

“Hidden Below: The Great Lakes” Dives Into Production
Underwater Robots Capture First-Ever Coaster Brook Trout Spawning Event



Coaster Brook Trout Spawning – Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area

[Watch the *Hidden Below* trailer here.](#)
[Hidden Below Website](#)

TOBERMORY (April 7, 2026) — Beneath the surface of our lakes and rivers lies a vast, unseen world that supports the water, wildlife and communities we depend on. Award-winning filmmakers Yvonne Drebert and Zach Melnick are setting out to reveal it in their most ambitious project yet: *Hidden Below: The Great Lakes* — a new TVO Original wildlife documentary exploring the Great Lakes watershed.

Production is already underway, with Drebert and Melnick deploying next-generation underwater drones capable of reaching the deepest depths of the lakes.

Over the next two years, the team’s cameras will capture a hidden world of survival and spectacle — deepwater sculpin guarding their nests hundreds of metres below the surface, rare lake trout with oversized fins gliding along the cliffs of unexplored submerged mountains, flocks of ducks plunging into dark waters for fish eggs, and vast schools of gizzard shad fleeing lethal cold in numbers rivalling the greatest wildlife migrations on Earth.

For a project of this scale, Drebert and Melnick will not be working alone. *Hidden Below* is being created in collaboration with a network of scientists, conservation organizations and community partners across the Great Lakes region. The Nature Conservancy of Canada is the project’s Lead Impact Partner, contributing scientific expertise and helping translate discovery into lasting freshwater conservation.

“Healthy freshwater systems support our communities, our economy and the wildlife we depend on — yet much of this world remains out of sight,” says Aaron Bilyea, Chief Marketing Officer, Nature Conservancy of Canada. “*Hidden Below* brings these critical ecosystems into view, helping people

better understand both their importance and what's at stake. As Lead Impact Partner, the Nature Conservancy of Canada is proud to support this work and to collaborate with partners to advance lasting conservation across the Great Lakes and beyond."

"Freshwater life is among the most threatened on Earth," says Yvonne Drebert, Producer. "Yet our TV screens are filled with coral reefs and ocean giants, while the vibrant life of freshwater ecosystems remains largely unseen. *Hidden Below* is about changing that."

First Production Breakthrough: Coaster Brook Trout in Lake Superior

The team has already achieved an important early milestone.

Last fall, working closely with Parks Canada staff in the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, the filmmakers documented Coaster Brook Trout spawning near the epic outer islands of the protected area.

Coaster Brook Trout — found only in Lake Superior — are a brilliantly coloured symbol of healthy freshwater ecosystems, that until recently were on the brink of extinction. While most Coaster spawning occurs in rivers, researchers and Indigenous knowledge holders have long suggested that some may also spawn amongst the remote islands.

Building on this understanding, the *Hidden Below* team captured what is believed to be the first footage documenting this island spawning behaviour. The footage is not only scientifically valuable — it is visually extraordinary. In crystal-clear water, the trout excavate nests in the gravel to lay their eggs, and they contort into expressive, almost comical faces as they release eggs and milt.

"Parks Canada is pleased to partner with Inspired Planet's work on *Hidden Below*. This exciting collaboration has deepened our understanding of Coaster Brook Trout and the freshwater ecosystems we are entrusted to protect. This will strengthen Parks Canada's evidence-based approach to conservation of Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area," says the Honourable Julie Dabrusin, Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature.

"This is a genuine freshwater breakthrough," says Zach Melnick, Director and Cinematographer. "Moments like this show what's possible when conservation science and cinematic storytelling come together."

"Understanding the ecology of aquatic animals below the surface has been a black box for scientists. New technologies, such as acoustic telemetry coupled with underwater video, provide scientists an unprecedented understanding of fish behaviour and interactions with their predators, prey, and habitats," says Andrew Muir, Science Director at the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the project's Scientific Partner, who will help translate discoveries from the field into actionable fisheries science.

The Coaster Brook Trout documentation represents the first of what the team hopes will be many scientific contributions emerging from *Hidden Below*. By opening this "black box," the project seeks to transform rare moments of observation into lasting conservation insight.

A Major Wildlife Program for TVO

Hidden Below builds on the success of Drebert and Melnick's previous TVO Original, [All Too Clear](#), which captivated audiences as it ventured deep into the Great Lakes to reveal the historic impacts of invasive mussels.

Drawing on the underwater storytelling lessons from that production, *Hidden Below* will take that experience to the next level. As a dedicated wildlife documentary, it will be driven by animal behaviour and underwater encounters, shining a spotlight on the Great Lakes in a way usually reserved for the world's oceans.

