Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, 12, scampers over logs and rocks, dark hair dancing as he jumps from boulder to boulder. Now he is romping through high grass with his younger brother and enormous dog; now the impassioned sixth-grader is talking into the camera, explaining why he likes spending so much time in the mountains.

"It's something I love to do," Xiuhtezcatl says, smiling. He speaks quickly and with confidence. "Being outside in nature, being in the fresh air, playing in rivers."

Xiuhtezcatl — his name honors his father's Aztec heritage — is a middle-school student who lives in Boulder. He is a musician, public speaker and, above all, an activist. In addition to his work with Earth Guardians, a nonprofit youth organization, Xiuhtezcatl attends marches, rallies and city council meetings. He and his younger brother, Itzcuauhltli, 10, write and perform original music, including the rap song "What the Frack?" Last summer, Xiuhtezcatl was the youngest speaker at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference for Sustainable Development in Brazil.

When I meet him outside a coffee shop in his neighborhood, he sits up, leans into the sun, and speaks with the same passionate, almost urgent tone that filled his voice in the video. He had just returned from meeting with fellow environmental activists in Australia, so he is freshly inspired.

"I think we will play a huge role in waking up other generations," Xiuhtezcatl says of his fellow millennials. "The movement has to begin with us because we will be the most affected."

He goes on to rattle off concerns such as climate change, genetically modified crops, and hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

I first learned about Martinez's activism in an eight-minute short film directed by Kelly Matheson called "Stories of Trust: Colorado" (youtu.be/xr-GUgpic5E). The film is one of 54 entries in this year's Colorado Environmental Film Festival (ceff.net), being held Feb. 21-24, at the American Mountaineering Center in Golden.

In the video, Xiuhtezcatl explains why he signed on to the Atmospheric Trust Litigation, a class-action lawsuit brought by 400 young plaintiffs from across the country.

"Our government has this thing called 'the public trust,' " says Xiuhtezcatl, "and it says the water and the air should be protected for everybody to enjoy."

The suit maintains that under the Public Trust Doctrine, our government is obligated to take more aggressive action to battle climate change. It goes on to suggest specific action to achieve this.

As Xiuhtezcatl tours the burn area of the Fourmile Canyon Fire in the video, he describes phenomena that he has witnessed during his lifetime — including drought, pine bark beetle expansion and severe forest fires.

"The proof is right in front of us," Xiuhtezcatl says of climate change. "This is happening now, this is happening here, and this is real. I think as the caretakers of this beautiful land, it's our responsibility to do something about it."

Xiuhtezcatl gets most excited when he tells me about his dreams for an Earth Guardians community youth center with a recording studio and other features. They're currently looking for funding and a place to put it.

"We have the people, we have the strength, and we have the numbers," he says through a chai-milk mustache. "We just need a place to ground ourselves."

Joshua Berman is the author of "Moon Nicaragua" and "Moon Belize." He can be found on the Web at JoshuaBerman.net and on Twitter at @tranquilotravel
Colorado Environmental Film Festival

"Stories of Trust: Colorado" (8 minutes), First showing Friday, February 22 in Foss Auditorium, 7:00-9:00 pm session; Second Screening Sunday, February 24, CEFF Theater, 1:30-3:30 pm session. Learn more at CEFF.net