



Spring 2011, Vol. 21 No. 1

A Sick Sea

A remembrance of Bill Freudenburg
Enviro stories reap awards
New global warming web venture

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Society of Environmental Journalists

SEJ ournal

Spring 2011, Vol. 21 No. 1

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Inviting though the ocean may appear at places like Christmas Island in the Pacific 1,300 miles south of Hawaii, there's no guarantee that it's healthy. See related story on page 14. Photo: © Amy Gulick, SEJ Contributing Photographer.

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SEJ promotes science-journalism connection, alters funding policy to build more stable organization

By CAROLYN WHETZEL

SEJ ushered in 2011 with an event at the University of California, Santa Barbara that explored the communication challenges journalists and scientists face.

SEJ's Board of Directors, other SEJ members, and scientists at UCSB's Bren School of Environmental Science and Management participated in the Jan. 28 roundtable discussion which focused on how to meld the different worlds in which journalists and scientists work toward a shared goal of advancing public understanding of environmental issues.

Scientists voiced their concerns about being misquoted or having their comments or research misinterpreted, which is why they often ask to approve quotes, or sometimes an entire story. The scientists also sought advice on how to cultivate relationships with journalists to promote research they believe is getting too little attention.

Journalists stressed their need for trusted science sources and information and for quick responses when writing on deadline. The journalists urged the scientists to reach out to reporters, clearly explain their research, and let journalists know when there are errors in their reporting.

Bringing journalists and scientists together is nothing new for SEJ. We've been doing it for years at annual and regional conferences and for reporting tours to help journalists explore the work scientists are doing.

SEJ would like to expand its effort to build better relationships between journalists and scientists, possibly by convening similar discussions in public venues or at scientific meetings. Events could focus on coverage of specific news topics, like climate change or other hot-button environmental issues. SEJ could link these efforts with more of our famous reporting tours or visits to laboratories or field work sites to explore cutting edge research or under-reported news stories.

Many thanks to UCSB faculty and others for hosting the roundtable discussion and the evening event which featured the showing of Frontline and ProPublica's "The Spill," followed by a lively panel discussion with journalists, including ProPublica's Abraham Lustgarten and *Los Angeles Times* reporter Bettina Boxall, and scientists.

UCSB Environmental Studies Professor Bill Freudenburg, an SEJ member, was to be part of the panel to discuss his recent book, *Blowout in the Gulf: The BP Oil Spill Disaster and the Future of Energy in America*. Sadly, Bill succumbed to cancer in late December (see page 5 in this journal for a remembrance of Bill and his final words to us!) As part of a moving tribute to Bill, his co-author Robert Gramling, professor of sociology at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, served on the panel.

Ultimately the SEJ board was gathered in Santa Barbara to tackle its first business meeting of 2011, the budget meeting.

After approving a FY 2011 budget of \$918,500, SEJ's Board

of Directors voted Jan 29 to revise the organization's financial policies to allow limited gifts of unrestricted general support from anyone who supports SEJ's mission.

The revised policy changes the SEJ board's longstanding prohibition on accepting gifts or grants of any kind from government sources, environmental interests, non-media companies, or business associations.

Under the new policy, SEJ may now accept unrestricted contributions of general support from any person, group, business or other entity that wants to strengthen the future of SEJ and environmental journalism, up to \$15,000, about 1.5 percent of SEJ's current operating budget, per donor per calendar year.

Total donations from this group of new donors will be capped at 20 percent of SEJ's budget in any given year. As an organizational goal, SEJ will seek these general support gifts from a range of sources representing diverse points of view.

The decision follows years of discussion among board members and within the SEJ community about how SEJ should adapt to the short- and long-term challenges to its traditional funding model, which is based largely on foundation, media company and university support.

A survey of 186 members conducted last July found SEJ's membership divided over whether the organization should accept general support from a diverse array of sources.

More than 62 percent of the respondents said such a change would be either "much more" or "somewhat more" acceptable if SEJ makes clear it is accepting the money with no strings attached and it retains control over its programming. Another 8.2 percent found seeking funds from these new sources "somewhat less acceptable" even with the "no strings attached" policy. Twenty-six members, 14.2 percent of the respondents, disapproved and 17.6 percent said they would be less likely to remain SEJ members if SEJ accepted direct funding from non-media corporations, government, and environmental groups.

Respondents also provided written comments, some suggesting SEJ cut programs, raise member dues, and sell services rather than accept such contributions.

This was not an easy decision for the SEJ board, but one the board believes is needed to build a financially sustainable organization.

"Times have changed," SEJ Founding President Jim Detjen said prior to the vote. "... I do think it's time to move on doing something like this."

The goal is to increase SEJ's financial independence by diversifying and expanding the organization's potential sources of funding without sacrificing SEJ's fundamental principles of independence, integrity and transparency in its fundraising or its strict firewall between funding sources and SEJ operations.

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Remembering Bill Freudenburg

Statistician and thinker showed that finding key bad actor would produce greatest results

By ROGER WITHERSPOON

The collaboration started informally enough, over lunch between lectures at UC Santa Barbara in January 2009. He wanted to talk with my wife, Marilyn, and I about the craft of writing and the art of storytelling.

Bill Freudenburg was a brilliant statistician and thinker who used numbers as a tool to decipher patterns in corporate behavior, economic and environmental impacts. He had done that type of work for the government, working for seven years as a consultant to the Idaho National Laboratories, looking for patterns in federal nuclear operations which led to radioactive contamination in surrounding environments, and patterns in cleanup efforts which might lead to more efficient operations.

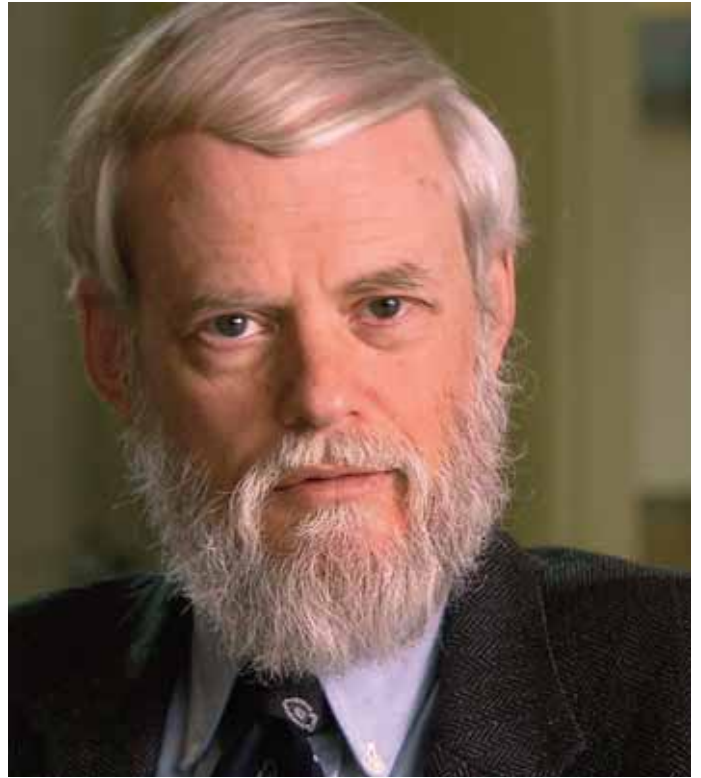
“But the official Bush Administration policy was that we were doing a good enough job and don’t have to do another god damned thing,” he said. “So they pulled the plug on the project.”

His work there buttressed a gnawing suspicion he had about environmental degradation:

- It was wrong to label an industry as dirty or environmentally harmful, and journalists and environmentalists were tackling the wrong issue by doing so.
- If you went after the one bad actor in a given field, about 80% of the environmental problems could go away.

If you looked at the data, he said, the spotted owl — that symbol of animal and tree-huggers vs. the economy and jobs for people — was all wrong. Statistically, the Pacific Northwest was over-logged and in economic decline long before environmentalists realized the spotted owl was in trouble. Indeed, the region’s economic decline was set before the owls and bird watchers knew there was a problem.

