

SEJ Journal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Vol. 17 No. 3

Editors focus new attention on climate change, environment

By CHRIS BOWMAN

The Society of Environmental Journalists broke major ground at this year's national conference in attracting 18 news executives to day-long dialogues with experts on global warming, one of the biggest and most difficult-to-tell stories of our time.

Never before have America's senior editors focused collectively on the environment, let alone climate change.

"This is a dream come true," SEJ president Tim Wheeler said of the News Executives Roundtable, hosted by Stanford University at the Sept. 5 opening of the society's 17th annual conference.

The glass-office editors came from coast to coast.

From California: Jeanne Carstensen, managing editor, Salon.com; Bob Cohn, executive editor, *Wired*; John Diaz, editorial page editor, *San Francisco Chronicle*; Donald Kennedy, editor-in-chief, *Science*; Rick Rodriguez, executive editor, *The Sacramento Bee*; and Leo Wolinsky, associate editor, *Los Angeles Times*.

The Pacific Northwest: David Boardman, executive editor, *The Seattle Times* and Dave Zeeck, executive editor, *The News Tribune* of Tacoma, Wash.

The Midwest: Caesar Andrews, executive editor, *Detroit Free Press*; Susan Goldberg, editor, *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland; Martin Kaiser, editor, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; and Carolyn Washburn, editor, *Des Moines Register*, Iowa.

The Southeast: Bennie Ivory, executive editor, *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Ky.

The Northeast: Leonard Downey, executive editor, *The Washington Post*; Glenn Kramon, assistant managing editor, *The New York Times*; David Ledford, executive editor, *The News Journal* of Wilmington, Del.; Frank Scandale, editor, *The Record* of Bergen County, N.J.; and Anne Thompson, chief environmental affairs correspondent for NBC News in New York.

"I was startled by the turnout," said James Bettinger, director of Stanford's John S. Knight Fellowships for Professional

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Inside Story:

'Horror movie' approach reaches wide TV audience

By BILL DAWSON

In a time of ever-accelerating change in American journalism, it probably shouldn't have come as that much of a surprise that one of the big winners in SEJ's 6th Annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment was a documentary with the trappings of a cheesy horror movie.

The top winner in the "Outstanding Beat/In-Depth Reporting, Television" category was "The Green Monster," a 30-minute examination of a huge algae bloom in Florida's St. Johns River in 2005. Sharing the honor was a five-member team from PRC Digital Media, an independent company in Jacksonville that produced the program. Sponsored by a local advocacy group with funders including Jacksonville's daily newspaper, it was initially broadcast on the city's WTLV-TV.

The SEJ Awards judges had this to say about the documentary, which explained the importance of the bloom, the multiple culprits ("It's you and me – it's all of us in Northeast Florida"),

and what corrective actions could be taken:

"The producers of this 30-minute program took an extremely unconventional approach, using a 1950's horror movie style to highlight a severe algae problem in Jacksonville's St. Johns River. Judges found the approach filled with potential to reach an audience that environmental journalism normally doesn't. Further, the judges found the focus not just on the problem but also on common-sense solutions commendable."

PRC also produced a follow-up documentary this year, "Revenge of the River," a harder-edged look at developers, environmental enforcement, and the political prospects for adequate funding of a cleanup plan for the St. Johns.

PRC's Bill Retherford, writer/producer for the two documentaries, responded to questions from the *SEJournal*:

Q: Tell me a little about your company, PRC Digital Media. What types of clients do you have? What kinds of

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Gloom and doom? SEJ's climate is anything but.

By **TIM WHEELER**

A reader sent me an email recently asking why my newspaper so often seemed to take a “negative slant” on the day’s news.

“All we hear is crime, the death of real estate, toxins, and maybe if someone is in a good mood something about how much fun this place is,” the frustrated reader lamented.

My correspondent was a real estate agent, who no doubt craves upbeat news these days given slumping home sales. But he had a point – we journalists, especially, tend to focus our attention on what’s wrong and overlook what’s right.

So, properly chastened, let me report some good news to you purveyors of gloom and doom.

First, climate change, or global warming – whatever you want to call it – is all over the news these days. And SEJ is in the thick of it, encouraging more and better reporting of this vital issue.

Credit Al Gore if you want. I prefer to think the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had more to do with it – that, and maybe the video of polar bears swimming for their lives; or the satellite images of the Arctic ice cap looking more like a beanie this past summer, it had melted so much.

Whatever the cause, polls show public interest in climate and the environment is on the rise. So, it seems, is interest in reporting on it. SEJ’s 17th annual conference at Stanford University in early September drew a record crowd of more than 900, including more than 400 journalists. That’s a phenomenal turnout, given the shrinking staffs and training budgets of so many newspapers.

The conference agenda was chockfull of climate topics, from the opening plenary on covering the issue to the screening Saturday night of a new global-warming documentary, Leonardo DiCaprio’s “11th Hour.”

The most exciting session for me began before the conference officially got under way. Eighteen top executives of newspapers and other news organizations gathered at Stanford’s business school for a day-long seminar on how to cover the climate story. The session, emceed by SEJ founder and maestro Bud Ward, was sponsored by the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting and by SEJ, with support from Stanford’s Woods Institute for the Environment and Yale University’s Project on Climate Change.

It was a dream come true. For years, we journalists have griped about how hard it was to sell environmental stories to skeptical editors and news directors. But there, editors for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and a lot of other highly respected mainstream and online publications sat through a full day of briefings by researchers on the scientific evidence of climate change and possible policy responses. No

one nodded off. The editors took notes, asked questions and vowed to do more climate coverage. Two of them even joined SEJ on the spot!

SEJ also helped organize a day-long seminar on covering climate in June in Portland, Ore., for print, radio and TV reporters and editors. More than 90 gave up their Saturday to attend that session, which was put on by the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication and the Climate Leadership Initiative at the University of Oregon, in partnership with SEJ.

Given the obvious hunger among reporters and news managers for fresh angles on climate change, SEJ plans more workshops, tipsheets and other activities on that topic in the coming year from SEJ. Staffers are gearing up now to expand the online reporting guide to climate change posted earlier this year, and we’re looking to replicate the success of last summer’s Oregon workshop as well in other parts of the country.

Through those and other initiatives under consideration, SEJ will be offering journalists in all media the tools and tips for delving into this most important environmental story. Bloggers and skeptics, please note: SEJ won’t be telling anyone what to report, or even how to do it, but encouraging them to dig deeper, seek out the experts and ask for the evidence to back up all claims and assumptions.

Other positive news to report to you,

SEJ members:

- SEJ is stronger financially today than it was a year ago, thanks in large part to the heart-warming generosity of members and of non-members as well, who appreciate the role journalists and SEJ play in improving the quality and visibility of environmental reporting. Spurred on by a matching grant offer from the Challenge Fund for Journalism, we blew past our goal and raised \$130,000, earning the maximum \$51,500 match. The sum raised more than doubled the size of SEJ’s 21st Century Fund. We’ve still got a long way to go to reach our ultimate goal of \$3 million, but this was a huge first step in that proverbial journey.

- *SEJournal* is about to take on an exciting new look. This past summer, SEJ’s board of directors authorized a redesign of the quarterly to enhance its visual appeal while sacrificing none of the news and features that make it must reading for anyone serious about covering the environment.

- Work is also ongoing behind the scenes to revamp the look and functionality of SEJ’s website. The first essential but invisible step will be to “migrate” our databases to a new platform, one that is easier to work with. Once that’s complete, we plan to revamp the website to enhance its usefulness to members and the public alike. Any and all suggestions – and offers of help – welcome!

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Report from the Society’s President

By
**Tim
Wheeler**



SEJournal

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SEJournal submission deadlines

Winter 2008.....November 1, 2007

Spring 2008.....February 1, 2008

Summer 2008.....May 1, 2008

Fall 2008.....August 1, 2008

SEJ's innovative solution: Meet at a suburban campus

By DAVID HELVARG

Arriving in the green sprawl of Stanford University, the Virginia Tech of the West, I was greeted by Frisbee-tossing SEJers high on the beat's new relevance amidst growing public concern over rapid climate change and fear about the kind of world Anna Nichole Smith's baby will grow up in.

Also SEJ had its second Pulitzer. And while Mark Schleifstein's prize had always seemed a little fishy to me, I've seen Ken Weiss get polluted and know his is worth a sea of ink.

As usual the conference offered a range of inspiring panels including a discussion of parasite and pathogens. I was certainly impressed that 18 top editors and publishers would come to Stanford for a daylong seminar on climate.

Given that climate has become a major part of the beat, it was suggested the SEJ board not accept contributions from anyone directly benefiting from photosynthesis. Once again a name change was also suggested from SEJ to SFEJ, Self-Flagellating Environmental Journalists. Can't people just relax and enjoy the benefits of ecosystem-wide collapse? By which of course I mean the newspaper industry.

The first night's energy plenary was unprecedented in that it left moderator Amy Goodman with little to say. One of the panelists was Stanford's own Paul Ehrlich who once lost a famous bet when he claimed that in 25 years we'd see a decline of key

natural resources like arrogance.

Thursday's field trips included visits to an organic strawberry farm, an eco-winery, the Monterey Bay Aquarium and a kayak trip through an enchanted lagoon full of frisky otters for reporters who've given up even trying to justify it to their editors.

This year's hospitality suites lacked some of the past drama of live wolves and free vodka, though it's good to know that China can at least make toxic-free tote bags and that there are still people dedicated to saving the wild salmon for appetizers.

Friday's breakout/break-up breakfast asked if the relationship between Scientists (Obsessive Compulsives) and Journalists (ADD) can be saved. Time to move on.

The conference's theme tracks included the climate, the ocean, environmental health and beauty tips, the latter provided by a sub-species once thought extinct, broadcast environmental reporters, who with warming temperatures, have flocked back to the beat. They can be distinguished from the grey-hued ink-stained generally wider-bodies print species by their feathery manes, natural preening and coppery glow. Ironically the same scientists who once claimed TV environmental reporting was dead are now saying that loss of habitat could soon doom print reporters (*Journos Norespectus Underpais*).

Still the big plenary on "the New Journalism," assured us

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In the field: Kayaking a coastal estuary

By MARK NEUZIL

More than three dozen SEJ conference attendees came faces to faces with California sea otters, harbor seals, brown

For example, the mouth of the Salinas River was diverted in 1908-1910; in 1946, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers channeled the slough to allow easier ship access; the nearby Moss

Landing Power Plant (natural gas) is one of the largest in the state. What remains is a fairly diverse habitat, particularly for birds. More than 350 species have been seen in the area.

The SEJers, complete with wetsuits and rain jackets, were divided into three flotillas of kayaks (all two-person sit-on-tops) and led by three guides from a nearby outfitter. All but one of the 38 participants had experience in a kayak or canoe before the trip. One highlight: The guides estimated that the group saw about 100 sea otters (of a statewide population of perhaps 3,000).

After the kayak trip, the group visited the Elkhorn Slough Foundation, where original research is being conducted.

A walking tour of the slough with Executive Director Mark Silberstein and presentations from scientists and activists completed the day. Freelancer Charlotte Kidd and *Contra Costa Times* reporter Dennis Cuff organized the outing.



Photo courtesy of CHARLOTTE KIDD

pelicans and other species in a three-hour kayak trip on Elkhorn Slough near Monterey.

Elkhorn Slough is one of California's largest remaining tidal estuaries and has been dramatically affected by humans.

Mark Neuzil teaches environmental journalism at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn.

SEJ names top environmental stories and journalists

Pollution of lakes, streams and oceans, the long-lasting effects of mining and mineral processing and attempts to turn laws protecting fragile habitats on their heads were the subjects of the best environmental journalism of 2006-2007, according to the Society of Environmental Journalists.

Winners and finalists were honored Sept. 5 at a gala ceremony in the Frances C. Arrillaga Alumni Center on the campus of Stanford University in California, on the first day of SEJ's 17th annual conference. Eight winning entries for the SEJ contest received \$1,000 each and a trophy.

Judges in the sixth annual contest sponsored by the SEJ selected 27 entries in 10 categories as finalists in the SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment, the world's largest and most comprehensive awards for journalism on environmental topics.

Judging panels of distinguished reporters, editors and journalism educators combed through nearly 200 entries to choose the finalists representing the best environmental reporting in print and on television, radio and the Internet. This year, the judges also chose the best environmental journalism among student entries.

In another first this year, Stanford University's John S. Knight Fellowships for Professional Journalists and the Bill Lane Center for the Study of the North American West presented the James V. Risser Prize for Western Environmental Journalism during the awards program. The \$3,000 annual award recognizes excellence in reporting on environmental issues in the West.

