Service Announcement category. Produced in collaboration with the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Resources Department, this impactful PSA is part of a seven-part educational video series highlighting local water sovereignty and the importance of intergenerational stewardship.

"Our connection to the land and water is profound," shared former FBIC Tribal Council President Donovan Archambault. "These videos help preserve our history and advocate for our future."

"A healthy future for myself, our community, and those who come after us - that's why this story matters. It was an honor to serve my community by making this film and educating people about our water rights," expressed Marie Hogan, a 2024 Harlem High School graduate who worked on this video series.

These awards represent a milestone not just for MAPS, but for Montana youth. As the films advance to the national stage, they carry with them the voices of Native Indigenous communities and the power of media to inspire, educate, and unite. Both projects were created through the MAPS Media Lab, the statewide outreach program of MAPS Media Institute, and serve as powerful examples of how media arts and communication skills can be used by youth to strengthen their communities.

"These films reflect the heart of our mission," said Clare Ann Harff, MAPS Executive Director of MAPS. "When we share with young people the tools to express themselves through media, paired with caring and skilled mentorship, we're not just preparing future artists or filmmakers, we're cultivating leaders who are deeply connected to their culture and community."

About MAPS Media Institute

Founded in 2004, MAPS Media Institute is an educational nonprofit organization providing free, professional media arts education to Montana's rural and tribal youth. With instruction in filmmaking, graphic design, music, animation, and podcasting, MAPS empowers the next generation through creativity, critical thinking, and civic engagement. In addition to statewide outreach through the MAPS Media Lab, MAPS offers year-round programming in the Fort Belknap Indian Community, Lewis and Clark County, and Ravalli County, ensuring consistent, professional, place-based learning opportunities that strengthen local communities.

View the Award-Winning Films:

- "Walking Between Two Worlds: The Urban Indigenous Youth Experience":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLCYTJrc1Cg>
- "Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Development: PSA (1 Minute)":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hl_FaCR7FA

To learn more about MAPS Media Institute: <https://mapsmediainstitute.com>