Journalists should never have gotten into a discussion of the environment vs. jobs and environmental organizations should not have defended the need to protect one over the other. If, instead, they had gone after the unsustainable logging practices of



Professor William Freudenburg, 1951-2010. Photo courtesy University of California at Santa Barbara

Weyerhaeuser — and left the other logging companies alone — they would have realized that owl conservation had nothing to do with regional economic decline.

Bill was comfortable with his findings. His problem was how to express them in ways that did not put people to sleep.

“We academicians and scientists operate with the premise that if we just put our data out there, everyone will see the same things we do, and act accordingly,” he said. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Explaining technical subjects means utilizing storytelling techniques that incorporate technical detail and draw readers into the discussion. Bill brought us to UCSB to talk to staff at the new Center for the Environmental Implications of Nanotechnology about effectively communicating science to the media and the public. But over lunch, he said he needed help communicating a project he had been working on for more than 20 years. And, since he was dying, it would be his last book.

“This started with studies I was doing around the time of the Exxon Valdez, which I called the ‘Atrophy of Vigilance’,” he explained. “There is a pretty predictable pattern. Right after an accident, everybody is paying attention. Congress holds hearings, executives pay attention to details, and the media records everything. But over time, the vigilance falls off and atrophies.

“It’s not just that individuals get lazy, but safety tends to be a secondary consideration for everybody. There aren’t any organizations on the face of the earth for whom protecting health and environment is something they do. As a professor, I worry about other people doing things safely, but I sometimes leave my

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To strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of SEJ is to strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,500 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's annual conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly *SEJournal*.

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file drawers open. We all take shortcuts.

“That said, not everyone is equally susceptible. It’s usually the case that, after an accident, people will take another look at information that’s been sitting there in front of them all along and see it in a different way.”

Over the ensuing months, there were several intermittent discussions with Bill about his final book, which he believed would show the correct way to look at threats to the environment. Sometimes there were long phone conversations, where he laid out his data and we suggested ways to tell that in a story. At other times, there were e-mail exchanges with sections of his work in progress. He was a man in a hurry, with good reason.

The preface to one such e-mail exchange began this way: “Statistically I should have been dead already. I have less than a year. Any hour I spend worrying about it is an hour I can’t spend doing something more valuable to me, so I can’t worry too much.

“The drugs do a number on my endurance. I have a couple of good hours a day.

“Chemo-brain is not just a theory. I can’t remember as quickly. Don’t have the endurance. There is so much in any job that is bull shit that you have to do five to six hours a day and then something valuable. I’m stuck with about as much bull shit as ever and then I’m wiped out.

“But it’s OK because of Max [his son]. He still thinks I’m wonderful. Biggest goal is to live long enough and ... see if he thinks I’m not such a dope.”

Bill paused in this project after the BP spill, driven to get out what he hoped would be a definitive work on the subject. In his view, the oil spill provided new fodder for the premise that the worst actors are responsible for the bulk of the environmental problems, and the oil spill was predictable from the patterns of the past.

“It is surely interesting that it was BP that had the Texas City Refinery that blew up,” he said recently. “It is interesting that of the 18 or so deep well blowouts, Halliburton was involved in all of them.

“It is the kind of thing where, after an accident, it’s as if your eyes open and you can see a pattern that was there all along.”

Bill interrupted his project to work with his long-time collaborator, Robert Gramling, on *Blowout in the Gulf* which turned out to be his last published work. When he resumed work on his emerging book, *Atrophy of Vigilance*, his energy level was down to about two hours a day. He could still think, he just lacked the energy to do anything else. He sent me the first half of his book and asked for help rewriting and restructuring it, as needed.

His accompanying note said, in part:

“You have a hodgepodge here — a few stretches might actually be ready for editing, but most of them won’t be. I’m trying to pull together pieces of ‘academic’ chapters, some of which I’ve tried to put into a consistent tone, and some of which I haven’t. I can do the thousand little bits of editing that still need to be done — what I’m still not doing all that well is to make sure



Professor William Freudenburg, 1951-2010
Photo © Marilyn Elie

that the first section actually leads into the second, enticing readers to head to the third, and so on. And the big problem I have with THAT is that, after so many years, I can’t convince myself I’m actually making the case I need to make unless I have at least a small assortment of statistics, a few citations to ‘respectable’ sources, etc. Here is where I really need help — or to be more clear about it, here’s where I KNOW I need help. I may need it in other places, too.

“In short, I’ll welcome just about any kind of feedback that you can find the time to provide. If there’s stuff that works, tell me about it, and tell me why. Where there are things that don’t work, tell me what they are. If you have alternative ideas that you’re able to pass along, do that. I’m eager to learn, in the limited time I have left, and I look forward to any lessons or bits of advice you’re willing to impart.”

Bill never did regain the strength to work on the book. After Thanksgiving, his one goal was to use his dwindling energy to enjoy one last Christmas with Max and Sarah. What follows on page 8 is his preface to *Atrophy of Vigilance* — as he wrote it.

Roger Witherspoon writes about the auto and nuclear industries.

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Preface: Robbing nature's bank

By BILL FREUDENBURG

May 14, 2009. Yesterday, my doctors told me that I have a rare and usually fatal cancer, meaning that I don't know how much time I have left on this earth. By about 2:00 this morning, I had decided that one of the things I want to do with that time is to finish this book *about* the earth, and about what we humans are doing to it.

I have spent about thirty-five years in studying relationships between humans and the environment. For at least half of that time, I have been increasingly bothered by an assumption that seems to permeate almost all environment-society writing — and that is clearly wrong. My goal, during whatever time I have left, is to spell out the reality of the situation as clearly as I know how.

As will be spelled out more fully in the following pages, that assumption goes by several names, ranging from “the Tragedy of the Commons” to the “IPAT equation.” The common theme in all of them is the assumption of rough *proportionality* between levels of environmental harm and levels of economic activity — that there are too many of us and that we all use too much.

In some senses, that view has to be true. There are over 300 million residents of the United States alone, and 300 million multiplied times almost anything will wind up being a pretty big number. We should all recycle, and do a better job of insulating our homes, and do more walking and less driving. With all due respect to the many authors who have worked so hard on all the other books in the “environment” sections of bookstores, though, even if all of us were to do our best to take on the “X simple things I can do to save the earth,” we would scarcely put a dent in the bigger problem. As I will spell out in later chapters, the things we can do *as individuals* wind up missing about 90% of all environmental problems. Yes, I mean that literally — about 90% of the problems. The reason that most of us still don't know that is that we've never really stopped to see the bigger picture. My hope is that this book can paint that picture clearly enough to help everyone to keep it in focus over the years ahead.

If you pay careful attention the next time some politicians intone, solemnly, that they don't accept that old assumption about a need for tradeoffs between economic growth and environmental protection, you'll notice something strange. Quite a few of them will then go on, in the next sentence or three, to say that they oppose one environmental policy or another precisely because (they claim) it would in fact involve such a tradeoff, being harmful for “jobs” or “the economy.” You will also notice that organized interest groups are forever attacking environmentalists for not caring a bit about jobs and working people — and environmentalists will often respond, indignantly but ineffectively, that they are, too, concerned about jobs. As will become clear in the following pages, I have learned a great deal from my fellow academics, but on this point, they are no better.

Instead, they write learned commentaries, noting that one such dispute or another is “proof” that capitalism cannot coexist with

environmental quality, or that it illustrates what one respected book called “the enduring conflict” between environment and economy. Liberals and conservatives may not agree on much, but ironically, with some variations, they do both tend to agree on this particular package of erroneous assumptions. Politically conservative commentators tend to see the creation of environmental harms as being an unfortunate but necessary side effect of prosperity, meaning that environmental protection is too expensive to be affordable — and that environmentalists just don't care about the economy.

Critical or leftist commentators generally share the view that environmental protection is expensive, differing only in seeing environmental damage as additional evidence of the drawbacks of capitalism. Although nearly everyone agrees on the supposed conflict between “jobs” and the environment, however, that expectation has everything going for it except one. At least in every case where someone has managed to look at the actual numbers, the expectation has proved to be dead wrong.