Holding more than 20 percent of the world's freshwater, the Great Lakes are one of the planet's most significant natural systems and essential to life in Ontario. As Ontario's public broadcaster, TVO's long history of trusted, educational nature documentaries and Ontario-focused storytelling makes it a natural home for a project that reveals the Great Lakes as the inland seas they truly are.

"TVO has a long history of connecting audiences to the rich culture and landscapes of Ontario, and the Great Lakes stand among the world's most extraordinary natural wonders," said Alexandra Roberts, Commissioning Editor of TVO Docs. "We're proud to be the commissioning broadcaster of *Hidden Below: The Great Lakes*, a project that will immerse viewers in the beauty of one of Ontario's most vital ecosystems while revealing aspects of it never seen before."

Explore Alongside the Filmmakers — Live

While *Hidden Below* will premiere in 2028, audiences don't have to wait to begin experiencing the underwater world of the Great Lakes.

Building on their recent expansion into live, interactive exploration, Drebert and Melnick are inviting the public to join them in real time as they explore the depths with underwater drones on *Hidden Below: LIVE*. Last September, the team [livestreamed their first major expedition to Superior Shoal](#) — the largest freshwater underwater mountain on Earth.

The next *Hidden Below: LIVE* event will take place at 10:00 am Eastern on Earth Day, April 22nd, broadcasting from one of the Great Lakes' most visually mesmerizing and rarely seen locations: the waters surrounding the Bruce Power nuclear generating station on Lake Huron. Co-hosted by renowned fish biologist, Dr. Nicholas Mandrak, the livestream will provide extraordinary access to this "fish city," where more than a dozen species, jockey for survival in crystal-clear waters shaped by human influence. The site stands as a vivid reminder that the Great Lakes are not untouched wilderness, but living ecosystems intricately intertwined with human activity.

Additional missions are planned throughout production — including a descent to the deepest point in the Great Lakes, known as "Superior Maximus," more than 400 metres below the surface of Lake Superior. Each expedition will combine cinema-grade underwater robotics with live commentary from expert guests, as viewers explore alongside the team.

Hidden Below: LIVE is brought to you by *Great Lakes Now/PBS Detroit* and *TVO's The Rundown*. Visit hiddenbelow.live for details on upcoming missions.

FISH CITY

Explore the underwater
metropolis
at the outflow of a
nuclear power plant

EARTH DAY
Wednesday, April 22, 10:00-11:00am ET

Hidden Below
LIVEstream 

Videos & Stills Available for Media:

- [Coaster Brook Trout Spawning Video – Textless](#)
- [Coaster Brook Trout Spawning Video – With Text](#)
- [Coaster Brook Trout Spawning - Stills](#)
- [Hidden Below Trailer](#)
- [Fish City LIVEstream Media](#)

About [Inspired Planet Productions](#)

Yvonne Drebert and Zach Melnick are award-winning documentary filmmakers and Fellows of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. Through Inspired Planet Productions, they have created more than 40 hours of broadcast documentary, including the Canadian Screen Award–nominated series *All Too Clear*. Their work combines cutting-edge underwater technology with cinematic storytelling to reveal overlooked natural worlds and advance freshwater science. They live and work on the shores of Lake Huron’s Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula in Ontario.

About [TVO Media Education Group](#): *Canadian Commissioning Broadcast Partner*

TVO Media Education Group inspires learning that changes lives and enriches communities. Founded in 1970, we are a globally recognized digital learning organization that engages Ontarians of all ages with inclusive experiences and diverse perspectives. Through our brands TVO Today, TVO Learn, TVO ILC and TVOkids, we’re investing in the transformative potential of education for everyone. TVO is a registered charity funded in part by the Province of Ontario and supported by thousands of sponsors and donors. Visit TVO.me for more information.

About *Hidden Below* Partners & Additional Quotes



Nature Conservancy of Canada: *Lead Impact Partner*

Since 1962, the Nature Conservancy of Canada has brought people together to protect the lands and waters that sustain us all. As an environmental charity working hand in hand with communities, Indigenous Nations, governments and businesses, we deliver nature-based solutions at a scale no one else can. Our conservation work safeguards clean air and water, stores carbon and reduces the risks of floods and wildfires — protecting our health, strengthening local economies and building more resilient communities. Together, we unlock nature’s power, so life can thrive.

Parks Canada: *Community Outreach Partner*

On behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations.

Georgian Bay Forever: *Community Outreach Partner*

Georgian Bay Forever conserves, protects, and restores the aquatic ecosystem of all Georgian Bay through science-based research, public education, and community action.

“Hidden Below opens a rare window into the underwater life that sustains our Great Lakes, and we’re proud to support a project that deepens public understanding and inspires the next generation to care for these fragile ecosystems. We’re excited to work with Zach and Yvonne, whose storytelling turns this journey of discovery into something truly wondrous.” - David Sweetnam, Executive Director.