Visit www.sej.org/contest/index4.htm to view winners' stories online.

This year's SEJ winners are:

Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting, Print

FIRST PLACE: Craig Pittman, Matthew Waite, *St. Petersburg Times*

The series' deep and meticulous reporting uncovered the hijacking of a wetlands mitigation program that often failed to perform, instead lining the pockets of politically well-connected businessmen. The reporters turned a spotlight on government failures at the local, state and federal level, showing how a politically popular environmental policy is easily corruptible.

SECOND PLACE: Sara Shipley Hiles, Marina Walker Guevara, *Mother Jones*, "Cities of Lead"

This well-documented and well-written piece explored the atrocious environmental record of the Doe Run Co.'s lead smelters in the United States and Peru. The authors dramatically illustrated how offshoring allows companies to escape government oversight and make a profit at the same time – in this case with a terrible cost to the health of workers and neighbors of Doe Run's smelters.

THIRD PLACE: David Danelski, Jennifer Bowles, Duane Gang, Cassie MacDuff, Devona Wells, *The Press-*

***Enterprise*, "The Big Squeeze"**

The reporters pulled together large quantities of scientific and bureaucratic information, along with on-scene reporting, to draw a clear conclusion: A regional compromise between more development and protecting large blocks of wildlife habitat is failing. Compelling maps and graphics helped draw readers into a complex story.



Outstanding Beat Reporting, Print

FIRST PLACE: Jane Kay, *San Francisco Chronicle*

In a very strong contest category, Jane Kay's stories stand out as exemplars of the very best of what environmental beat reporting can be. The seven stories she submitted range widely in tone (from agenda-setting news to inspirational features) and subject (from rising sea levels to toxic toys), but what they all share is Kay's careful reporting, smart organization and clear, confident voice.

SECOND PLACE: Susan Gordon, *The News Tribune*

Susan Gordon is a solid beat reporter, prowling the waterfront of her city to document new and lingering sources of the pollution, inadequate cleanup, misspent funds and inadequate state oversight. She goes deep and it shows in a great body of work.

THIRD PLACE: Tom Knudson, *The Sacramento Bee* "Fires"

In a series of stories about problems fighting western forest fires, restoring burned forests and outrageous costs in fighting the fires, Tom Knudson writes with the authority and clarity of a veteran of the environmental beat. Every story brings out powerful points, with eloquence. Beautiful work.

Outstanding Beat/In-depth Reporting, Radio

FIRST PLACE: Bob Edwards, Andy Danyo, Geoffrey Redick, XM Satellite Radio XMPR Channel 133, "Exploding Heritage"

This documentary had it all: deep reporting, great writing, colorful storytelling, crisp production and a parade of engaging, passionate voices. Edwards creates haunting images and introduces us to voices that linger in the listener's mind for days. The writing sparkles, but never gets in the way of the story or its compelling voices. It also explores the tension and heartbreak over the coal industry's origins and the future of the rural communities that surround it. The documentary never loses its aim of communicating the potential peril. It also gives ample time to all sides of a complex story. Edwards took a familiar environmental topic and managed to make it new. It had depth, nuance and a determination to dynamite through the rhetoric...and uncover the truth. This excellent documentary shows just how great radio journalism can be.

SECOND PLACE: John Ryan, KUOW-94.9FM, Seattle, "As The Sound Churns"

Ryan's style is loose, cool and pleasingly ragged around the

(Continued on page 27)

Climate change may help us — but not define us

By **BUD WARD**

It was all climate change, all the time – 24/7 as they say.

SEJ's 17th annual conference, at Stanford University Sept. 5-9, was a veritable smorgasbord, an unending feast, for those on the climate change beat. But only for those who actually wanted that particular diet, you understand. Dozens of ostensibly unrelated environmental issues – as well as the delicious “tools of the trade” sessions on new media and like – were addressed at the conference.

In the summer 2007 issue of this same newsletter, SEJ President Tim Wheeler, of the *Baltimore Sun*, wrote philosophically on the subject of a potential name change for SEJ (www.sej.org/pub/index2.htm). It's not an entirely new idea, and it's still not clear where, if anywhere, it will or should go. But as SEJ, like any maturing organization, continues to define and redefine itself in a rapidly changing media environment, it's an important one.

The notion was broached at the SEJ board of directors' business meeting at Stanford, but it didn't appear to generate a whole lot of buzz among the members at large.

All the same, judging from the Stanford meeting, one might imagine something along the lines of “Society of Climate Change Journalists.”

Let's hope not. Climate change for the past couple of years now has been commanding a reasonably fair share of the media's too-few air time and column inches available for reporting on the environment. And that's a good thing.

But alas – as sweeping and profound as the implications of climate change may be – there is more to the environment and to environmental journalism than “just” climate change.

The climate change goodies at the Stanford conference included a first-ever full-day “forum” for some of the nation's top news executives and an all-star list of climate scientists, experts, and economists. While most conference attendees were still en route from around the country, SEJ had teamed with the Metcalf Institute for Marine & Environmental Reporting, housed at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography, to invite the editors and faculty. (Hosted by Stanford, the Sept. 5 “News Executives Forum” was underwritten by grants from the Heinz Family Philanthropies and the Yale Project on Climate Change, in the case of SEJ, and from The Energy Foundation, in the case of Metcalf.)

With a morning focus on the underlying “consensus” science showing that the Earth is warming and that human activities are a major contributing factor in that warming, the afternoon emphasized impacts and economics – can we afford to address the challenges and seek out the opportunities? Can we afford not to?

World-renowned climate experts – including Ohio State glaciologist Lonnie Thompson, Stanford's Steve Schneider and Terry Root, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Ben Santer, and the Rocky Mountain Institute's Amory Lovins – made up the star-studded faculty, eclipsed perhaps only by an equally

celestial group of executive editors. (See cover story.)

It was a first for SEJ and, it now appears, a first also for prominent executive editors. But how did it, in fact, go?

Keep in mind I was directly involved in planning this meeting. But what matters most is how the invited editors – and also the invited scientists – think it went. One can say this for sure. There are things we could have done better, this cohesive planning committee that had labored over a year for this particular day. To wit:

- When we initially planned the editors' forum more than a year ago, we envisioned emphasizing only the science of climate change. The issue over just that short time had moved so fast that even editors were showing signs of “getting it” on the science. We

refocused to include impacts, adaptation, energy implications, and economics. If we were to do another workshop along these lines, we'll focus much more on the “solutions” and less on the underlying science, now that there's growing recognition (even among editors!) of the scientific backing.

- A few – not too many – of the scientists lapsed into instances of their own jargon. “PNAS,” we had to inform editors, referred to the peer-reviewed journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Word is that two editors were overheard complaining in the restroom that they wished people didn't use the term “coefficients” in addressing editors (or many reporters!). Another top editor allowed that at a few points the scientific jargon “left me cold.”

- There were some concerns about the scientists discussing upcoming studies and analyses which, at the time, were embargoed. The editors wanted more here than they could then get.

- At least one of the faculty's presentations came across as being highly technical, excessively procedural...and in some cases flat-out in error. It helped here to have a knowledgeable science reporter, AP's Seth Borenstein, in the room to help complement the editors and set things right.

The ball now is in the court of SEJ and other journalism-minded groups. The door finally is opened, at least a bit, to closer and deeper collaboration with top executive editors, something that has been a long-time “dream,” to use SEJ leaders' terminology, for the organization. You'll read elsewhere in this and, one hopes, upcoming *SEJournals*, about those next steps and the road toward implementing them.

For now, those of us – and there were many – involved in planning and conducting the News Executives Forum can bathe only briefly in the glow of what in many ways appears to have been a substantial success. What we can't afford to do is rest on our laurels. The issues are too big, and the challenges facing responsible journalism and a warming world too daunting, to be overly self-congratulatory. Let's get on with it.

E-Reporting Biz



By
**Bud
Ward**

Bud Ward is a co-founder of SEJ.



Mike Dunne, 1949-2007

Journalist, mentor, volunteer left us with a lesson

By MICHAEL MANSUR

This is the first issue of the *SEJournal* published since the passing of Mike Dunne, our assistant editor.

Each issue, Mike would assemble “The Beat” and an “Inside Story” on some outstanding work of journalism, probing the author about why he chose to lead with this fact. Or asking why he chose to organize a story in this certain way.

Mike invented the “Inside Story.” Not long after I took over as editor, Mike told me at a reception at an SEJ annual meeting that he had been thinking about ways to make the journal more how-to, more useful to the daily reporter on the E-beat. What if we did...? And the “Inside Story” was born.

Mike and I saw each other once a year at such SEJ meetings. And we used it in recent years to reinforce our mission with the journal. Be of use. Help others.

At another such annual SEJ gathering, Mike explained, in part, where such passion was born. He was a Vietnam vet. And for decades he carried the heavy mantle of the survivor, the one who got that extra chance at making a life. He didn’t want to waste it.

Mike survived by the grace of God and a bottle of rum.

After basic training in Fort Polk, La., Mike got orders to go to Vietnam as an infantryman. He figured that his life was over, so he gave away his earthly possessions and got drunk.

Driving home that night in New Orleans, he hit a telephone pole. The injuries kept him three weeks in the hospital. When he finally was released back to the military, his platoon’s ship had sailed for Vietnam. The Army sent him, instead, to Germany, where according to his wife, Freda, he tormented the officers much like Radar O’Reilly of TV fame.

Mike kept up with his basic training buddies from Fort Polk. By the time the war was over, Mike was the only surviving member of the platoon. All the others who went to Vietnam died in combat.

Mike told me that story to explain why he did so much. Don’t waste a day. Help others, he told me.

It was clear from his packed funeral service that many saw and appreciated how much he did for others, from the

Boy Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous and his many years of reporting in Louisiana.

“He was an amazing mentor to me because his knowledge of environmental issues in Louisiana was so extensive,” *Advocate* environment reporter Amy Wold said. “He’s well known and respected nationwide. He’s been a really good teacher and friend.”

A founding member of the Society of Environmental

Journalists, Mike was well known in Baton Rouge for his work with Boy Scouts. An Eagle Scout, Mike was an active Boy Scouts volunteer.

“Mike gave his life to Scouting and impacted tens of thousands of young people in our council area,” Chuck Simmons, Scout executive, told the *Advocate*.

Mike, as many of you know, succumbed to a long battle with cancer in July. His last “Inside Story” was an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* reporter who

wrote the *Altered Oceans* series, which earlier had won the Pulitzer Prize.

Mike had twice won the Edward J. Meeman Award, Scripps-Howard Foundation’s top prize for environment writing. In recent years he had completed a book with photographer Bevil Knapp on Louisiana’s vanishing coastal wetlands.

At the recent annual conference in Stanford, SEJ awarded Mike with its David Stolberg award, annually given to its top volunteer. Family attended to accept on Mike’s behalf.

Mike would appreciate, I’m sure, that his SEJ family honor him in one other way – remember how he lived. Don’t waste that precious time we all somehow have won, by luck or persistence or smarts. Put it to good use for others.

Thanks, Mike.



Mike Dunne, 1949-2007.

In Memory of Mike Dunne

The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana



Viewpoint... (from page 4)

that if we each just tape and record our stories while researching and blogging them we can remain as relevant to the demanding new news consumer as any skateboarding bulldog. The executive editor of the *News Journal* surprised many when he asserted that, "major news breaks in Delaware."

One bit of exciting news was that Cliff Bars bought enough credits to make the conference carbon neutral which appealed to the crunchy-granola-with-chocolate-drops-and-almonds crowd. Also Stanford University has set saving the planet as one of its top four or five initiatives using innovative approaches like feeding Cardinals to large Golden Bears.

Unlike drying paint, the annual SEJ membership meeting gave off no volatile organic compounds. SEJ reported tremendous membership growth among freelancers, also known as out-of-work reporters. This year's conference attendance was reported to be 888 though SEJ critic Joe Farah insists it was 666.

Other news from the conference sessions included the fact that 97 percent of Appalachia's mountains still have tops, your odds of not getting cut up by coral or attacked by large fish when you go into the ocean are improving, sea lions now have herpes (which may track back to exposure to disco in the 1970s), alien species no longer are (since you can find them everywhere) and the Ambassador from Bangladesh is shocked that people would think of moving back to New Orleans.

Among the kinds of cutting-edge research often heard at SEJ, UC Davis professor Pat Conrad reported 70 percent of the 105 tons of cat feces deposited outdoors around Moro Bay is from domestic cats. This is important information if you're tracking pathogens to sea otters or planning to buy in the area. Princeton Professor Andy Dobson reported that parasites can take up heavy

metals in the body. The Bush administration is now considering tapeworms as a low-cost voluntary approach to toxic remediation and the national epidemic of obesity.