This book, accordingly, is intended to let out the truth about a little-known secret. The most environmentally damaging activities tend to have had an actual economic importance that is almost vanishingly small. The dirtiest industries of the economy aren't found on the cutting edge of the economy — they're closer to the manufacturers of buggy whips — and if the dirtiest few firms within those industries were “only” as bad *as the average or median firms in their own industries*, the *total* amounts of pollution from the dirtiest industries in the economy could be reduced by anywhere from 60-95%, depending on the industry in question. If the findings are that clear, why don't we do something about it? Partly because the heavy polluters certainly wouldn't have any reason to bring the facts to our attention — and partly because the rest of us still assume that what we face is a “Tragedy of the Commons,” and that we're all more or less equally responsible for environmental problems.

For years, major polluters have defended themselves by claiming that they bring vital economic benefits to the economy as a whole — and even environmental thinkers who are otherwise very smart have usually gone along with those claims. In fact, the big polluters' actual “contributions” to the economy have been more or less in line with the “benefits” that could have been delivered by a string of bank robberies. A few people really do make out like bandits, but for the economy as a whole, the net effect is more likely to be negative — and I mean negative *economically*, as well as environmentally.

The process amounts to the removal of money from the many, for the benefit of the few. In the name of helping “the economy,” those few bandits are robbing nature's bank, and the rest of us — along with our children, and with the environment — wind up being poorer as a result. [To be finished later...]

Fund for Environmental Journalism

SEJ's new program helps journalists complete some of their dream reporting, photography projects

By MICHAEL MANSUR

“To be a journalist is to have a passion for truth. To be an environmental journalist is a doubling of that passion,” says Jude Isabella, a freelance journalist.

Isabella, though, also has to pay her bills.

In this changing journalism world, where more dedicated journalists are left worrying more about how they can finance their next reporting project, the Society of Environmental Journalists has stepped in to help a little with those bills. It's all aimed at keeping journalists like Isabella tracking their story.

It's called the Fund for Environmental Journalism and it currently is accepting applications for its third round of grants. Up to \$2,500 will be awarded to environmental reporting projects and other journalism-related entrepreneurial ventures.

SEJ's board established the program after many members asked for their organization to help fill the void created when so many mainstream journalists became victims of the news industry's withering, thanks to the recent recession and the dramatic shift in media technology.

Each applicant must meet SEJ's membership eligibility requirements, but it's not necessary to actually be a member. It's your work that SEJ is interested in promoting.

Isabella is among about 30 U.S., Canadian and Mexico-based journalists who already have been helped by the fund. By the way, the fund can also use the help of more journalism-loving donations. See www.sej.org/get-involved/donate.

And SEJ soon hopes to help more.

Before we tell you a bit more about Isabella's project and how SEJ helped her, here's a rundown of several projects that SEJ's Fund for Environmental Journalism has already helped:

Ruxandra Guidi, Emeryville, CA, \$1,200 for travel for a



multimedia project about climate change and forestry in Panama.

Laura Frank and I-News: The Rocky Mountain Investigative News Network, Denver, CO, \$1,000 for graphics, photos and videos for an investigative multimedia water project in Colorado.

Eric Mack, Vadito, NM, \$1,000 for website development and cost/benefit analysis on energy projects in New Mexico.

Dan Collison and Long Haul Productions, Three Oaks, MI, \$750 for travel for an audio documentary on invasive fish in Arkansas, Missouri and Illinois.

< Jude Isabella accompanied scientists studying salmon streams that have fed indigenous people for thousands of years.

PHOTO: © JUDE ISABELLA

Heather Dewar, Baltimore, MD, \$725 for travel for adding a BP spill chapter in finalizing book on Florida ocean issues.

Bruce Ritchie and Florida Environments, Tallahassee, FL, \$500 for website development.

Kate Golden and the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, Madison, WI, \$500 for water testing for a multimedia project on water and agriculture in Wisconsin.

Lisa Morehouse, San Francisco, CA, \$425 for environmental elements of a radio series on changing rural economies in California.

Robert Berwyn and www.summitvoice.org, Frisco, CO, \$400 for travel for a multimedia online project on climate change and water pollution in Colorado and Utah.

continued on next page

Fund for Environmental Journalism
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Jim Carrier, Madison, WI, \$400 for travel for a multimedia project on hunters and environmental health in Wisconsin, Colorado and Wyoming.

Some new ventures funded in a second round of grants include Florida Center for Investigative Reporting, which is producing a multimedia project about an environmental issue in Florida.

“Investigative journalism is needed more than ever and SEJ understands the value of supporting watchdog journalism at a time when newsroom resources are dwindling and new models of journalism are emerging on the Internet, providing more opportunities to publish stories that matter,” said McNelly Torres, associate director of the Florida Center for Investigative Reporting. “We are thrilled and thankful that we were selected as recipient of this grant.”

Roberto “Bear” Guerra, who won \$1,900 from FEJ in 2010 to help with costs of reporting in Peru’s Amazon Basin on the impacts of the soon-to-be-completed Transoceanic Highway, said that “at a time when fewer and fewer outlets can afford to pay the costs associated with reporting — or in my case, photographing — environmental stories, we run the risk of not knowing about many situations until it’s too late ...

“Today, journalists and photographers simply can no longer do this work without the help of funding from organizations like the Society of Environmental Journalists,” Guerra said. “I hope to see the Fund grow in the coming years, and continue to provide opportunities for journalists to tell the stories that might otherwise not get told.”

Ah, yes, Jude Isabella.

Her \$900 FEJ grant allowed her to travel to a remote area of British Columbia to report and photograph with a team of biologists. The trip will be used for a magazine piece, as well as a book on salmon and humans and, maybe, paintings.

“Because my book is about human and salmon life histories, going to this area with biologists was an amazing opportunity,” Isabella said. “It’s also the place where archaeologists have found some of the oldest evidence of Pacific salmon exploitation by humans on the West Coast.

“The scientists took me through the bush, walking along salmon streams that fed people for thousands of years.”

Applications for an FEJ grant can be found at www.sej.org. Please also consider making a donation to the fund, so even more quality journalists can keep tracking their dream stories.

Michael Mansur, SEJournal editor, reports for The Kansas City Star. He can be reached at mansur.michael@gmail.com.

SEJ President’s Report
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Names and the dollar ranges of all gifts must be disclosed on sej.org at least quarterly and in the *SEJournal* at least annually. All donations of \$5,000 or more must still be reported in their exact amounts on SEJ’s IRS Form 990, which will continue to be posted on sej.org.

SEJ does not accept anonymous donations.

“I think it’s a really good step,” SEJ member Paul Rogers of the San Jose *Mercury News* and KQED’s Quest told me.

Rogers, who served on the board of directors of the Institutes for Journalism and Natural Resources from 2002-2010, recommended SEJ make “every effort to find a diverse group of donors” from the environmental community and from corporations, but SEJ must “clearly disclose the donors.”

“When reporters write stories, they interview all sides,” Rogers said. “That’s considered a strength in reporting. It’s only natural that SEJ pursues diverse funding. The most important thing to me is that the donations come with no strings attached.”

Rogers pointed out that neither member dues nor conference fees could fund the “important” work SEJ does. With 1,500 members and a \$1-million-a-year operating budget, members would have to pay about \$666 in annual dues just to maintain the organization’s current programming and operations, Rogers said.

In 2010, SEJ’s nearly \$900,000 operating budget was underwritten 45 percent by foundation grants and media company contributions in response to SEJ proposals, 30 percent by earned income (dues, subscriptions, advertising sales, contest entry fees, conference fees and exhibitor fees), 22.5 percent by the University of Montana sponsorship of the annual conference, and 2.5 percent by gifts from individuals.

Bud Ward, a founding SEJ board member, also supported the new policy. “It’s vital for environmental journalism that we stay vibrant and independent,” Ward told me. He suggested SEJ consider funding policies like the National Public Radio model.

Like Rogers, Ward stressed the need for complete transparency regarding donor gifts.

“SEJ is the pre-eminent network of educated, well-connected, professional environmental journalists,” Executive Director Beth Parke said.

“People who follow environmental issues appreciate what SEJ does,” Parke said. “I’m glad the organization can now welcome and accept no-strings support from anyone who values what we do to strengthen environmental journalism.”

More information on SEJ’s revised financial policy is at <http://www.sej.org/funding-policy-change>.

Carolyn Whetzel, SEJ board president, covers environmental issues in California for BNA, Inc.