Freshwater Conservation Canada: *Community Outreach Partner*

Freshwater Conservation Canada is committed to conserving, protecting, and restoring Canada’s freshwater ecosystems and their coldwater resources for current and future generations.

“Healthy freshwater ecosystems support wildlife, communities, and future generations, yet so much of this world remains unseen. *Hidden Below* offers an opportunity to highlight the importance of protecting what lies beneath the reflective surface.” - Silvia D’Amelio, CEO.

Canada Freshwater Initiative: *Community Outreach Partner*

The Canadian Freshwater Initiative brings together seven leading conservation organizations, including the Nature Conservancy of Canada and World Wildlife Fund Canada, to protect and restore freshwater ecosystems across the country. The initiative is supported by a landmark \$20 million legacy donation from John McCutcheon, the largest personal gift ever made in Canada for freshwater conservation.

“Across Canada, our waters are under growing pressure, from drying wetlands to declining groundwater and the impacts of development and climate change,” says McCutcheon. “This series will raise awareness of the importance of freshwater ecosystems and inspire Canadians to protect and restore them.” – John McCutcheon, Founder.

Dragonfly Fund: *Community Outreach Partner*

The Dragonfly Fund is the charitable branch of Dragonfly Ventures, a single family office committed to the wellbeing of people and the earth.

“As a small family office investing in the long term health of people with deep connections to our planet, The Dragonfly Fund is beyond excited and honoured to be part of this inspiring documentary. With our own personal deep roots connecting us to Georgian Bay and the Ojibway Peoples who have lived here since time immemorial, we are privileged to support this rare visual journey into the depths of the incredibly unique and life sustaining waters of the Great Lakes.” – Annabelle White and Wendy Cooper, Co-CEOs.

Great Lakes Fishery Commission: *Scientific Partner*

The Great Lakes Fishery Commission is a binational body established by the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries to coordinate and conduct research, recommend measures to protect and improve the fishery, and implement a comprehensive program — including sea lamprey control — to sustain fish stocks and support cooperative management across governments.

Boxfish Robotics: *Technology Partner*

Boxfish Robotics is a New Zealand based underwater robotics manufacturing company that designs autonomous and remotely operated systems with advanced imaging to support scientific research, conservation, and natural history documentaries. Boxfish technology was previously used for freshwater documentary filmmaking by Inspired Planet Productions, and for *Hidden Below*, the company is developing a dedicated underwater robotic platform, along with new visual capabilities designed to offer audiences a more immersive and dimensional experience of life beneath the surface.

“*Hidden Below* reflects exactly why Boxfish underwater robots are perfectly positioned to support science and enable stories that would otherwise remain unseen. Working with Inspired Planet Productions shows the impact of aligning technological innovation with research and filmmaking.

Together, we are developing a new visual approach that will allow audiences to observe underwater ecosystems with an enhanced sense of depth and presence, revealing the hidden complexity of life below the surface." - Craig Anderson, co-founder of Boxfish.

Canadian Geographic: Education Partner

Canadian Geographic and its charitable home, the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, were founded in 1929 with a clear mission: to “make Canada better known to Canadians and to the world.”

"Canadian Geographic is proud to collaborate with Inspired Planet Productions to bring *Hidden Below* to classrooms in every province and territory. Freshwater sustains all life on planet earth and exploring the waters of the Great Lakes with Yvonne and Zach will be exciting and thought-provoking for learners of all ages." - Meredith Brown, Director of Water and Land Relations, Canadian Geographic.

Bruce Power: Education & Outreach Sponsor

Bruce Power is an electricity company based in Bruce County, Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territory, Ontario. We are powered by our people. Our 4,200 employees are the foundation of our accomplishments and are proud of the role they play in safely delivering clean, reliable nuclear power to families and businesses across the province and cancer-fighting medical isotopes around the world. Bruce Power has worked hard to build strong roots in Ontario and is committed to protecting the environment and supporting the communities in which we live. Formed in 2001, Bruce Power is a Canadian-owned partnership of TC Energy, OMERS, the Power Workers’ Union and The Society of United Professionals.

“Bruce Power is pleased to support *Hidden Below* in unlocking a rarely seen underwater world in Lake Huron and around the Great Lakes. The enhanced understanding of life below the water's surface will benefit all residents and users of these culturally significant waters." – Cherie-Lee Fietsch, Environment Regulatory & Research Manager.

Socials:

Facebook
@HiddenBelowGreatLakes

Blue Sky
@hiddenbelow.bsky.social

Instagram
@HiddenBelowGreatLakes

X
@HiddenBelowFilm

TikTok
@hiddenbelowgreatlakes

Media Contacts:

Yvonne Drebert
Producer
yvonne@inspiredplanet.ca
905-317-0350

Genevieve Grant
TVO
ggrant@tvo.org