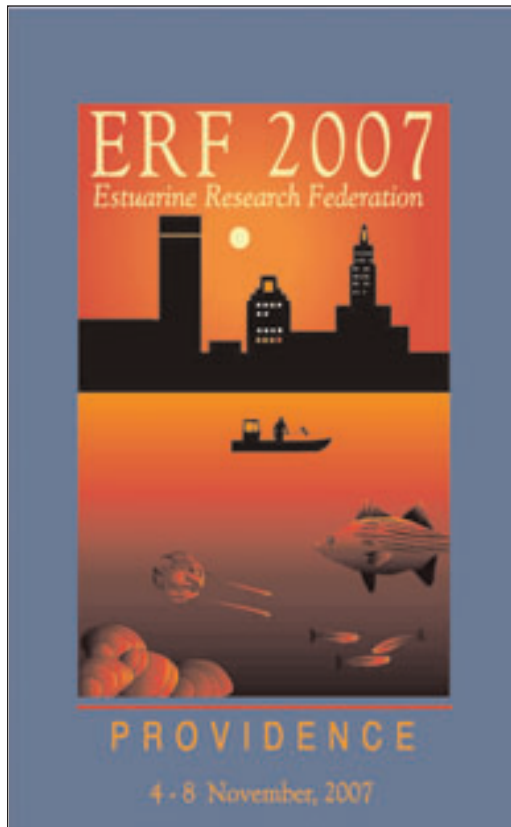
Among the beat dinners and mini-tours freelancers discussed how to spend their careers searching for a restaurant in San Francisco while others visited the Hayward Fault which runs directly through the UC Bears stadium. (As part of its commitment to the planet Stanford is working on seismic triggering technology). There was also a bus tour to Google headquarters to view the company's efforts to reduce their carbon footprint. Wouldn't just googling it have helped?

The conference's last night was given over to a special screening of Leonardo DeCaprio's movie "The 11th Repetition." After four days of panels, I for one was happy to skip the traditional Saturday night dance in order to hear his take on the failure of the media to cover the environment. I look forward to next year when, rumor has it, Sheryl Crow will give her take on cap and trade versus a carbon tax.

Most unusual this year was the SEJ board's decision to have two conferences in a row at popular travel destinations like Burlington, Vt., and Northern California. Luckily this will be corrected before the IRS begins looking into our business travel deductions. With planning for next year well under way I'd like to propose a conference travel fellowship to the first member who can identify what state Roanoke is in.

David Helvarg is an author and associate member of SEJ who has written "50 Ways to Save the Ocean." To remain impartial he is now working on "50 Ways to Destroy the Ocean."

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Jobs and honors – even for wikis – flow to SEJers

By JACKLEEN de LA HARPE

Jon Cooksey, writer/director, is working on a documentary entitled “How to Boil a Frog,” a factual comedy about the bigger picture around global warming and what real people can do to make a difference. Cooksey uses humor, interviews with experts, and experiments from his own life to piece together the story of how we managed to get all the way off the cliff before seeing it coming, and what – short of a total catastrophe (or the threat of more movies about global warming) – can get us to take action. The online activism has already begun – check it out at www.howtoboilafrog.com.

Stephanie Hainsfurther is the new associate editor, special publications, of *New Mexico Business Weekly*, a publication of American City Business Journals. She also assigns and edits Focus features and Small Business Strategies profiles for the *Weekly*.

Greg Harman left the *Houston Press* last year (where he received a “Lone Star Award” from the Houston Press Club for political reporting) to dance with wolf hybrids at a wildlife rescue deep in the Texas Hill Country. The pleasure of those steps quickly led him back to his journalistic stride and a staff writing position at the *San Antonio Current*.

Tom Henry of *The (Toledo) Blade* was honored with a special award by the League of Women Voters of Toledo-Lucas County for his environmental coverage, in particular, Toledo-area refineries. He was nominated by Sue Nichols, his first journalism professor at his undergraduate alma mater, Central Michigan University. Nichols is a past president of the Toledo chapter and, in the 1970s, founded the League of Women Voters chapter in Republican stronghold Mount Pleasant, Mich., where CMU is based. Henry also recently began writing a weekly environmental column for *The Blade*'s Sunday news analysis section, one of the few of its kind in the Midwest.

Peter B. Lord, environmental writer at the *Providence Journal*, received a masters degree in marine affairs this spring at the University of Rhode Island. Lord spent five years working on the program, taking one course a semester. He continues to serve as journalism director at the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting and to teach journalism at the University of Rhode Island.

In September, **Jason Mark**, editor of the environmental quarterly *Earth Island Journal*, will publish his second book, “Building the Green Economy: Success Stories from the Grassroots” (PoliPointPress). Co-authored with **Kevin Danaher** and **Shannon Biggs**, the book tells the stories of people who are working in their communities to create a more ecologically sustainable and socially just economy. The book includes Q&As with environmental leaders such as Van Jones, Lois Gibbs, Omar Freilla, and Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson.

Diane Gow McDilda's book, “The Everything Green Living Book,” will be on shelves September 2007. The book walks readers through different environmental aspects of their everyday lives from throwing away trash to pouring a glass of water, even clothing their family. Some background is given on current technologies and their impacts along with environmentally friendly solutions and improvements.

Mindy Pennybacker, former editor-in-chief of *The Green Guide* and www.thegreenguide.com, left on the eve of the nonprofit's acquisition by National Geographic's Digital Media and has

soft-launched a new website and blog, www.greenerpenney.com.

Jim Motavalli, editor of *E/The Environmental Magazine* (www.emagazine.com) and co-director of SEJ's Ride and Drive program, is now posting a weekly auto blog at the Hearst startup www.thedailygreen.com. His book “Naked in the Woods: Joseph Knowles and the Legacy of Frontier Fakery in America” will be published by DaCapo in January. Knowles went into the woods of Maine in 1913 to prove he could “live off the land.” His story, serialized in the *Boston Post* newspaper, doubled circulation and led to crowds of 100,000 or more in the streets of Boston when he emerged after two months.

Dave Poulson, project director for the Great Lakes Wiki, reports that this Michigan State University student experiment in environmental reporting is among the projects recognized in a national competition of cutting-edge journalism. Of 133 entries, only 10 were honored. Judges of the Knight-Batten Awards recognized MSU's GreatLakesWiki.org “for collecting information as broad and deep as the Great Lakes it covers.” The judges said the project “has the categories, content and organization that made this wiki the best of those entered.” The rest: www.great-lakeswiki.org/index.php/Great_Lakes_Wiki_Award

John Ryan took first place in Public Radio News Directors Incorporated's 2007 contest for Best News Series with “As the Sound Churns,” a five-part series on the currents of Puget Sound, produced for KUOW-FM in Seattle. John is now a reporter at KTOO-FM in Juneau, Alaska. The series won regional first-place awards from the Society of Professional Journalists and the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

Darren Samuelsohn, senior reporter at Greenwire, won an honorable mention this summer from the National Press Club for a series on climate change. Darren's award came for outstanding analysis in a newsletter.

Jim Schwab, who doubles as co-editor of the monthly *Zoning Practice* and as a senior research associate for the American Planning Association in Chicago, is now manager of the new APA Hazards Planning Research Center. The Center has attracted its first contract for APA, a 30-month contract with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to produce a Planning Advisory Service Report (an APA series of technical monographs) on “Integrating Hazard Mitigation into Local Planning.” The study will examine the best practices on how communities can make mitigation of natural hazards a routine part of their planning activities. Jim previously has managed several research projects on disaster issues for APA prior to the creation of the new center, including the well-known “Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction,” released in 1999.

Bud Ward is launching an online climate change journalism resource – the Yale Forum on Climate Change & The Media (www.climatemediaforum.yale.edu) – this fall in cooperation with the Yale University Project on Climate Change. The online magazine seeks to link journalists and climate scientists and provide both disciplines resources to better inform the public on climate change/global warming issues.

Snagged a new job or won an award? Contact Jackleen de La Harpe at jackdelaha@yahoo.com.

An old topic – recycling – offers some new angles and stories

By SALLY DENEEN

If you haven't covered recycling for a while, you – and your audience – might be surprised by how things have changed and the variety of new angles to explore.

The number of curbside recycling programs now surpasses 9,000. Yet, a greater percentage of recyclable plastic bottles and aluminum cans are landing in the garbage.

Here's another odd disconnect that may not bode well for recycling: North American manufacturers want more recyclables and fear they won't get them. Yet, a Minnesota survey found almost three-quarters of Minnesotans say there isn't a need to recycle more cans, bottles and paper.

And get this: "The more education you have, the more likely you are to be cynical about recycling," said Paul Gardner, executive director, Recycling Association of Minnesota.

Gardner surmises that educated consumers are recalling the early 1990s, when local recycling programs picked up more discards than manufacturers could handle.

But over the last decade, the paper, plastic, glass, aluminum and steel industries invested billions in new equipment to handle recyclables. Some people still think there's a glut, though.

Gardner spends some time combating arguments posed in occasional anti-recycling articles such as "Recycle This!" (*Weekly Standard*, January 2006). Most famous was the original story – "Recycling Is Garbage," a 1996 cover story in *The New York Times* Sunday magazine. Libertarian writer John Tierney argued that recycling could be "the most wasteful activity in modern America."

"Recycling does sometimes make sense – for some materials in some places at some times," Tierney wrote. "But the simplest and cheapest option is usually to bury garbage in an environmentally safe landfill... There's no reason to make recycling a legal or moral imperative." When *The American Prospect* in 2001 profiled Tierney and asked about that story, he said: "I could write something about the good side of recycling. And there are some benefits. But everybody else writes that."

Jerry Powell, editor of *Resource Recycling* magazine, calls arguments against recycling "ill-founded," because "recycling is a major source of raw materials."

"Without recycling, given current virgin raw material supplies, we could not print the daily newspaper, build a car or ship a product in a cardboard box. Recycling is not some feel-good activity," Powell said. "It is one of the backbones of global eco-

nomics development. With recycling levels exceeding 50 percent for many materials (corrugated cartons, steel, aluminum, etc.), materials recovery and utilization are key ingredients to industrial growth and stability."

OK, that's the background.

What about story angles? Recycling could be a whole beat, but here are a few ideas:

- Blame the bottled water craze. "Americans' thirst for portable water is behind drop in recycling rate," reads a secondary headline above SEJer Miguel Llanos' 2005 article for MSNBC.com. Most bottled water is consumed in parks and other places where there isn't recycling. (See story: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5279230/).

- Can cities become garbage-free? San Francisco aims for 100 percent diversion by 2020; it's among a handful of communities making "zero waste" a guiding principle, including Del Norte, Calif., and Seattle. "We are now treating waste as a resource," said Seattle councilmember Richard Conlin. San Francisco has banned foam restaurant take-out containers and supermarket plastic shopping bags, ending the tired question: paper or plastic? *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer's* Kathy Mulady recently followed a Seattle household's garbage all the way to its landfill destination in Oregon: http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/323082_trashtrain10.html.

- Congress long ago ordered the Commerce Department to stimulate U.S. markets for recycled materials, but the department is falling down on the job, says a December 2006 Government Accountability Office report (www.gao.gov/new.items/d0737.pdf). It's finding markets in foreign nations like China instead. "...[T]he agency is not taking any actions to stimulate domestic markets and, therefore, is not fully meeting its responsibilities under RCRA (Resource Conservation and Recovery Act) subtitle E," the GAO reported.

- Is your city on the path to meet the national recycling goal of 35 percent by 2008? How does it stack up against other cities? In the same GAO report mentioned above, Atlanta reported a modest recycling goal – 26 percent by 2015. Chicago and New York reported their recycling goals are 25 percent; Philadelphia, 35 per-

cent. Denver aims for 30 percent waste diversion by 2011. Portland, Ore., aims higher with a 75 percent goal by 2015.

- In Kamikatsu, Japan, residents sort trash into 44 categories, yet the U.S. trend is toward "single-stream" recycling – meaning all recyclables go into one curbside bin. This process lowers the cost of service, so "it's here to stay," predicts *Resource Recycling's*

(Continued on page 12)



Recycling Resources:

- Best statistical sources, according to GAO: EPA report, "Municipal Solid Waste in the United States: Facts and Figures" (www.epa.gov/msw/msw99.htm); and BioCycle Magazine's "The State of Garbage in America" (www.jgpress.com/archives/_free/000848.html)
- Resource Recycling Magazine (www.resource-recycling.com) covers the industry.
- Container Recycling Institute (www.container-recycling.org), a nonprofit pro-recycling organization, offers statistical charts and a bottle-bill resource guide. It's pushing a "zero beverage container waste by 2020" campaign.
- Minnesota survey: <http://tinyurl.com/3b9obs>

Climate concern sparks surge in green building designs

By CATHERINE COONEY

You can feel it the minute you step inside: the cool concrete flooring, oversized windows, neutral colors and low lighting provide a sense of open space and cleanliness. The modern-styled architecture seems out of place in Washington, D.C., especially on a hot, smoggy, July afternoon. I'm in Lake Tahoe, I thought, as I walked into the school building where my daughter's summer camp was held.