*“Make a donation to the fund so even more quality journalists
can keep tracking their dream stories.”*

www.sej.org/get-involved/donate

Environmental stories reap major national prizes

Environmental stories from 2010 were beginning to win recognition from national journalism prizes announced early this year.

The Associated Press won a George Polk Award for Environmental Reporting for its “colossal effort” covering the worst oil spill in U.S. history, the million-gallon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

“It not only held people accountable for the initial disaster but also widened the lens to many more problems that are lurking just under the waters of the Gulf,” stated Kathleen Carroll, AP’s executive editor and senior vice president, in a press statement.

The AP was the first news organization to report the explosion aboard the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig. Its investigations revealed gaps in regulatory oversight of the 27,000 abandoned wells in the Gulf of Mexico.

Among the reporters whose stories were submitted for the prize: Jeff Donn and Seth Borenstein, Michael Kunzelman, Mike Baker, Mitch Weiss and Justin Pritchard.

Their stories examined:

— “Glaring errors and omissions in BP’s oil spill response plans.”

— The failure of BP to actually file a plan about how to handle just the type of spill that occurred at Deepwater Horizon.

— How the federal agency charged with ensuring oil rigs operate safely “fell well short of its policy” of once-per-month inspections.

— And the failure of cutoff valves (like the one that failed to stop the Gulf oil spill) which had repeatedly broken down at other wells in the years after federal regulators weakened testing requirements.

Also winning distinction this winter were three journalism efforts cited by one of the nation’s premier environmental prizes,

the John B. Oakes Awards, announced by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

Citations awarded:

1st place: A joint effort by the Center for Public Integrity’s International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and the BBC’s International News Service for their nine-month project, “Dangers in the Dust: Inside the Global Asbestos Trade.” Judges commended the project as “amazingly ambitious and hard-hitting.”

2nd place: *The (New Orleans) Times Picayune* for its extensive coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Judges cited the newspaper’s breaking of numerous stories and helping to “shape national coverage of the disaster.”

3rd place: Dan Egan of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* for his in-depth series “Great Lakes, Great Peril: A Road Map to Restoration.” Egan documented the area’s most pressing issues, including invasive species, Chicago’s outdated sewage system and dwindling water levels.



The Oakes award honors the late *New York Times* columnist, editorial writer and editorial page editor. Oakes was a pioneer of environmental journalism.

Visit www.sej.org

for an alphabetical listing of awards.

The list includes a broad array of journalism awards, most but not all environmental.

<http://www.sej.org/initiatives/awards-fellowships/nonSEJ-awards>



By BUD WARD

For climate change reporters, here's an essential reading list

Climate change/global warming issues may well turn out to be “the story of the century” as many science and environmental journalists have said. But that doesn’t necessarily make it the story of the day, week, month or year. One need only recall the “Deepwater Horizon” disaster in the Gulf of Mexico or the sweeping coverage given the economic collapse (or, one suspects, of the coming presidential election campaign).

So, for environmental reporters increasingly having to juggle multiple beats and assignments from editors or finicky demands of an ever-changing freelance career, how to best stay atop the climate change issues? They’re issues, after all, that are rapidly changing and evolving, notwithstanding the certainly glacial pace, no pun, of the overall impacts.

What follows are some “must see” resources and websites for journalists *wanting* to remain abreast of climate change ...but also *needing* to split their time and attention among numerous issues. The universe of potential candidates surely is enormous, and no single “best of” list is likely to suit all needs. But for a start, reporters new to the climate change issue and those having to immerse themselves into it while also grappling with a range of other important environmental (and, given the nature of today’s newsrooms, also non-environmental) issues, might try these:

‘Must Read’ Books —

The Discovery of Global Warming: Revised and Expanded Edition, by Spencer R. Weart (American Institute of Physics, retired), Harvard University Press, 2008, 230 pages. ISBN-13:978-0-674-03189-0 (paper).

If you can read only one book on climate change, this should be it. Scientifically rigorous and authoritative, but very accessible and understandable.

The Rough Guide to Climate Change: The Symptoms, The Science, The Solutions, by Robert Henson (University Consortium for Atmospheric Research), Rough Guides, Ltd./Penguin Books, Ltd., 2009. 352 pages. ISBN 10: 1-84353-711-7 (paper).

But you really shouldn’t stop at one book ...and Henson’s “Rough Guide” should definitely be the second one you read. From “the basics” of a primer, greenhouse effect, and “Who’s responsible?” ... to symptoms and impacts ranging from high heat; floods and droughts; severe storms; ocean, ecosystem, and

agricultural impacts; to the underlying science; and mitigation/adaptation strategies. Rock-solid scientifically.

Americans and Climate Change: Closing the Gap Between Science and Action, by Daniel R. Abassi, Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies Publication Series, 2006, 210 pages. ISBN-0-0707882-4-X (paper).

Based on a high-powered 2005 Aspen, Colorado, conference spearheaded by then-Yale Forestry Dean Gus Speth. Just a tad dated now, but still provides timeless insights into what drives



America and Americans on climate change. A bit more emphasis on policy than on underlying science, but effectively links the two.

“Should Read” Books

(“Wish I Could Find Time to Read Books ...”) —

Why We Disagree about Climate Change, by Mike Hulme, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 432 pages. ISBN-978-0521727327 (paper).

A respected British scientist and academic takes a swing at better understanding “both sides” of the climate science debates ...and hits a homer, or at least a triple. His points are universal and global in relevance, not simply “British.”

Ten Technologies to Save the Planet: Energy Options for a Low-Carbon Future, by Chris Goodall, Greystone Books, 2008 and 2010, 320 pages. ISBN-978-1-55365-525-1 (paper).



Must-Bookmark Web Sites —

(There are, of course, infinitely more important and worthwhile climate change web sites. Virtually all the sites — good, bad, and ugly — are accessible through links or citations from one or more of the sites included below.)

<http://www.ipcc.ch/>

The official site for what the international climate science community considers “the gold standard” for climate science. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, is an operation of the United Nations and the World Meteorological Organizations.

<http://skepticalscience.com>

Queenslander John Cook’s innovative and highly readable three-plus year old Web site, now available in 19 languages and with monthly unique visitors approaching a half-million. Rebutts common “myths” voiced by climate “contrarians,” and does so in Advanced, Intermediate, and Basic formats to broaden appeal and understanding. A popular I-Phone and Android app. It’s increasingly getting rave reviews and being pointed to during scientific society meetings dealing with climate change issues.

<http://realclimate.org>

“Climate science from climate scientists,” but only from those in general agreement with the so-called “consensus” [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, National Academy of Sciences, etc.] perspectives that Earth is warming and that humans play a substantial role in that warming. Intended as a “quick response ... commentary site” for journalists and broad public, but can often be a bit on the more technical side.

<http://dailyclimate.org>

Launched in 2007 to be “the source of record on climate change news,” aggregating and linking through daily (7 X a week) summaries of “best news on climate change from round the globe.” Who published what on climate change — Top Stories, Solutions, Causes, Consequences, and Politics — over the previous 24-hour period. Any reporter seriously following these issues gets this free e-mail resource, with its searchable data base. Published by a Charlottesville, Va., nonprofit organization headed by John Peterson Myers, a co-author with scientist Theo Colburn and former *Boston Globe* reporter Dianne Dumanoski of *Our Stolen Future*, dealing with endocrine disrupters.

<http://wattsupwiththat.com/>

When it comes to web sites managed by climate “skeptics,” none gets more traffic than that managed and run by former TV meteorologist Anthony Watts ... “WUWT.” The vast majority of

respected climate scientists are highly dubious about its scientific credentials, but it’s the one “must see” site for those wanting to know the pulse of the climate skeptics community. (Critics like to describe Watts’ site as “snarky.”)

<http://climateprogress.com/>

Blogger and former Carter Administration Energy Department official Joe Romm’s site is about as far — scientifically, politically, and philosophically — from Anthony Watt’s WUWT as could be. Romm’s site is managed by the Center for American Progress, a liberal policy think tank headed by former Clinton Administration White House Chief of Staff John Podesta. Romm is known for his “take no prisoners” approach and rhetoric ... and for his prolific blogging on climate and energy issues. (Again ... critics find this site, like WUWT, “snarky.” Chances are good that both sites take those barbs as compliments coming, as they often do, from their adversaries.)