The structure is not new. It was a 55-year-old building sorely in need of an upgrade when a member of the Board of Trustees at the private Sidwell Friends Middle School heard a talk by William McDonough, who has played a key role in developing sustainable designs for the past 20 years.

Following a year-and-a-half of discussions with the trustees, school leaders, architects, city officials, and parents, the school committed to a green redesign. The renovated structure opened for classes in the fall of 2006, complete with passive solar design, daylighting using existing sunlight, highly efficient electric lighting and a green roof. It also includes the District of Columbia's only constructed wetland, treating wastewater for reuse in the school's toilets and cooling towers.

Green building design, or sustainable design, is undergoing a growth spurt. The actual definition remains up for debate. But under the "green building" umbrella, architects are answering a call from their clients for materials that have been used previously or made from recycled materials, says Whit Faulconer, a project manager at GreenBlue, a nonprofit research organization that promotes sustainable design. These include glass tiles made from old bottles or wooden beams taken from a dismantled house.

Faulconer says several architects he advises in the Charlottesville, Va., area insist that new structures incorporate green improvements. He admits, though, that not everyone is on this bandwagon: "Clearly there is a long way to go," he says about making green design a mainstream choice.

Yet the buzz on green building design is growing. The North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation held a conference in May to develop policy recommendations

on green buildings for the U.S., Mexican and Canadian governments. The National Association of Counties in July adopted a resolution supporting a commitment by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) that calls for public buildings to be carbon neutral by 2030. And the Democratic leadership of the U.S. Congress in June completed a report detailing how the U.S. Capitol will cut its energy consumption by 50 percent in 10 years.

The focus on green design seems to stem from concern over global warming, says Stephen Selkowitz, head of the Buildings Technology Department at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab. Selkowitz specializes in energy and sees today's green movement as a giant step forward.

Small steps to make buildings more energy efficient will go a long way towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions, he argues. Plus, there are plenty of easy opportunities to green a home or office building.

One obvious spot to look at is lighting. The International Energy Administration estimates that if everyone on Earth switched to compact fluorescent light bulbs, in 2010 the CO2 savings would be 470 million tons. That's slightly more than half of the reductions sought in the Kyoto Protocol on climate change.

"If you've got everyone doing light green actions, such as replacing light bulbs and raising the temperature on their air conditioner, and a few doing 'dark green,' then you've really made progress," Selkowitz says. A dark green effort, Selkowitz explains, is remodeling an old building with environmental-friendly technologies – like the middle school in D.C. did.

Plenty of U.S. architects have picked up the dark green challenge, says R.K. Stewart, president of AIA.

For example, Boulder Associates Inc., which specializes in healthcare and living facilities, made its headquarters in a renovated historic bank building in downtown Boulder, Colo. The construction materials, paints, and furnishings have low levels of volatile organic compounds, which are chemicals that can cause smog. The building is

(Continued on page 12)



Photo courtesy of SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Going green in D.C.: The entrance to the Sidwell Friends Middle School features a wooden boardwalk constructed of reclaimed pilings from the Baltimore Harbor and a bench made with reclaimed wine casks. The school's wetland is in the forefront.

Green building... (from page 11)

equipped with water-saving shower heads, 1.4-gallon flush toilets, electric-eye faucets, and water-free urinals. The company reports that it saves 46,000 gallons of water each year compared with what it would have used if the building was renovated using conventional plumbing fixtures.

Boulder Associates' office earned a top honor in the U.S.: a gold rank under the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. LEED certification is a benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of green buildings. The program also goes beyond certification and gives builders and designers a roadmap to follow when they undertake what is still a novel way to build in the U.S.

Community-wide green building efforts are also under way. A sustainable community dubbed Armory Park del Sol, located in the inner-city region of Tucson, Ariz., involves 99 single-family homes priced from \$80,000 with energy- and water-efficient technologies.

Neighborhoods similar in design have sprung up across the country. However, housing units like these aren't in high demand in every part of the country. Nonetheless, Selkowitz and others suggest that if the newly greened communities are built, buyers will come. "I would argue that if you plopped people into a city where it is designed so they can walk to a pub or a store, it would be pleasant and they would like it," Selkowitz says.

The greening of buildings also raises a number of challenges. Most people believe that using green design principles will raise construction prices sky high. Faulconer estimates that in the area around Charlottesville, the costs initially will be 5 -10 percent over a conventional design, until the industry is up to speed. The installation costs, say more energy efficient lighting or solar panels, will pay for themselves over the lifetime of a building, he adds.

Other research debunks the stereotype of expensive green techniques. International cost consultant Davis Langdon studied 100 buildings for a report in 2004. He found that the cost of sustainability is statistically insignificant to a project's total cost, Stewart says.

Turner Construction did its own study in 2006 and found the price of construction, when compared with a conventional

design, was just 0.8 percent more, Stewart says. "In our experience, we've seen the costs come down," Stewart says.

Installation of new, eco-friendly materials can be a stumbling block for construction crews. During the green renovation of the D.C. middle school, sub-contractors used materials they had little or no experience with. "They expected there would be problems that they hadn't encountered before, so they added a bit to the price," says Mike Saxenian, chief financial officer and assistant head of the Sidwell Middle School.

GreenBlue is working to address these concerns. Faulconer's project, Green2Green, lists scores of recycled and recovered supplies as well as new technologies and places where they can be purchased.

If you're eager to report a story on sustainable design but think your editor might think the readers would dismiss it as impractical, try pitching a story on energy efficiency. The LEED program offers certification to existing buildings that demonstrate steps they have taken to improve energy efficiency, recycle paper and reduce its use, and increase water efficiency. For comprehensive information on LEED, check out the U.S. Green Building Council.

Another angle could focus on the health benefits to occupants in a green home or office. Richard Jackson, formerly with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, conducted studies showing that building design can affect a person's health, especially with respect to diabetes and obesity. Jackson is now an adjunct professor at the University of California, Berkeley's School of Public Health and its College of Environmental

Green building resources:

- American Institute of Architects www.aia.org
- Building Technologies Department at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab www.savepower.lbl.gov/staff/selkowitz-se.html
- U.S. Green Building Council www.usgbc.org
- GreenBlue www.greenblue.org
- Green2Green www.green2green.org
- Smart Communities Network: www.smart-communities.ncat.org/greendev/stories.shtml

Design. Look also for additional research showing that more-environmentally friendly building designs reduce absenteeism and increase job satisfaction at the office.

To find out who in your community is pursuing a green design, check out the AIA website. There are regional chapters throughout the country, and the national site is chockfull of resources, projects, and design guides.

Catherine M. Cooney is a reporter/editor for Environmental Science & Technology magazine in Washington, D.C. She works in a building that will soon be LEED certified.

Recycling... (from page 10)

Powell. Trouble is, the quality of recyclables slips due to residues and contamination. Example: A mill that buys newsprint wants newsprint; it doesn't want cardboard mistakenly mixed in. According to Susan Kinsella, executive director of Conservatree, contamination in single-stream systems prompts landfilling of tons of valuable aluminum, plastic and glass each day.

In the end, recycling may seem old hat to you, but it's every-

man's issue, the environmental topic that most anyone in your audience can relate to, even those who never go to the woods or give pollution a second thought.

SEJ member Sally Deneen explored recycling in her 2006 E Magazine cover article "How To Recycle Practically Anything."

‘Need bee geek:’ Searching for meaning and fun in subject lines

By DAVID POULSON

The subject line of an e-mail is an underappreciated writing task.

We knock off dozens daily with little thought. And yet they carry every bit of the challenge and impact of a newspaper headline – a terse explanation of what’s to come, with perhaps the added burden of hinting at the sender’s personality.

Extend that concept and maybe a case can be made that the e-mail subject lines found on a listserv say something about its members.

I scanned the SEJ-Talk archives for the first six months of 2007 to see if I could draw such a conclusion. Yeah, I know. It’s a strange task. But I do have a life. Honest.

I was prompted to take a closer look after reading this SEJ-Talk subject line written by Joe Davis: “Need Bee Geek.”

It’s a phrase that word connoisseurs can savor – three terse and powerful syllables with an internal rhyme scheme that succinctly communicates a need. SEJ member Ramona Smith says that line and the thread it prompted reminds her of the last two lines of Alfred Tennyson’s “Come Down, O Maid:”

“The moan of doves in immemorial elms
“And murmuring of innumerable bees.”

Smith recalls a college instructor citing those lines as fine examples of assonance, with the vowels carrying the sound, and also consonance in the repetition of the “m” sounds.

Well...I’m not yet convinced that e-mail subject lines represent a new branch of literature.

But they may say a little about an organization. SEJ-Talk’s archive reveals a shorthand that outsiders are sure to find bizarre. Our subject lines tend to be the same phrases that make spouses and friends roll their eyes when we talk about a hot story. But within the confines of a listserv of like-minded people, the best ones not only communicate, they entertain and demand that the contents they advertise be read.

Literary gems are tucked amid the pleas for sources, data, story ideas and help with stubborn bureaucrats.

There are the subject lines with a juxtaposition of unlikely elements such as “Carbon credits and adultery” by Robert McClure. Another comes from Bill Kovarik: “Lead, crime and Iraq.” Both could be mysterious titles of international thrillers.

There are those that seem to pose philosophical questions. “Why is recycling good?” is the deep query posed by Rob Davis. And Roger Archibald ventures into some heavy stuff with “Nature Taking Revenge – Some Kind of Pattern Here?” Then there is

Amy Gahran, who leaves us wanting to read more with three cryptic words and a question mark: “Recycling plastic islands?”

There are religious references such as “Satan is behind global warming debate” by Tom Yulsman and “Climate Change Meets the Spanish Inquisition” by Peter Dykstra.

And there are numerous nods to pop culture: “Ask a ninja: Global Warming” was posted by Gahran - though she quickly notes that it is the title of a video-cast and not something she made up. Other pop references include “Env impact of Paris Hilton interview?” by Allen Salzberg and “Anyone know anything about Global Green USA and Brad Pitt?” by Elizabeth Weiss.

Some subject lines are intriguing, even if impenetrable. Try to figure out what’s behind “Toxic home request” by Tony Davis and “TCE AND NOT SO ICY PIO” by Chuck Quirnbach.

Other are just strange, like these: “Glamour on the poop beat” by Merritt Clifton and “Get your lawn off drugs” by Dan Sullivan.

There’s sex, too. My favorite is Mark Schleifstein’s “GAO has LUST in its heart.” Outsiders might take it as a reference to an oversexed town in China. Those in the know realize it refers to a federal report on Leaking Underground Storage Tanks.

Some subject lines are noteworthy because of their rhythm and alliteration. Hear the poetry when you read aloud Judith Robinson’s “Pesticides and Parkinson’s.”

But if they gave out Pulitzers for e-mail subject lines, Joe Davis has to be SEJ’s frontrunner. That’s not just because of his quest for an apiary expert.

Davis has given careful thought to subject lines and their power to jumpstart provocative threads after too many days of spotty listserv traffic.

“Subject lines are really just an opportunity to develop and practice headline-writing skills,” he says. “Media change, but communication principles don’t change all that much.

“Cleverness is nice ... sometimes. But if it obscures what the story is about, then it had better arouse a lot of curiosity. The really bigger challenge is telling a complicated story in four words - or telling the first part of the story so that the reader wants to read the remainder.”

Davis recently admitted on SEJ-Talk that he is a “nerdo-American” with a penchant for geeks. But he’s no one-trick pony. So far this year he’s used a vigorous writing style to create subjects that appear to touch on philosophy, crime, celebrity and voyeurism.

Consider these others that he’s scored for the first half of 2007: “Journalistic Moment of Zen,” “Green Celebrity Crime Update” and “Lurid Peek for the Climate Geek.”

Now that sets the bar high for subject line literature for the rest of the year. SEJ members are sure to rise to the challenge.

**Find FOIA tips
at SEJ.org**

David Poulson teaches computer-assisted, investigative and environmental reporting at Michigan State University.

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Editors... (from page 1)

Journalists, noting his own difficulty getting on top editors' busy schedules.

SEJ conference planners, too, have had spotty success drawing news industry leaders, who at times perceived environmental journalism as trendy or its practitioners as environmental advocates.