Focusing on American Attitudes on Climate Change

Anthony Leiserowitz at Yale University and Edward Maibach at George Mason University have done research commonly referred to as “the Six Americas study.” Try googling that term, and you’ll be led to the most recent of those studies (<http://tinyurl.com/yhhj9sz>), illustrating the range of public opinions and attitudes — from “alarmed” to “dismissive” — characterizing Americans’ views on the subject and factors indicating how and why the public falls into those categories.

Sites Focusing on Journalism and Climate Change

No conversation of useful climate change web sites — and certainly no conversation addressing the interests of journalists — would be complete without mention of former *New York Times* science reporter Andy Revkin’s dot earth site (<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com>).

A long-time SEJ member, Revkin in early 2010 accepted a buy-out from the *Times* to move to Pace University, but he continues to contribute frequently to the Dot-Earth site he had launched, now more in a column and opinion format rather than as a news site. Like other SEJ members and their own sites — Tom Yulsman and his <http://cejournal.net>. and Curtis Brainard’s work at http://www.cjr.org/the_observatory/ come quickly to mind — Revkin’s site and long-time science reporter Charlie Petit’s work at <http://ksjtracker.mit.edu> frequently provide practical insights into reporting on climate change and also on related environmental and science issues.

Finally, how do I say it? I hope SEJ members will often visit the site I edit and write for: <http://climatemediaforum.yale.edu>, *The Yale Forum on Climate Change & The Media*. Saying it poses an obvious conflict of interest ...omitting it makes it a conspicuous omission.

Bud Ward is a founding member of SEJ and the editor of The Yale Forum on Climate Change & The Media.

Check out other great books
written by SEJ members at
www.sej.org/library/books/overview

“Reporting like a demon, writing like an angel” Move from daily newspaper job rewards to science writing

PHOTO COURTESY ALANNA MITCHELL



Author / journalist
Alanna Mitchell

By BILL DAWSON

Alanna Mitchell’s own website sums up her work this way:

“Alanna Mitchell is a Canadian author and journalist

who writes about global science issues. She specializes in investigating changes to the earth’s life-support systems and travels the world in search of scientists at the centre of what’s going on.”

Mitchell worked as a business reporter for Canada’s *The Financial Post* before taking a job at *The Globe and Mail*, Canada’s Toronto-based national newspaper. After covering other beats, she became a feature writer covering earth sciences for *The Globe*. Her work for the newspaper earned four major national and international awards.

After 17 years of daily newspaper work, she began writing books and magazine articles about science in 2004. Her second book, an international bestseller, was published in the U.S. with the title *Seasick: Ocean Change and the Extinction of Life on Earth*. It was the first book to win the \$75,000 Grantham Prize for Excellence in Reporting on the Environment in 2010.

“Reading Alanna Mitchell convinces you that the ocean is at least as important as the atmosphere when we worry about climate change,” The Grantham Jury stated. “Because of its depth, the global ocean contains 99 percent of the earth’s living space, and it’s in trouble. She traveled around the world to get this story, reporting it like a demon and writing like an angel. That’s an important combination for science writing, because it gets the information into our heads, not just our hands. You cannot put this book down without understanding that, for life on earth to continue as it is, the ocean from which we evolved must remain healthy.”

Mitchell answered *SEJournal*’s emailed questions about *Seasick* and her career.

Q: Please tell me a little about how *Seasick* came to be and how you went about reporting and writing it. Your first book, *Dancing at the Dead Sea*, was mainly about environmental issues on land, including such interrelated subjects as extinction, biodiversity and tropical deforestation. Was the second book conceived as an oceanic complement? Were there significant differences in the ways you approached the two subjects?

A: *Seasick* wasn’t conceived of as a complement. It was just the next great story, and one that I hadn’t understood until I started researching. I had a much more consciously scientific approach to *Seasick* than *Dancing*. That’s because the secrets of the sea — and therefore the planet’s future — are locked in the brains and papers of scientists and I wanted to unlock them.

Q: How did you go about selecting the places and scientists to feature in *Seasick*? Had you reported on any of those researchers’ work previously? Was ocean science a fairly new subject for you? Did you generally anticipate or suspect that the situation you detailed through your reporting would be as dire, environmentally speaking, as you found it to be, or was this a surprise for you?

A: Ocean science was a closed book to me until I started the research for *Seasick*. The depth of the problem was an utter surprise to me. The scientists were all new to me. I chose them by reading their research papers. I remember downloading papers in the middle of the night and devouring them — Nancy Knowlton, Ken Caldeira, and on and on. I selected the scientists by the quality of their published research and by the recommendations of scientists I had already discovered and knew to be brilliant. The places I wrote about were totally dependent on the scientists and other characters I chose to write about.

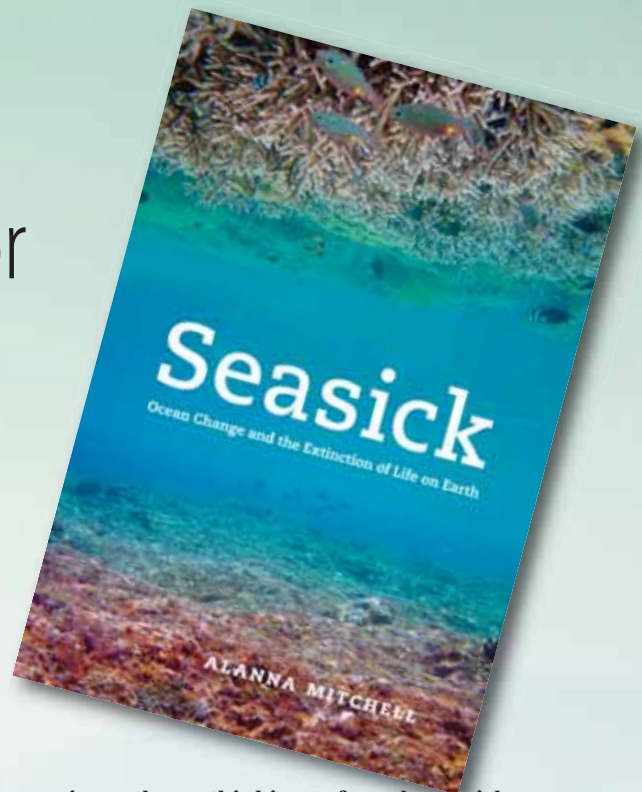
Q: In an interview in 2008 with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, you described *Seasick* as “a journalistic take on what scientists are finding out.” In a general sense, what are they finding out — or rather, what were they finding out when you did the reporting for the book?

A: It’s the same as what they’re finding out now. The global ocean is in very, very serious trouble. That has to do with the chemical changes happening in the global ocean, caused by humans. The main one is the acidification of the ocean, which is happening in lockstep with the increasing CO₂ that humans are putting into the atmosphere as we burn fossil fuels.

Q: Have any major findings since the book’s publication confirmed your overall appraisal or provided important new details? Have there been major new findings that lend themselves to a less worrisome assessment? Any significant developments or initiatives in policy or technology or other areas that give you reason for greater hope?

A: All findings since the publication have confirmed the worst. The findings have lent themselves to a better assessment. If anything, things are more dire than I wrote in *Seasick*. Since the book came out, scientists have made two international statements declaring ocean acidification to be a huge problem and calling on world governments to take it into account in CO₂/Kyoto negotiations. That hasn’t had an effect yet in the negotiations. The Obama administration clearly understands the issue and has issued an oceans policy that talks about mitigating the effects of ocean acidification, which is one of the first official acknowledgements in the world that ocean acidification is happening. So a tiny bit of progress there.

ting like an angel” science writer and book author



Q: As a newspaper reporter, you covered real estate, banking, social trends and statistics, and a geographically-defined beat — Calgary and its region — before you began covering earth sciences. That latter work led to your designation as the world’s best environmental reporter and an opportunity to study at Oxford University in a Reuters Foundation competition. Why and how did you become interested in and involved in reporting on earth sciences? Did the fact that you came from a family of scientists, with a biologist father, have something to do with it?

A: I ate biology for breakfast. Because of my dad, I had a burning need to understand how everything fit together. At first, it was just on the prairies where I grew up and reported, and then later, it grew to the planetary systems. It was just this huge curiosity to understand things. I remember having a stack of books and scientific articles at my bedside and devouring them, night after night, making notes.

Q: What persuaded you to make the move from newspaper reporting to a multifaceted role as an author of books, a public speaker on environmental and other subjects, a consultant for clients including non-profits and private companies, and an associate of the Winnipeg-based International Institute for Sustainable Development? Was it tough to make that transition? How do the challenges and satisfactions of that mix of activities compare with life as a newspaper reporter?

A: I made the leap because I could no longer write the types of stories I wanted to for the newspaper I worked at. I had been banned from writing about science, mainly because the paper wanted me to write about something else — education — and I couldn’t bond with it. I couldn’t bear to let go of all the expertise I had acquired by that time. Plus, planetary science was absolutely the best story going and I couldn’t not write about it. But it was terribly difficult to say goodbye to regular salary, benefits, pension. I had a single \$7,000 contract when I left and I was a sole-support single mother of two kids. But I’ve ended up making more money every single year but one as an independent. The one year was when I spent six months writing *Seasick*. Not such a tough transition, but very focused. I have so much more freedom to write stories I know are important now that I’m independent.

Q: How tough did it get — leaving a regular salary? And could

you give others thinking of such a risky move some practical advice?

A: How tough? There are still times I lie awake at night worrying about where the next gig is going to come from. Something always shows up, though. And none of it is as hard as staying in the newspaper job would have been. I lost a lot more sleep over the newspaper job than I do over where the next check is going to come from. Advice? My breakthrough was when I began to think of myself as a creator of income and value — an entrepreneur — and to realize that my skill set had value to others. Plus, I realized that being an independent journalist has a nobility of its own. Before, I bought into the idea that I could only be successful if someone employed me full time.

Q: You were awarded the 2008 Atkinson Fellowship in Journalism, a \$100,000 prize, to study the intersection of neuroscience and education. Does your work in this area signal a move away from work on environmental concerns? Is a book in the works?

A: A book is in the works. It’s a natural progression from the enviro stuff. Environmental issues are just a function of human behavior, so the new book is an attempt to understand the biology of human behavior.

Q: Do you have any practical wisdom — advice, encouragement, warnings, whatever — for other environmental journalists or aspiring environmental journalists on the basis of your experiences as a reporter and author?

A: My advice is to care passionately, to adore what you’re doing and keep going even if everyone else says you should be nonchalant. Why write about it if it’s not important? Whether it’s finance or arts or politics, or even, God forbid, the science of the planet, just keep going. Explain things to me that I don’t understand. Please!

Bill Dawson is SEJournal assistant editor.

Environment, staple of documentaries, inches into dramas at Sundance Film Festival



PHOTO © VIVIAN STOCKMAN

Maria Gunnoe, featured in "The Last Mountain," at a mountaintop removal coal mine site in West Virginia.

By JoANN M. VALENTI

The submissions pile to Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival, now in its third decade, gets deeper every year. The snow drifts blanketing Park City, UT remain about the same and half of Hollywood continues to crowd onto Main Street to see films from around the world.

Close to 10,000 wannabe screenings of features, shorts and documentaries poured in for SFF 2011 consideration. Nearly 4,000 fit the feature-length category from which only 118 representing 29 countries and 40 first-time filmmakers were selected. Of those, 95 were world premieres.

Given that Sundance films now regularly make their way to

Academy Award nominations — "The Kids Are All Right," "Winter's Bone" and "Gasland," a documentary that pushed fracking onto the nation's agenda, from SFF 2010 showed up this year as Oscar nominees — industry reps also swarm the mountains looking for deals. Pre-fest buys included a few on my to-see list: HBO grabbed "Project Nim," adapted from the book reporting the fate of the chimp raised as a human baby then abandoned when the research funds and interest ran dry; Sony Pictures pre-bought "Take Shelter," more a mental-health story than an omen of climate change-caused natural disasters, but you never know; and a deal seemed imminent for "Perfect Sense," a thriller/love story

set against a global pandemic featuring an epidemiologist who couldn't keep her clothes on.

Trying to search out environment or science content based on a one- or two-line synopsis made available prior to opening day can get a tad overwhelming. I set my sights on 15 possibilities along with a couple of filmmaker panels that looked promising. The ten-day festival also presents short films, documentaries, and art installations. One artist featured in the New Frontier section of the fest offered an interactive multimedia experiment creating and tracking the spread of a virtual epidemic. Another called "Glowing Pathfinder Bugs" looked intriguing but struggled with malfunctions (insecticide?) and "The Wilderness Downtown" also contributed to the intersection of art, science and filmmaking.

Redford is determined to find audiences for his message.

"Thirty years ago, in 1980, I wanted to create a space where independent artists with new ideas and new voices could have a place to develop," Redford, the actor/director/producer, NRDC Trustee, said at the opening press conference. Describing how his idea was cobbled together on a shoestring, Redford said, "[a sense of community is] something I always missed in my life."

Stories presented at Sundance cross borders and cross ways of thinking, he said, and he's taking advantage of new opportunities to find audiences.

Sundance Channel and the Sundance Cinemas have been a start. New launches also include Sundance Select and Sundance shorts on YouTube along with live streams throughout the fest.

The Sundance Institute recently joined with President Obama's Committee of Arts and Humanities on a global project called Film Forward, and announced new theatre labs in East Africa and India. Also new this year, SFF sent nine films from the festival for simultaneous screening in nine U.S. cities: Seattle; Nashville; San Francisco; Madison; Ann Arbor; Brookline, MA; Chicago; Los Angeles; and Brooklyn. Five films were also made available on Video On Demand on several television outlets for a month following the festival. Redford is committed to spreading the word from his community of indies.

Attending celebs this year included Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. appearing in Bill Haney's doc "The Last Mountain." In an interview I berated Haney with my pessimism over last mountains, last lions, ongoing devastation, the results of enviro issues tackled for the duration of Redford's festival, seemingly, with not much effect. Haney's film documents mountain top removal for mining and burning of coal with some seriously dramatic dynamiting in Appalachia that spreads pollution to other states and particularly endangers people living in nearby West Virginia valleys. In the film Kennedy says, "If people could see this there would be a revolution." Really?

The film offers the usual awe-inspiring scenes and a slew of superimposed facts: 30 percent of coal comes from Appalachia, burning is the number one source of greenhouse gases worldwide, in a six-year period one coal company (Massey Energy) committed over 60,000 environmental violations, etc. etc. The film stays away from total doom and gloom by offering more data to argue for a wind industry solution. The wind industry in the U.S. already employs as many people as currently work in the coal

industry and operates some 35,000 turbines according to the film's narration. Canada, the film heralds, is decommissioning coal power plants and moving to renewable energy. The film is dedicated to NRDC co-founder John Adams.

"If A Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front" manages to break the doc formula and left the audience — albeit the usual SFF crowd of self-described "liberals" — outraged, some in tears. Director Marshall Curry, a Swarthmore Comparative Religion major, tells the story of ELF, the secretive eco-radical organization primarily active in northwestern states around the turn of the century, focused on one unlikely member, a slightly nerdy, Catholic-reared son of a New York cop. He's caught in the FBI's initial round-up of ELF and gets tagged — unfairly by media, the film argues — an "eco-terrorist." This is pre-9/11 and the term "terrorist" now carries a life-long hellish label. The young man's still locked up in a federal prison for terrorists. Archival



PHOTO: © ERIC GRUNEBaum

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. addressing a West Virginia gathering opposed to mountaintop removal coal mining.

footage of environmentalists demonstrating in Eugene, OR and Seattle, WA shows police forcing open students' eyes and pouring in pepper spray as they refuse to disperse. That's after dousing mobs in the streets with tear gas, some very disturbing scenes in spite of follow-up interviews with forestry folks and government prosecutors making their case for genetically engineering trees, lumbering in general. "If A Tree Falls" won the Documentary Editing Award.