"Just getting them there was an achievement," said Wheeler, development writer for the *Baltimore Sun*.

Actually, most news executives enthusiastically accepted the invitation. They were willing to suspend their competitive juices – at least for the day – and brainstorm together on how to cover climate change.

The global warming story had advanced to Page One sooner than they had expected or felt equipped to manage, some acknowledged.

"I don't know that the expertise in the (news) industry matches the urgency of the issue," said Andrews, of the *Detroit Free Press*.

In just the past two years, discussion of planetary warming had broad-jumped from academia to mass culture – Wal-Mart, the Oscars, Leonardo DiCaprio, the 2008 presidential race. The icons have elevated from the obscure (think "hockey stick") to the familiar – Al Gore, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Hurricane Katrina, polar bears.

As columnist Thomas L. Friedman declared in an April 15 cover story for *The New York Times Magazine*, "Green has gone Main Street...because global warming has."

The "ice-albedo effect," however, doesn't roll off the tongues of most Americans, let alone news executives whose reporting credentials are typically limited to coverage of politics, business, sports and cops.

How might they become fluent on the ocean's "conveyor belt," "carbon cycling/sequestering," "cap-and-trade" and such?

The same way they've always kept on top of the news: VIP access to the newsmakers.

Editors, of course, don't have a natural entrée to climatologists as they do with publicity-seeking politicians, police chiefs, CEOs and other power brokers.

So the SEJ conference planning team did a little matchmaking, tapping one of its co-founders, Bud Ward, as the chief matchmaker.

Ward had recently run a nationwide series of six climate scientist-reporter workshops funded by the National Science Foundation's Paleoclimate Program and administered by the nonprofit Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting. I attended two of those workshops, at Columbia University and the University of California, Berkeley, in 2005.

As co-chairman of the 2007 SEJ conference, I approached Ward with the idea of running a similar workshop at Stanford, only this time for top-tier editors who have the power to set newsroom priorities and even the national agenda.

Many SEJ members long had complained about their bosses underplaying and misunderstanding environmental stories. With "innovation

and solutions" as a conference theme, it was time to answer their call.

"The vision of having top-tier editors and world-class scientists and researchers focusing at such depth on the climate change issue for many had too long seemed a fantasy," Ward said in an article inaugurating the new online Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media.

Ward decided the editors' first date with climate experts should be dress-down casual – no pressure. This was, after all, a group blind date.

On the eve of the conference, SEJ veterans drove editors to dinner at Portola Valley's Alpine Inn (affectionately known as Zotts), which bears none of the bucolic charm the name might suggest.

"The burgers weren't as bad as I remembered them," quipped *The New York Times*' Kramon, a 1975 Stanford graduate.

We're talking tank tops, old-school bikers, cheap beer, wooden picnic tables and grease-oozing, stove-top fried burgers on butter-saturated buns.

"Not the kind of place I would have chosen," said Stanford biological sciences professor Terry Root, a roundtable presenter.

The venue for the following day's roundtable was decidedly high-brow. Stanford's Woods Institute for the Environment spared no expense in securing the slick, multimedia conference room where the university's board of trustees meets, at the Graduate School of Business.

The Woods Institute sponsored the roundtable along with The Energy Foundation, the Heinz Family Philanthropies and the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies Project on Climate Change.

SEJ and Metcalf staff and conference co-chairs organized the event with assistance from the Woods Institute staff and the university's Office of Public Affairs.

Ward moderated the events and did most of the heavy lifting, securing the funds and recruiting most of the nine speakers, including climatologist Stephen Schneider of Stanford, energy efficiency guru Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute and Ohio State University glaciologist Lonnie Thompson, a 2007 winner of the National Science Foundation's National Medal of Science.

(Continued on page 17)

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ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE

finding the ways that work

Editors... (from page 17)

The experts briefed the editors on the science, economics and public perception of global warming. None of the news executives questioned whether climate change is real and happening now. Rather, they focused on the challenges of telling the story with adequate resources and appropriate urgency, context and integrity.

Climate stories do not easily yield villains to drive a narrative; everyone is seemingly complicit, said the Tacoma paper's Zeeck.

Anecdotes to make the story real and personal are hard to nail down, said the *Des Moines Register's* Washburn. "We have to figure out how people will make the connection between the local and the global."

The urgency is not obvious. An average temperature change of two or three degrees does not seem like much of a threat, said Boardman of the *Seattle Times*.

"Most Americans have no idea what that means," Boardman said. "It symbolizes the gap between your world and the rest of Americans in terms of an effective message."

And the solution-oriented stories are scarce. Without them, people are bound to feel hopeless and tune out, said *The Plain Dealer's* Goldberg.

"We hear that the ball is rolling down hill to disaster," Goldberg said. "We need to give public a sense they can do something about it, otherwise they'll just throw up their hands."

Climatologist Schneider said scientists can help only so much.

"When asked for solutions, we can be policy relevant, but we must never be policy prescriptive," Schneider said. "What we must do is talk about the relative distribution of pros and cons of proposed solutions. Who wins? Who loses?"

Roundtable organizers feared that editors, who as a lot are impatient and easily distracted breed, would nod off or fiddle with their Blackberries after the third or fourth presentation by

experts. That never happened.

The Sacramento Bee's Rodriguez said he was especially struck by Thompson's series of time-scale photographs showing accelerated loss of glaciers and sea ice.

Downie of *The Washington Post* trained his pen on specific, on-the-ground changes that told the larger story, such as the decline in the quality of wine grapes in the south of France or the narrowing range of butterflies.

Washburn pondered the political implications: "What kind of leadership can we call upon locally to make a difference, who will ask people to make sacrifices for changes they won't see, and maybe their children or grandchildren won't see?"

It could be that the editors stayed engaged throughout the 8-hour roundtable because we had two video cameras trained on them the whole time. (For a preview, please see home page for the Woods Institute at <http://woods.stanford.edu>. Click on SEJ video.)

But during a break I asked Washburn how it was going.

Her response, I bet, could stand for many of her peers:

"This is the first conference I have been to in two years that hasn't been about news industry troubles. It's so refreshing to come here and spend a day not wringing our hands about the industry and not talking about ourselves, but really about what's important in the world."

Chris Bowman, a veteran environmental reporter for The Sacramento Bee, helped instigate the News Executive Roundtable on Climate Change as co-chairman of the 2007 SEJ national conference at Stanford University. He was elected to the SEJ Board of Directors in September. Reach him at cbowman@sacbee.com.

Yale Climate Project to launch journalists' resource

By JOE DAVIS

Journalists writing about climate change got some help this fall when the Yale Project on Climate Change launches a new publication aimed at helping them communicate science – and communicate with scientists.

The Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media is published online, aimed mostly at an audience of journalists, but also at scientists, policymakers, and the general public. Quarterbacking the Forum will be SEJ co-founder Bud Ward, now a private consultant, who has spent the last several years organizing seminars, funded by the National Science Foundation, to help journalists and scientists communicate with one another about climate.

The publication also is aimed at a select cadre of scientists, editors, media execs, and foundations. It focuses specifically on the problems of covering the complex science and policy questions raised by climate change in general-audience news media.

The Yale Project on Climate Change, which funds the Yale Forum, is housed at Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. The project was born out of an

October 2005 conference on climate the school held in Aspen, Colo. It (<http://environment.yale.edu/climate/>) spans areas ranging from business, entertainment, news, and religion to education and politics – all with an eye to translating science into action.

In addition to provocative opinion pieces, the Forum will offer case studies in climate change media coverage. It will also offer journalists an array of tools helpful in getting climate coverage right – beginning with a Rolodex full of names and phone numbers of reputable scientists, guides to terminology, and key articles. Important, too, will be explanations of the many academic disciplines involved in studying climate change, and profiles of the various research institutions and policy groups involved in climate.

Climate change, project sponsors believe, is not just for environmental journalists. The Forum will explain how the story impacts many other journalistic beats – ranging from business and economics writing to fishing and skiing magazines.

A website for the Forum is already online at <http://yaleclimatemediaforum.org/index.htm>. You can reach editor Bud Ward at wardbud@gmail.com.

Monster... (from page 1)

work do you do? Has the company done other documentaries or handled many other journalistic assignments?

A: Actually, next year – 2008 – is PRC Digital Media’s 20th anniversary. Ray Hays, our company president, started PRC after years in local public television and commercial TV. He was a producer on the local “PM Magazine” program, which had its heyday in the 80s.

Our client list is all over the place. Corporate clients like AT&T, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Maxwell House, Johnson & Johnson. Government clients like the U.S. Navy and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). Broadcast and cable clients like NBC Sports, PGA Tour Productions and The Discovery Channel. PRC’s presentation video to the NFL owners helped the city land the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Q: What’s your professional background? Did you have journalistic or documentary experience in school or in previous jobs? Any prior professional involvement with environmental topics?

A: Even in elementary school, I was attracted to the stuff that journalists do – writing, reporting, asking questions, working on deadline. At family reunions I’d run around with a tape recorder and interview my cousins. I thought Darren McGavin – who played a newspaper reporter in “Kolchak, The Night Stalker” – was really cool. Just before local elections I’d “publish” a newspaper – eight pages of notebook paper folded in half, tabloid-style, with headlines in red Crayola and little articles I’d

written about the candidates. I cut out real campaign ads from the local paper and stuck them to the pages with library paste. My circulation wasn’t much. I didn’t show it to anyone except my Mom.

I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t fascinated by television. When I was nine, I watched NBC’s coverage of the Democratic and Republican national conventions. I took notes while David Brinkley pontificated, then ran back to my bedroom, shut the door and wrote a short script based on what Brinkley said. Then I’d report “live” from my “studio” about what was going on at the convention. The bedroom window was the camera lens. I’d try to read the script while maintaining as much eye contact as possible with the window. I timed my reports with a Mickey Mouse wristwatch. When I was finished, I actually said, “Back to you, David.” My broadcast day ended at bedtime.

As a TV reporter, I looked for any excuse imaginable to do a story with even the slightest connection to science or nature – anything from local environmental issues to the new giraffe at the zoo. At my first job in Jacksonville, one of my minor duties was hosting a daily, five-minute local kids’ program that ran just before the “Today” show. I produced about 250 of them. At least half were science-oriented. I’d talk to the kids about endangered species, energy conservation, pollution in our river and the possibility of life on Mars.

A few years later, in Miami, I regularly performed the time-
(Continued next page)

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Monster... (from page 18)

honored reporter's shtick with icky creatures – you know, letting boa constrictors slither down my shirt or tarantulas crawl up my pants. Maybe it was silly, but I tried, even in those stories, to convey a positive message – or at least an appreciation – of the environment.

I had pretty much free rein on what I covered, and it seemed as though I was always at places like the Museum of Science or Metrozoo. At Miami Seaquarium I swam with the manatees – wonderful animals, by the way – and produced a prime-time special on a dolphin research facility down in the Keys.

Anytime the local school kids did something unique, particularly something science-oriented, we'd be there. Even stories that initially didn't seem like much. We covered a class project that was nothing more than some sixth graders growing lima beans out of Styrofoam cups. But after running it locally we sent the story to CNN and they ran it for three days. That piece, and hundreds of others, showed me the most mundane event could make for an interesting, intelligent,

fun story – if only you cared enough to come up with a creative approach. In my opinion, a first-rate journalist should have the capability and curiosity to produce a compelling story about anything – even, say, a single blade of grass.

I remember the terrible day of the Challenger disaster. From Miami Beach, you could look up and see the white streaks from the explosion crisscrossing the sky. We stopped what we were doing and started interviewing drivers sitting at a stoplight on Collins Avenue. Some people were in tears. Later that day – and how ironic is this – I'm looking through my mail and there's a letter of congratulations from NASA. I'd just been named a finalist in the Journalist-in-Space Program. I'd applied for it months ago. It was for another shuttle mission slated down the line, but it never happened because of Challenger.

Q: The most novel thing about "The Green Monster," which is quite arresting, is the humorous 1950s horror-movie theme. It includes kitschy graphics, music and appropriate metaphors to frame more conventional narration and quotes. How did you decide on this theme? Did you have any doubts as you progressed that such a lighthearted approach might backfire in dealing with such a serious subject?

A: That one occurred to me instantly. I mean, like five minutes into our first production meeting, I thought of the title: "The Green Monster – It Came From The River" – a take-off on those kitschy 1950s and 60s horror movies. With a toxic, fluorescent green algae literally devouring the St. Johns, it seemed a natural and very obvious choice.

The first minute of the show spoofed an old-time movie trailer: "A grotesque green goo, squirting a vile primordial juice all over our river. . . An alien creature invades a pristine environment, sliming anything in its path. . . Can the town save its crown jewel?" I had a great time writing it.

Our voice-over guy did a big, booming, melodramatic rendition over creepy music. We dirtied the video by superimposing "film scratches" over it. The fonts are classics, reminiscent of '50s movie trailers. The entire opening was in black-and-white –

except the river itself. Our graphic artist, Chris Linke, turned that portion of the picture into a bright green. It offered a splendid contrast to the black-and-white. It was a great way to get into the documentary.

Photo courtesy of PFC DIGITAL MEDIA



I never had the slightest hesitation about the title or creative concept. I thought it was memorable, highly promotable, and offered marketing possibilities beyond the show itself. Infinitely better than taking a standard, boilerplate approach. You know what I mean – you've seen it a

thousand times – that listless, uninspired style of writing and production so common in news and documentaries. It's boring.

Our client, the St. Johns Riverkeeper, was terrific. They bought into the idea right away. If they had any reservations, they didn't tell me. Ray Hays, our executive producer, was hesitant at first, but later felt we trod the line perfectly and used humor appropriately.

As for the audience – everyone got it. Just like that. It really caught on. Spot an algae bloom in the river now, and the media refers to "the return of the Green Monster." Our mayor has used the term in speeches. "Green Monster" is now sort of a brand – a catch-phrase that has passed into the local vernacular.

"The Green Monster" name and concept gave us an added bonus. It appealed to kids. Science teachers began showing "Green Monster" DVDs to their students and they really responded. The Jacksonville Museum of Science and History picked up on it, and we're now working with them on a kiosk and interactive game for kids. We call it "Zap The Green Monster." If we had done something dull and pedantic, that project never would have happened. There is no way to overestimate the value of an educational tool that kids actually like. It pleases me immensely, knowing that "Green Monster" works for sophisticated, erudite PhDs – and ten-year-olds.

Q: How important was the choice of Jeff Lageman – a former player for the Jaguars and, more recently, a sports and fishing broadcaster – to the success of the documen-

(Continued next page)

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Inside Story

Monster... (from page 19)

tary? Did he take a lot of persuading before he agreed to participate?

A: I don't want anyone to take this the wrong way. But we felt the host should not be someone perceived as a "tree-hugger." I don't mean that in a pejorative sense. But North Florida's a fairly conservative place – and here we are, asking people to get stoked over an environmental issue. Granted, the environment's gone mainstream. But so many people still consider it an ideological issue. I know that's ridiculous, but that's the way it is. Jeff – who is well-known here, not just from his time with the Jags but for a local fishing show he co-hosts – has a "good-ole-boy" persona. He could get buy-in from the skeptics. He was the perfect counter-intuitive choice.

He needed no persuasion to host the show. Seems he took his son fishing during the bloom. They were out there in that goop – we found out later it was toxic, up to 150 times what the World Health Organization says is safe – when his son suddenly got quite ill. That's not uncommon. The blooms cause respiratory problems along with eye, nose and throat irritations. He was okay once he got off the river, but Jeff saw firsthand just how bad the blooms could be. So he was more than enthusiastic to do the show. He donated his time, which was a very generous thing for him to do.

Q: Was "The Green Monster" conceived and produced without a prior arrangement for it to be broadcast? The documentary was sponsored by an advocacy group, St. Johns Riverkeeper, and PRC is an independent production company. Did this parentage and the fact that the WTLV news department was not involved in the program make it tough to get it aired on the station? The prime-time broadcast is a rare feat for any local documentary.

A: Actually, that part, to my astonishment, was amazingly easy. Before we shot even a frame of footage, we approached Ken Tinning, president and general manager of WTLV, Jacksonville's NBC affiliate and No. 1 station. By coincidence, he lived on the river. Ray Hays, our executive producer, was barely a sentence into his pitch when Ken said, "Thank God. We've gotta do something." We struck a deal immediately.

Basically, WTLV exercised no editorial control over the program. St. Johns Riverkeeper, our sponsors, bought a half-hour slot at a reduced rate. WTLV gave us prime-time – eight o'clock on Thursday night – pre-empting an original episode of *Will & Grace*. That's rare – a local station canceling a network show to run a documentary. Because Riverkeeper bought the time, "The Green Monster" ran without commercial interruption.

Riverkeeper wanted "Green Monster" on by mid-March, because one of its segments showed viewers how to create a "river-friendly" yard – and most people here fertilize before April. So our March 16 airdate was perfect, except for one thing – our competition that night, which included two of the most-hyped shows of the year: "American Idol" and the NCAA playoffs.

We didn't expect much in the ratings. Everyone said we wouldn't even approach a 3 rating. But "Green Monster" nearly doubled that with a 5.4 rating (representing the number of homes in the designated area with televisions – turned on or off – tuned into a particular program) and 8 share (meaning 8 percent of viewers watching TV at that time). It didn't get past the

NCAA or “Idol,” but it was a strong third and beat everything else that night. WTLV called it “very, very respectable,” and I think they were a little surprised. We were, to say the least, extremely pleased.

Q: The sponsorship and funding of “The Green Monster” represented an unconventional arrangement, at least for mainstream journalism. Besides St. Johns Riverkeeper’s advocacy status, funders included individuals, companies, a foundation, a garden club and *The Florida Times-Union* newspaper. How independent were you as writer/producer in your editorial decisions?

A: I can tell you straight up that I had as much independence on this project as anything I’ve ever done. I wrote and produced “Green Monster” exactly the way I’d write and produce any balanced, independent news piece. St. Johns Riverkeeper realized right away that “Green Monster” was a work of journalism, not an infomercial. They allowed us near-complete editorial and creative autonomy. Two people from their organization – Jimmy Orth, the executive director, and Neil Armingeon, who is the actual riverkeeper – reviewed the script on a Sunday, the day before we taped Jeff Lageman’s on-camera narration. There were virtually no changes – just a couple of very minor word tweaks, that’s it. I will forever be appreciative of their great faith in us. Every producer should be so lucky.

I can’t speak highly enough of the Riverkeeper organization. They didn’t veto interview subjects. There were no restrictions. They gave us full support, even if it meant putting someone on-camera who might disagree with them. Riverkeeper’s a non-profit, independent watchdog group – so as you might imagine, they’ve had their share of disagreements with numerous government agencies over the years. But they encouraged us to balance the program and include those agencies in the program. I will always admire them for their fair play and evenhandedness.

Q: What kind of reaction among the public and regional leaders did “The Green Monster” elicit when it was first broadcast? Was the reaction surprising to you in any way?

A: About the time “Green Monster” aired, the city of Jacksonville was in the midst of crafting a plan to clean up the river, hardly an easy or enviable task. Our documentary clearly had a positive impact on what they ultimately created. Four months after “Green Monster’s” initial run, the city announced the “River Accord,” the scope of which astounded me – a 10-year, \$700 million plan to address the long-standing problems of the St. Johns. What’s more, some of the recommendations suggested in “Green Monster” appeared in the accord.

Here are a couple of quotes regarding Green Monster’s influence on city leaders as they prepared the Accord:

Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton said, “The program played a large part in my decision to act on the public’s concern for our river.” He called it “a catalyst for increased action and advocacy.”

Quinton White, a biology and marine science professor and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Jacksonville University – and one of our “Green Monster” interview subjects, said the program “had tremendous impact on public opinion. The groundswell of support gave energy to the city govern-

ment’s initiative.”

I can’t begin to tell you how thrilled we were to hear all of this. To think that “The Green Monster” had even a small impact in the creation and execution of an unprecedented \$700 million plan to clean up our river – really, that blew me away.

Q: Has your follow-up documentary – “Revenge of the River” – been broadcast (apart from its recent placement as streaming video on *The Florida Times-Union* website)?

A: “Revenge of the River” was broadcast in May 2007 – again in prime-time, again partnered with our friends at St. Johns Riverkeeper and WTLV – and again, we got great numbers. We finished No. 1 in the time slot against all other half-hour programs, which amazed us. “Revenge” played a second time in August on WJCT, our PBS/Public Television affiliate, and is now on its third go-round with repeated airings on Comcast Cable’s local access channel

Q: Besides helping fund “The Green Monster,” the *Times-Union* has a well-known political columnist, Ron Littlepage, who comments memorably in both documentaries. How did the recent decision by the newspaper to feature both “The Green Monster” and “Revenge of the River” on its home page come about?

A: *The Florida Times-Union* has been a great supporter of ours since the start. Just before the broadcast, they ran a free – repeat, free – quarter-page advertisement in the TV section promoting “The Green Monster.” Normally, an ad like that costs thousands of dollars. It was an enormously generous gesture, and it’s one of the reasons why “Green Monster” got excellent ratings. Along with the ad, Ron Littlepage, the *T-U*’s political columnist, wrote glowing reviews of both documentaries that appeared on the days of their airings. I’ll always be grateful for that. So the *T-U*’s willingness to help out once again – to feature both of our documentaries on their website – was no surprise to me.

Q: Do you have plans for any more follow-ups on St. Johns River issues, or to examine other environmental subjects in future documentaries?

A: Sure. Even after two documentaries, I feel like we’ve barely begun. The next thing, I hope, is a television spinoff of the children’s interactive game and kiosk I’m now producing for our Museum of Science and History (“Zap The Green Monster”). I’d like to do a companion children’s program that would run on local television during an after-school time slot or Saturday morning. It would focus on conservation – the things kids can do now to make a difference and help save the river.

We’re also developing some proposals for eco-documentaries and television series to take to the broadcast and cable networks. That, to me, is the most exciting possibility of all.

SEJournal readers wishing to communicate with Retherford are invited to contact him at bretherford@prcdigital.com

Bill Dawson is a Houston-based freelancer and also teaches at Rice University. He formerly wrote about environmental issues for the Houston Chronicle and other news organizations.

Tree-top research, climate economics and Dust Bowl tales

Science in the treetops

THE WILD TREES: A STORY OF PASSION AND DARING

By **Richard Preston**

Random House, \$25.95

Reviewed by **NANCY BAZILCHUK**

Tree canopy research is still a young science, partly because it's difficult to get into the canopy to see what's there, and also because until recently, scientists hadn't thought to look.

When Washington state-based biologist Nalini Nadkarni decided in the late 1970s to climb into the Costa Rican forest canopy for her work, she ran into a great deal of opposition from fellow researchers. "People said, 'What do you mean, you're going up into the trees? There's nothing up there. That's just Tarzan and Jane stuff,'" she told Richard Preston, for his new book "The Wild Trees."

Serious exploration of the world's tallest trees, California redwoods, wouldn't begin until 1987, when the main protagonists of "The Wild Trees" – Steve Sillett, then a junior at Reed College, and Michael Taylor, then a junior at Humboldt State College – realized the redwood forests were virtually unknown, in the ecological sense, both from the air and on the ground. Their obsession to learn more about these ancient giants later would take control of their lives.

Their exploration of the redwood canopy makes for a fascinating tale. Sillett maps the three-dimensional intricacies of the canopy and Taylor discovers the world's tallest tree. Preston also tells how their lives unfold under the spell of the redwoods. He does a wonderful job of interweaving intriguing science (though I would have liked

more), love stories (including, yes, lovemaking in a tree), and the occasional bit of thriller, including an account of how one tree climber fell more than 100 feet to the ground, which tree climbers call "cratering," and lived to tell the tale.

If there's any weakness in *The Wild Trees*, it's the difficulty in visualizing how Sillett and others climb trees. This is an unusual failing for a "McPhino," or a graduate of John McPhee's Princeton University writing course, which Preston is. I found the photographs on Preston's website (www.richardpreston.net) helpful in overcoming this one little flaw in the book.

Preston also describes his own forays into tree climbing. He accompanies Sillett and other researchers on a pioneering climb of mountain ash trees (*Eucalyptus regnans*) in southeastern Australia. It's a terrific tale – the only drawback might be that you

decide that you, too, need to reclaim your primate past and learn how to climb tall trees.

Nancy Bazilchuk is a freelance environment and science writer based in Trondheim, Norway.

■ ■ ■

Business and economic ABCs of climate change

CARBON FINANCE

Sonia Labatt and Rodney R. White

Wiley Finance, \$101.99

Reviewed by **CRAIG SAUNDERS**

Climate change has serious financial ramifications and opportunities for business. In their new book "Carbon Finance," University of Toronto professors Sonia Labatt and Rodney White describe the economic ABCs of climate change.

The book is very much geared for financial and insurance professionals and business leaders, a fact to which its price tag will attest. While "Carbon Finance" is very good as a descriptive text, its lack of critical analysis is a disappointment. For journalists who have been covering the economic aspects of climate change for years, the first half of the text largely will be old hat. For others, it will be a concise and competent description of the capitalist mechanisms that have been put in place to combat climate change.