Although science content was stronger in features this year — "Another Earth," a must-see story of a parallel universe, picked up for distribution by Fox Searchlight, won the Alfred P. Sloan Prize and a U.S. Dramatic Special Jury Prize — environment issues are only gradually finding a way into films other than docs and shorts. "The Majestic Plastic Bag" narrated by Jeremy Irons is a four-minute history of the great garbage island in the Pacific Ocean. "Animals Distract Me," 48 minutes following actress Isabella Rossellini in Manhattan, includes an encounter with Charles Darwin explaining animal behavior and his theory of evolution. Tiffany Shlain's "Connected: An Autobiography About Love, Death & Technology" skillfully blends the story of her father's

continued on page 19

So little time, so stop procrastinating!



Here are some helpful tips to better manage your time and energy

By NAOMI LUBICK

Let's be blunt here: I procrastinated when it came to writing this story.

And I seem to have joined a long line of journalists and researchers working on stories about procrastination. I recently read the article by James Surowiecki, "Later," reviewing an entire book on procrastination (<http://tinyurl.com/2bq3qdw>).

Excellent stuff, both philosophically and practically — as a reporter it is so easy to justify procrastinating: No really, it's part of my work to read *The New York Times* and Facebook! I have to know what's happening out there! (OK, maybe not the *NYT* Style section.)

Anyway, one of the main points I took away from the essay (and therefore the book he reviewed, which I will never have time to read unless I am procrastinating) is that it's really mentally handy to break a task down into its components. Smaller tasks are easier to envision completing. But even for those smaller tasks, you might need reminders.

A slew of time management programs have popped up online to do just that. They can tell you to get back to work with a little pop-up window, or email you the day before you told yourself you had to have the last chapter written for your book. Some programs are available for free; some, for monthly fees. I resolved to download one a week to test them for you, my SEJ colleagues. Of course, I did not (I procrastinated and ran out of time). Instead, I took the liberty of polling some of my freelance colleagues recently to see what tools they use.

Aside from paper (bulletin boards with note cards, paper calendars, and daybooks), most of us in my survey pool seem to rely on some kind of e-tool. Part of my colleagues' winnowing process on selecting which applications to use depended on whether they were Mac or PC users. But a lot of their finds are available as online applications for either, built in HTML or XML.

Whether Mac or PC, these web-based tools might be for you. If all you need are reminders, then list-oriented apps that have the

ability to break large "to-do's" into smaller tasks might prove useful. Fruitful Time (<http://www.fruitfultime.com>) and Todoist (<http://todoist.com/>) seem pretty basic and will track deadlines, pop up reminders on your desktop, and more. Both are free.

For tracking hourly work, the bubblegum-flavored Freckle (<http://letsfreckle.com/tour/>) uses XML to create timers that you hit a "play" button when you start and a "stop" or "pause" button, to track the time you spent on different tasks. In the end, it can create work reports and actual *invoices* based on how you timed your working hours. You also have to pay a monthly fee for the service (they have a 30-day trial period that I am afraid to try, in case I get addicted). Toggl (<http://www.toggl.com/>) is another similar timekeeper, with web-based, desktop, or iPhone and Android versions. You can find a gazillion such apps through Lifehacker, a website that has the potential to quickly turn into another distracting time-sink (see <http://tinyurl.com/ycq38bm>).

If staying focused is one of your bugaboos, little electronic tricks can help you block out the rest of the world while you work. Firefox browser users can download LeechBlock, an "addon" that prevents you from logging on to Amazon, Lexulous, or whatever else happens to be your Achilles' heel (<http://tinyurl.com/6mpsd2>). One colleague suggested the "Pomodoro Technique," a concentration method that comes with a book and other hoopla, but which in the end can be boiled down to setting a timer for 25 minutes. As the timer counts down, you are to do nothing but concentrate on your project (the Google group has a list of "Pomodoro-approved" apps for your Android or iPhone, computer desktop, and so on: <http://tinyurl.com/4jvtaz5>).

Basecamp (<http://basecamp.com/>) is an online project management tool I have used to schedule out deadlines for a long-range project, working with several collaborators. The online program allows you to set deadlines, marked by email reminders. For team projects, the online interface lets you send messages to colleagues and post files to share without having to email them.

However, I found the interface frustrating at times when the available options were not what I wanted; when the free-trial period ended, I did not sign on for the monthly fee to keep using it.

For now, I am cobbling together my own work management system. I use Excel spreadsheets to track my time, invoices, and costs. Google Wave has been my go-to for file-sharing and editing with collaborators (it's about to become defunct, but most of my editors use tracked changes in Word anyway). Google Calendar (<https://www.google.com/calendar>) lets me set up reminders and email them to myself or schedule them to pop up on my computer screen, whenever I have a phone call scheduled with a source or a looming deadline. (And don't forget: Google is free!)

But then, I have to remember to enter these events in the calendar, check my Gmail, or have it open that day to see the

"I love deadlines. I love the whooshing sound they make as they go by."

Attributed to Douglas Adams
Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams,
"widely quoted but original source unknown,"
[<http://tinyurl.com/4jny8r2>]



reminder. I have to remember to look at my Excel spreadsheet and enter in all the stories I've completed, and then remember to go write up invoices. (One colleague notes that even Quicken is better than Excel when it comes to invoices; Quicken has a free version, but you have to pay for the home and business version that has invoice functions: <http://quicken.intuit.com/>.) The thought that I am getting paid to do this softens the burden of these niggling tasks. And I keep these windows open all the time to reinforce the habit of using them (supposedly, habit-forming takes about two months of consistent repetition, <http://tinyurl.com/mfsrfrk>).

So, whether you need that last-minute rush of adrenaline as the clock ticks away or you finished writing a full day ahead of schedule, how you meet your deadlines is completely up to you. A plethora of electronic tools can help you wherever you stand on the procrastination spectrum. However, the question may not be which to choose, but whether you will actually use them.

Naomi Lubick covers environmental and other science news from her base in Stockholm, Sweden.

The original research cited in the blog on habit-forming behavior
<http://tinyurl.com/mfsrfrk>
<http://tinyurl.com/4rszdh9>
<http://tinyurl.com/kks9t3>

More procrastinating researchers who write:
<http://tinyurl.com/4etythm>
<http://tinyurl.com/4a3d2yj>
[this guy writes at the gym, away from the Internet! But really, this is mostly about sabbaticals and academic time management]
<http://structuredprocrastination.com/>

EXTRA:

For organizing your work, I've heard people say good things about the Mac-based DEVONThink (<http://tinyurl.com/ypnuw7>), an all-around application for tracking email, archiving PDFs and other documents, and letting you annotate as you go. Mac users also highly recommend Scrivener (<http://www.literatureandlatte.com/>), which allows you to storyboard, integrate note-taking into your library of PDFs, and more. This sounds like life-changing magic. I, however, am a PC user, and I'm waiting for Scrivener's beta-Windows version to be tested completely before I go for it (www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivenerforwindows).



me: I'm so unable to work right now.
It's pathetic.
H: *
me: and I have no excuses
H: oh, surely you can think of some
-Gmail chat exchange

Sundance Film Festival continued from page 17

death (author/researcher Leonard Shlain) with a history of the interconnectedness and interdependence of everything. Her right-brain-left-brain insight should win an award for women's superiority ... I mean, equality. But only "Letters From The Big Man" by Christopher Munch extends to a feature-length story that tackles U.S. Forest Service controversies and casts the leading lady as a government hydrologist. Unfortunately, the field researcher/artist sees, then joins, sasquatches in the ancient forests. It's an interesting option I suppose.

Overall, I suspect the number one must-see film from this year's Sundance for SEJers and journalists in general is "Page One," Andrew Rossi and Kate Novack's doc covering a year inside the *New York Times*. Even though it's a story about everyone's favorite newspaper character David Carr and the focus is on the *Times'* Media Desk, the film provides an 88-minute lesson on the importance of good old-fashioned reporting and the necessity of editors, plus a crash course on the crisis in the news industry. Magnolia and Participant Media picked up the film for release so watch for it to appear soon somewhere. Go to www.sundance.org or websites for individual films for more information.

JoAnn Valenti, Emerita Professor and member of SEJournal's Editorial Board, has logged two decades at Sundance with students and covering science and environment in emerging films. The movies, mountains and magpies make slogging through snow drifts endurable.

SEJ Members! Are you subscribed to

Tip-Sheet?

The SEJ TipSheet email list-serv provides biweekly news tips to notify journalists of potential environmental stories and sources. Contact the SEJ office and start receiving SEJ-TipSheet.