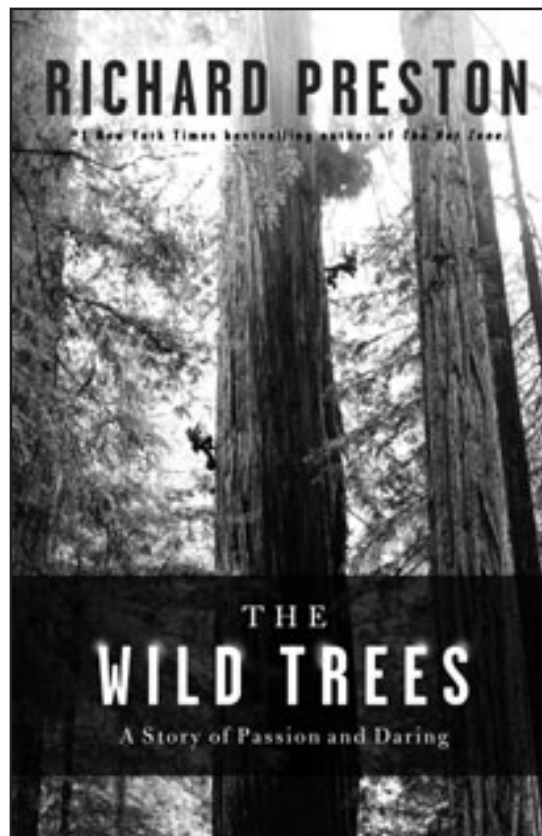
The book really gets going in its second half, when it delves into the workings of the carbon market. This most complex of trading systems

began to develop after the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. But it remains fragmented. Trading hubs have developed independently in Europe and a handful of other places, including some U.S. states. In this fragmented form, it's unstable and high-risk for investors. But that is likely to change soon, according to White.

"It will coalesce. I think when Bush is replaced, things will coalesce quickly," he writes. "Once America moves, Canada will. Business is ready to go." And once the market coalesces, there will be more movement on the monitoring and reporting systems that go along with it.

"Carbon Finance" does an excellent job of laying out the mechanics and history of emissions trading, and clearly lays out what can and cannot be traded, and the various types of credits

(Continued next page)



available. It does not delve into the murkier waters of retail carbon offsets being sold to consumers. Instead, it focuses on the areas that will most affect business, in particular, the financial services sectors.

The book also covers the changing role of fund managers as climate change and other environmental issues become part of corporate reporting. It covers changes in the insurance industry and new financial products coming onto the market, such as weather derivatives. For those in finance, insurance or government, “Carbon Finance” is essential reading. For journalists, it’s one of the few plain language texts that effectively describes a field that is increasingly linking the environment and business beats.

Craig Saunders is a freelance writer and editor who is leaving London for the forests of Ontario.



Dust Bowl tales reverberate in climate-change era

THE WORST HARD TIME: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE GREAT AMERICAN DUST BOWL

By Timothy Egan

Houghton Mifflin, \$28

Reviewed by EMMA BROWN

When I bought Timothy Egan’s “Lasso the Wind” last summer in Ashland, Ore., the bookstore owner chuckled and said, “Tim Egan, lucky guy, you know he covers the West for *The New York Times*?” I said yeah, that’s a job I’d like to have. She shook her head and said, “He can write whatever he wants and no one back East knows whether he’s telling the truth.”

Which is not exactly why I want his job, but is not a completely untrue thing to say about someone who writes about a mythical region for people who want, very much, to believe in a myth.

When Egan reports on the West, however, he doesn’t perpetuate myths: he wrestles them to the ground, breaks them down, and extracts the bits of truth out of which they are built. Then—whether he’s writing about immigration, water scarcity or energy development, he finds the characters, the landscape and the story that best illustrate those truths.

In his National Book Award-winning book, “The Worst Hard Time,” Egan draws on that ability to humanize and dramatize a larger-than-life issue. This time, it’s the Dust Bowl, a story Americans know so well and so incompletely that it qualifies as a legend.

On Sunday, April 14, 1935, a massive cold front, carrying tons of dust held aloft by violent winds, swept south across the plains from North Dakota to Texas. Americans’ collective memory of the Depression is built, in part, out of photographs taken that day—the storm’s black wall looming over vulnerable farmhouses, roiling clouds rolling over a small-looking ridge.

But the worst hard time lasted much longer than one terrible Sunday, or one terrible season. Dust storms buffeted the plains for the better part of a decade, and left the land and its people desperate for relief. By digging for the lost details of that time—and, in particular, by resuscitating the small and poignant stories of people who lived through the 1930s on the High Plains—Egan brings to life an episode now regarded as the worst long-term environmental disaster in American history.

Take the Folkers: Fred and Katherine, homesteaders who started out simply, with mules and a plow and a shack infested with centipedes that Katherine killed with a flat iron. High wheat prices during and after World War I meant sudden wealth and rescue from the misery of farm living: a real house, a car, and a piano for their daughter Faye. “The centipede scratching, the hissing of an iron on insect legs,” writes Egan, “was replaced by piano music that drifted out of the Folker’s new house and settled on fruit trees and the fresh-plowed fields.”

When the stock market crashed in 1929, wheat prices fell, and the dreams and ambitions of families like the Folkers faltered. With increasing speed and desperation, farmers ripped up native buffalo grass in order to plant more wheat, trying to make up for low prices with greater volume. Prices fell further. Farmers defaulted on their loans, lost their land. Banks closed. Things were bad on the Plains. And then they got worse.

Drought descended on the Plains just as homesteaders were scraping away the last of the plains’ native grasses. The combination of little rain and millions of acres of prairie soil left exposed for the first time in thousands of years resulted in dust storms that suffocated cows, strangled wheat and sickened children.

Farmers hung on to a heartbreaking hope that each season would be better than the last—this year, the rain will come, the wheat will grow. This year, we’ll be able to buy shoes. This year, we’ll be able to pay the bank, and we won’t lose the tractor or the combine or the house. This year, we won’t be desperate.

All that hope meant that most people stayed stubbornly on the plains. “They hung on because this was still the only place they could call theirs. Going to the city, or to California, was a journey to the unknown,” Egan wrote.

But each year brought more storms, more debt and more heartache. The desperation of the time is vivid in a scene of a town-wide rabbit-killing derby, brought on by the animals’ munching of scant vegetation:

“They spread to the edge of the fenced section, forming a perimeter, then moved toward the center, herding rabbits inward to a stake enclosure. As the human noose tightened, rabbits hopped around madly, sniffing the air, stumbling over each other. The clubs smashed heads. The bats crushed rib cages. Blood splattered, teeth were knocked out, hair was matted and reddened. The rabbits panicked, screamed. It took most of an afternoon to crush several thousand rabbits. Their bodies were left in a bloodied heap at the center of the field. Somebody strung up a few hundred of them and took a picture.”

The same homesteaders with whom we come to sympathize are, of course, directly responsible for the environmental disaster that causes them such suffering. The same government that was slow to heed warnings about the dangers of soil erosion played a large part in healing the prairie through federal soil conservation programs.

Egan is not heavy-handed with the lessons to be drawn from this story. But in an age of global climate change, it’s impossible to relive the Dust Bowl without wondering whether we learned enough from that episode, and whether we are, like those long-ago sodbusters, headed for a future we can’t quite imagine.

Emma Brown is a freelance writer based in Berkeley, Calif.



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Climate change thawing freeze on E-news

By **BILL DAWSON**

“All news, all the time” was the slogan of a once all-news radio station of my acquaintance. A quick Google search reveals that the phrase and several variations are still around.

Given the recent rise to prominence of the climate issue, even veteran reporters familiar with the often-surprising meanders of the environment beat’s path may have wondered if “all climate news, all the time” could be the beat’s future.

That’s not going to happen, of course. But how about a “mostly climate, most of the time” scenario? That seems less far-fetched.

Certainly, the combined impetus of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, “An Inconvenient Truth,” a celebrity bandwagon, and a steady flow of dramatic scientific findings, to name just some of the key factors, have boosted media attention to, and public awareness of, global warming.

Pete Myers, a longtime SEJ supporter and founder of the Environmental Health News website, told me when I interviewed him for the *Environment Writer* newsletter last year that EHN’s tracking of environmental news from around the world had recorded a marked increase in coverage of climate change, and that related stories on energy also “have increased hugely.”

EHN’s invaluable database provides some striking statistical evidence suggesting that climate and related coverage continues to occupy a larger place in news organizations’ attention to the environment.

In 2006, about 18.7 percent of all the

news articles classified and linked by EHN (11,817 stories out of 63,343) were labeled “climate change” in its categorization by issue.

At this writing (through Sept. 21), about 30.5 percent of all 2007 articles archived by EHN – 16,186 stories out of 53,099 – were in the “climate change” category.

Last year, “water” was the top-ranked issue, with 32.1 percent of all articles. “Climate change” was second (18.7 percent), “environmental politics” was third (18.2 percent), and “air” was fourth (16.3 percent).

This year, through Sept. 21, “climate change” at 30.5 percent tops the list. “Environmental politics” is second (15.6 percent), “water” is third (15.0 percent) and “air” is fourth (14.8 percent).

Of course, news decisions are largely driven by events, and this year’s release of the latest scientific reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change comprised a series of major news events.

The IPCC’s Working Group I report (on the physical science basis for experts’ understanding of human impacts on climate) was released Feb. 2 in Paris, generating a “steady stream of stories” in the run-up to that event, as the late **Mike Dunne** reported in “The Beat” in *SEJournal*’s Spring 2007 issue. Working Group II released its report on “Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability” on April 6. And Working Group III’s report (“Mitigation”) came out on May 4.

The impact on coverage is obvious in

EHN’s statistics. The month with the largest number of articles in the “climate change” category in 2006 was September, with 1,159 stories. In January of this year, there were 1,668 articles.

In each of the following four months, more than 2,000 stories were included in the EHN database – 2,093 in February (when the Working Group I report was released), 2,046 in March, 2,349 in April (the month of the Working Group II release), and 2,118 in May (Working Group III).

“Climate change” stories declined in each of the next three months, however – to 1,871 in June, 1,536 in July, and 1,430 in August. The 1,078 articles recorded through Sept. 21 suggested there might be an increase during that month, compared to August.

Such variation doesn’t say anything definitive about the long-term trajectory of the climate issue compared to other environmental coverage, but it suggests that journalistic attention to climate is (no surprise) influenced by major events and is not (again, no surprise) on a consistently upward track.

Still, even the smaller numbers of climate articles in the last few months were larger than any recorded in 2006, and I’d be hard pressed to find an environmental journalist who doesn’t think the climate issue will loom larger and larger on journalistic agendas.

Bud Ward argued in his E-Reporting Biz column in the Summer 2007 *SEJournal* that reporters on the environ-

(Continued next page)

President... (from page 2)

Finally, let me provide you a brief update on the topic of my last column. We had a thoughtful discussion with members at the conference about SEJ’s name and whether it ought to be changed to Society for Environmental Journalism. There were mixed views on it, but members seemed to appreciate the thought behind the proposal. As journalism and the news business change, SEJ needs to broaden its appeal. We need to help and involve journalists who aren’t covering the environment as a beat, while also emphasizing that the only thing we’re advocating is good journalism, both old and new, but not any particular cause.

The board is working to keep SEJ vital in that changing media world. While board members haven’t taken a vote on

whether a name change is warranted, the ultimate deciders of that issue are you, the members. Any name change would have to be approved by the membership as a change in the society’s bylaws. And there’ll be plenty of notice before any such vote is taken.

Meanwhile, please let us know what you think, about SEJ’s name, if you care, but also about how SEJ can help you and others trying to do your best at understanding and engaging the public in these complex but compelling environmental issues. That’s what SEJ is all about, no matter what name we call ourselves.

Tim Wheeler covers growth and development for The Baltimore Sun and is SEJ board president.

Beat... (from page 25)

ment beat should “loosen their death-hold grip on what has been their keystone issue, possibly the story of their lifetime,” and that the issue “must morph from the environmental and science desks to the entire newsroom.”

That’s already happening – the “morphing” part, at least – as the climate issue figures more often and more prominently in reporting on business developments and economic news in general.

This should not be surprising. Even before the IPCC’s head-turning reports in 2007, Myers said last year that the coverage aggregated by EHN’s software was indicating a shift “from a ‘he-said, she-said’ depiction of the science to one that, for the most part, accepts that climate change is happening and that is caused by human activity.”

If the public debate over human causation is indeed winding down, the debate over responses to climate change is expected to heat up, inevitably and increasingly involving tough economic questions. The wide variety of ways that climate concerns can intersect with these questions – an individual company’s reaction to global warming, say, or the economic ramifications of new scientific research – was on display in articles published in the last few months.

Climate was central to some of the stories, peripheral but still important in others. They extended from the hyper-local (to borrow a current newspaper industry buzzword) to the decidedly international.

On June 10, for instance, the *Boston Globe’s* **Beth Daley** examined research on the possible warming-spurred advance of the woolly adelgid, a tree-sap-eating insect, and other invasive pests.

Dealing largely with science, the article also noted the implications for the forest industry, including contemplated actions such as “tighten(ing) quarantines for hemlock logs, conduct(ing) more inspections of nurseries for the bug, and enact(ing) stricter rules governing transport of hemlocks.” (www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2007/06/10/as_ne_warms_tiny_pests_take_root/)

Other stories also focused largely on the potential economic impacts of climate change on specific industries or regions.

On June 22, the *Wilmington Star-News’s* **Gareth McGrath** reported a study by university researchers that projected “rising seas could wash away most of Southeastern North Carolina’s public beaches by 2080, limiting recreational and fishing opportunities, and costing the regional economy \$3.9 billion.” (www.wilmingtonstar.com/article/20070621/NEWS/706210435/0/business)

A week later, the *International Herald Tribune*, in an article by **James Kanter**, reported on June 29 that major banks were proposing “tough new standards for the trading of carbon offsets, in a bid to prevent a public backlash against one of the fastest-growing sectors in finance.” (<http://iht.com/articles/2007/06/28/business/carbon.php>)

The Star-Ledger of Newark, N.J., published an article on July 8 that reported that lawyers see a potentially “lucrative new field” in global warming: “These days, it seems everyone wants to get in on the act, from big law firms starting specialty practice groups, to solo lawyers working on projects, to law schools adding classes devoted to the subject.”

Other articles looked at responses to the climate issue by individual businesses, small and large.

The Miami Herald’s **Begone Cazalis**, in a Sept. 17 article, profiled the owner of a Hialeah, Fla., printing company. Though a Republican, the businessman had been so impressed by Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth” film that he instituted practices that have made his company “the first triple certified green printer of Florida.” (www.miamiherald.com/news/miami_dade/northwest/story/241062.htm)

Dominic Gates, aerospace reporter for the *Seattle Times*, reported on June 5 about an airline trade group’s goal of a “zero-emissions” airplane within a half-century, and Boeing’s desire to make the industry “carbon-neutral” before then through a combination of technologies and practices including emissions trading. (http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/business/technology/2003734587_iata05.html)

A Sept. 14 article in the *Wall Street Journal* by **Kathryn Kranhold** provided a detailed examination of General Electric’s 2-year-old “ecomagination”

campaign to address climate change. It included attention to the skepticism that campaign has produced in-house as well as critical scrutiny from outsiders. (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118973485406827339.html>)

Meanwhile, coverage of the energy industry itself dealt with climate-related subjects in various ways.

Jim Landers of the *Dallas Morning News* reported from Washington on July 19 that the National Petroleum Council, a federal advisory panel with members from the oil and gas industry and others, was calling for “a crash program to double automobile fuel efficiency, limit carbon emissions and push as hard as it can for bio-fuels and other energy sources over the next 25 years or risk serious shortages.” (www.wfaa.com/shared-content/dws/bus/stories/DN-energy_19bus.ART0.State.Edition1.3634e44.html)

The nuclear industry – long in a no-growth mode, but which could receive a boost from concerns about greenhouse emissions from fossil fuels – received an unsurprising share of journalistic attention.

The Economist magazine, in a major Sept. 6 article headlined “Atomic renaissance,” reported that “America’s nuclear industry is about to embark on its biggest expansion in more than a generation. This will influence energy policy in the rest of the world.” (www.economist.com/science/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9762843)

Eric Fleischauer of *The Decatur (Ala.) Daily* reported in a detailed Aug. 26 article that a shutdown of the Browns Ferry nuclear reactor because of high temperatures in the Tennessee River had drawn international attention from both “mainstream press” and “anti-nuclear blogs.”

He examined a key question about the prospects of a nuclear industry resurgence fueled by climate concerns: “What use is nuclear power if plants become inoperable as global temperatures rise?” (www.decaturdaily.com/decaturdaily/business/070826/plant.shtml)

Bill Dawson, the SEJournal’s new assistant editor, is a Houston-based freelancer who also teaches at Rice University.

Awards... (from page 5)

edges. Listen a bit closer and one also finds solid storytelling, thorough reporting and very clever, considered use of sound. Some of these elements can be cloying in the wrong hands. In Ryan's they all come together to create a great sense of place. It stood out amid all other entries because of its unique use of the medium. It raises the bar. You always wonder what Ryan has up his sleeve next. It broke the mold that environmental journalism usually gets squeezed into. Ryan didn't just tell us about The Puget Sound, he took us there — even when that meant following a trail of human waste, or ending up under a capsized kayak — but not at the same time, thankfully.

THIRD PLACE: Jim Handman, Jim Lebens, Bob McDonald, CBC Radio, Quirks & Quarks, "Biofuels: Greening Our Energy Further"

This piece offered a thorough, balanced examination of a "green" technology that most people do not fully understand. The program conveyed the promise of this type of renewable energy. But it was also unflinching in questioning the claims of advocates, and looking at who stands to profit. It distilled a very tough subject into something interesting and listenable. It also cleverly uses music and television experts to make its point.

Outstanding Beat/In-depth Reporting, Television

FIRST PLACE: Bill Retherford, Ray Hayes, Chris Linke, Jay Pennington, Barbara Sprunger, PRC Digital Media, WTLV-TV, Jacksonville, Florida, "The Green Monster – It Came From The River"

The producers of this 30-minute program took an extremely unconventional approach, using a 1950's horror movie style to highlight a severe algae problem in Jacksonville's St. Johns River. Judges found the approach filled with potential to reach an audience that environmental journalism normally doesn't. Further, the judges found the focus not just on the problem but also on common-sense solutions commendable.

SECOND PLACE: Bruce Rheins, Jerry Bowen, The CBS Evening News, "Alaska/Arctic"

This entry demonstrates the lifeblood of environmental journalism: high-quality beat reporting. Using several visual locations in Alaska, CBS News correspondent Jerry Bowen and producer Bruce Rheins successfully showed the stunning costs of climate change to our planet. By using well-crafted visuals and top-notch storytelling this team achieved the highest standard for television journalism.

THIRD PLACE: Lynn Kosek Walker, Michael Budd, Fred Ehmann, Paul Horvath, Aubrey Kauffman, Scott Neall, Jeff Reisly, Janice Selinger, Bob Szuter, NJN Public Television, "Turning the Tide"

The stunning visual quality of this documentary made interesting subject matter special. Showing the hidden beauty of wetlands in the middle of New Jersey's most notorious industrial area, this was an eye-opener told with gorgeous video and exceptional narration.

Outstanding Explanatory Reporting, Print

FIRST PLACE: Ken Weiss, Los Angeles Times, "Altered Oceans"

From its opening sentence, Weiss's account of global seas devolving into a slop of primitive muck under devastating human influence sizzles with fresh details and pungent images.

The combination of sharp analysis, riveting anecdotes and jarring quotations — "the rise of slime" is sure to become a catchphrase for the oceans' ecological demise — promises to elevate this work into the canon of environmental journalism.

SECOND PLACE: Spencer Hunt, The Columbus Dispatch, "Back in Black"

Diving into the murky world of coal, Hunt gives readers a clear-eyed assessment of political and environmental issues surrounding the growth of Ohio coal-mining operations. Using clean and effective language and graphics, the three-day series explains the environmental mess left by decades-old mining operations — and how the state is ill-equipped to handle it. And although Ohio coal production had declined for 20 years, it is now on the upswing — making this series timely and relevant for Ohio readers.

THIRD PLACE: Judy Pasternak, Los Angeles Times, "Blighted Homeland"

Pasternak takes scattered historical accounts and tribal stories and, by leveraging federal records, weaves a detailed and heart-breaking account of uranium contamination among the Navajo. Her fluid narrative lays out the horrible personal health consequences as well as the U.S. government's decades of indifference.

Outstanding Online Reporting

FIRST PLACE: Bill Hogan, Robert Brodsky, Lisa Fetta, Gail Gibson, Josh Israel, Jim Morris, Center for Public Integrity's takingsinitiatives.org

An outstanding online investigation of land-use ballot initiatives that could have radically changed land-use and environmental regulations in five Western states. The team did a splendid job of using Internet tools to integrate an extensive financial investigation, interviews and analysis that uncovered the links between the initiatives and a single wealthy activist.

SECOND PLACE: Michael Burnham, Kelly Thompson, Monica Trauzzi, Greenwire, "Sustainable Design: The Growing Green Movement"

A wide-ranging look at the under-reported topic of green building that stretches from Manhattan's skyscrapers to Seattle's homes and neighborhoods. Burnham and colleagues combined in-depth reporting with video and interactive presentations to flesh out a timely portrait of the build environment — the world's most energy-intensive economic sector.

Outstanding Small Market Reporting, Print

FIRST PLACE: Bruce Ritchie, Glenn Beil, Jennifer Portman, John Roberge, The Tallahassee Democrat, "Saving Our Springs"

The goal of top quality environmental journalism is to present a clear, balanced case to educate the community and inspire action to correct a harmful problem. The Democrat pulled out all the quality journalistic stops and its community won.

SECOND PLACE: Tim Thornton, The Roanoke Times, "Mountaintop Removal"

This is what environmental reporting is all about. Mr. Thornton takes a complex topic of importance to the region, clearly explains it with balance and enhances the package with graphics and the testimony of experts and ordinary residents of the affected area.

(Continued on next page)

Awards... (from page 27)

THIRD PLACE: Lee van der Voo, *Lake Oswego Review*

This newspaper and reporter took on some of the wealthiest and powerful in uncovering sewage and mineral pollution in a lake exempt from EPA scrutiny. Sources made fact gathering as difficult and nerve wracking as possible, but the story was reported — and the state ordered a fix.

Outstanding Story, Radio

FIRST PLACE: Tamara Keith, *The California Report* (aired statewide), “Mule Creek Prison”

This tightly focused, engaging story reveals that California’s overcrowded prisons are violating water-quality laws. The reporter places one community’s problems with its prison into a statewide context, making excellent use of public records, interviews and nat sound to support a story that also serves as a cautionary tale for the problems of explosive growth in any realm.

SECOND PLACE: Nazanin Rafsanjani, *NPR’s All Things Considered*, “Caspian Pollution”

Rafsanjani explores a little-known angle on Iran — the pollution of the Caspian Sea and the government’s modest efforts to stop the pollution. The story excels with superb writing, excellent use of nat sound and the fact that the reporter managed to tell this compelling story despite the suspicions of Iranian officials.

THIRD PLACE: Sarah McCammon, *Nebraska Public Radio Network, National Public Radio’s Morning Edition*, “Fire on the Prairie”

In this explanatory piece, McCammon describes scientists’ efforts to uncover the history of fire on the Great Plains. Excellent writing, good use of natural sound and expert storytelling make this story a winner.

Outstanding Story, Television

HONORABLE MENTION: Mara Schiavocampo, *Current TV*, “When the Beaches Turned Black”

This entry deserves an honorable mention for the enterprise reporting done by the freelance journalist. According to the background information provided, the reporter traveled to the location and produced, shot and edited the story. She brought to light an environmental disaster most had never heard about and was able to show the effects on local people. The report showed how the environment can be another casualty of war, something most people don’t think about. The story had good visual elements and interviews, but could have benefited from a reporter’s narration.

Outstanding Student Reporting

FIRST PLACE: Julie Leibach, *www.scienceline.org*, “The Greenpoint Oil Spill”

This is a fantastic piece of scholarship. It demonstrates wide-ranging research, great human touches, solid investigation and terrific relevance. This is a fine example of environmental reporting at its best. Bravo!

SECOND PLACE: Melinda Wenner, *www.scienceline.org*, “Food for Chickens, Poison for Man.”

This report is in-depth, richly detailed and crisply written. The story combines solid science and compelling personal testimony. It is a solid, hard-hitting indictment of a very scary practice, with a disturbing relevance. Excellent work.

THIRD PLACE: Carol Navarro, *Mairin MacDonald, Michigan State University, *EJ Magazine, “Who Owns The Water?”**

The story exhibits very engaging writing and catches many of the subtleties and nuances of a complicated environmental issue. The tales of laws, policies and culture that are implied by this water case are vividly demonstrated and convincing. These two comprise a very skilled team.

For a list of this year’s judges, see www.sej.org.

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