215-884-8174 or sej@sej.org

Northwestern University students produce impressive series on climate change threats to national security

By BILL DAWSON

Journalists and news organizations looking for collaborative ways to keep alive the tradition of in-depth, public-service reporting have a new model to consider.

In January, Northwestern University's Medill School published "Global Warning," an investigative series by 10 of its graduate students about the ways that climate change threatens national security.

Besides the project's own website — which also features interactive elements including a crisis-resolution game — stories from the series were published in the *Washington Post* and on McClatchy Newspapers' Washington website. They were also distributed to more than 600 other newspapers by the McClatchy-Tribune news service.

News outlets around the world published articles from the series, said Josh Meyer, a former national security writer for the *Los Angeles Times* who is now director for education and outreach for the Medill National Security Journalism Initiative.

"Global Warning," funded by the McCormick Foundation, was the first annual reporting project that Medill students will produce on a subject related to national security.

Meyer told *SEJournal* that he and Ellen Shearer, director of Medill's Washington program and co-director of the initiative, wanted the initial investigation to address a subject that had gone largely unexamined by journalists and would represent a public service.

He said he believes the product of the students' three-month investigation met both criteria.

In announcing the project's publication, Medill said that the team had "found that the nation's security establishment is not adequately prepared for many of the environmental changes that are coming faster than predicted and that threaten to reshape demands made on the military and intelligence community. This is despite the fact that the Defense Department has called climate change a potential 'accelerant of instability.'"

The school listed these key findings:

- "The government lacks critical information about where and when climate changes will happen and what effect they will have on the U.S. military, intelligence and national security communities."
- "In a major strategy review last year, the Pentagon acknowledged the challenge that climate change poses to its operations, including a dramatically increased need for intervention in future humanitarian crises. While military branches have begun global assessments of their vulnerabilities, many security experts say the



The home page of Global-Warming.org features stories all relating to the impact of climate change on national security. PHOTO COURTESY GLOBAL-WARMING.ORG

work lacks senior level support in Congress and the administration and that military service preparations are not keeping up with environmental changes."

- "Work by the CIA and environmental scientists during the Clinton administration was largely ignored in the years of George Bush's presidency. Although the CIA is now spear-

heading intelligence assessments to determine where climate change could affect global stability, that work may be in jeopardy as Republicans skeptical of climate control take control of key congressional committees."

- "The nation's satellite system, which provides the lifeblood of climate information, is in disrepair after years of inadequate funding and, in the past two decades, the intelligence community has struggled both internally and politically to respond to the challenges posed by climate change."

- "At home, critical infrastructure along the Gulf of Mexico is vulnerable to the stronger storms and more frequent flooding that are predicted due to climate change."

Meyer, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* for 20 years before joining the Medill faculty, said producing the climate project was stressful work. "We wanted to make sure we had a professional-grade project for the Post and McClatchy," he said.

He said he was especially proud that all interviews for the series were on the record.

Those interviews — more than 200 in all — included the first that any journalist had conducted with the top CIA official at the agency's Center on Climate Change and National Security. The participating students reported from diverse locations including the Arctic Circle, Bangladesh, Peru, Washington, North Carolina and Texas. Here are some excerpts from series installments:

"Arctic military posturing heats up" by Jacquelyn Ryan

"While attention has been focused on a pending fight over Arctic resources military and homeland security officials say the real struggle lies in trying to get the resources they need to operate in an arena that, until now, has sat vacant as a frozen ocean.

"Despite the Arctic being identified as an area of key strategic interest by the White House and Department of Defense, the United States still sits in the far north without the military and civilian resources it says it needs — and few indications that any significant ones will be forthcoming.

"Summer 2007 marked a record low of Arctic sea ice, and

more open water brings with it increased human activity through newly thawed sea lanes and a freshly accessible, resource-rich seabed. Whether the activity is commercial, leisure, or foreign militaries, such activity requires a U.S. presence and capability that officials say simply isn't there."

"Bases at risk" (interactive feature) by Sarah Chacko

"The Pentagon's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review cites 30 U.S. military bases and facilities as being at risk of rising sea levels, though others say it's a much higher number. Military officials have declined to release the unclassified list. A \$5 million sea level rise study is underway at five installations, through the Defense Department's environmental research agency. Final results are expected in 2014."

"U.S. military grasps effects of the rising tide" by Malathi Nayak

"Climate change is fast becoming [a security threat], according to U.S. and Bangladeshi officials, who have concluded it will help create new conflict hotspots around the world and heighten the tensions in existing ones — and impact the national security of the United States in the process. Moreover, climate change could overstress the U.S. military by creating frequent and intensified disasters and humanitarian crises to which it would have to respond.

"Nowhere is that potential chain of events more worrisome than in Bangladesh, a country strategically sandwiched between rising superpowers China and India, and which also acts as a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia.

"Already, Bangladesh is beset by extreme poverty, overcrowding and flooding that frequently render large numbers of people homeless. The Muslim-majority country also has had problems with Islamist radicalization."

"Disease: A top U.S. security threat" by Jessica Q. Chen

"U.S. intelligence officials said the spread of disease is one of their top four climate change-related security concerns, along with food and water scarcity and the impact of extreme weather on domestic infrastructure. Outbreaks can destabilize foreign countries, especially developing nations, overtax the U.S. military and undermine social cohesion and the economy at home.

"In the coming decades, more heat, humidity and rainfall will allow mosquitoes, ticks, parasites and other tropical and subtropical disease vectors to spread into new areas where people have not built up any resistance to them, the intelligence and health officials said. Other environmental changes can spawn new infectious diseases that may be undetectable, causing new concerns, they said."

"Houston oil infrastructure exposed to storms" by Sonja Elmquist

"If [Hurricane] Ike had been a direct hit on the channel, refineries would have been flooded with seawater despite 16-foot fortifications, likely requiring months of repairs and prolonging supply disruptions, according to analysis by the Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disasters Center at Rice University.

"Experts say that the nation can't count on luck alone to protect the Gulf region from future storms made more damaging

due to the effects of climate change.

"Climate scientists predict that current trends — rising sea levels, harder rainfalls and stronger hurricanes fueled by warmer oceans — will accelerate in coming years to hammer the Gulf Coast's oil and chemical infrastructure. As sea level rises, floods and storm runoff will push farther inland, inundating previously safe areas and keeping some flooded areas underwater longer."

"Our man in the greenhouse: Why the CIA is spying on a changing climate" by Charles Mead and Annie Snider

"As intelligence officials assess key components of state stability ... they are realizing that the norms they had been operating with — like predictable river flows and crop yields — are shifting.

"But the U.S. government is ill-prepared to act on changes that are coming faster than anticipated and threaten to bring instability to places of U.S. national interest, according to interviews with several dozen current and former officials and outside experts, and a review of two decades' worth of government reports. Climate projections lack critical detail, they say, and information about how people react to changes — for instance, by migrating — is sparse. Military brass say they don't yet have the intelligence they need in order to act."

"Losing the Andes glaciers" by Heather Somerville

"Glaciers in the South American Andes are melting faster than many scientists predicted, causing a dramatic change in the region's availability of water for drinking, irrigation and electricity. Some climate change experts estimate entire glaciers will disappear in 10 years due to rising global temperatures, threatening to create instability across the globe long before their ultimate demise.

"That's particularly the case in Peru, where glacier melt has begun to deplete crops, displace communities, cause widespread drinking water shortages, destabilize hydroelectric power, diminish trade and affect transportation and tourism. The trend is expected to cause regional conflict, economic crises, increased crime, broken infrastructure and food insecurity."

"Blind to the threat" by Emmarie Huetteman

"The short, unproductive life of OCO [NASA's Orbiting Carbon Observatory] — and the lack of a backup plan — marked another chapter in the long-running story of the nation's teetering climate observation system. For two decades, the U.S. constellation of earth science satellites has been beset by competing priorities, shrinking budgets and mismanagement, even as intelligence and military officials express serious concerns about the national security threats posed by climate change and the need for accurate data to help assess those threats.

"In a world where the Larsen B Ice Shelf in Antarctica is intact one day and collapses into the sea the next, scientists say the need for continuous, reliable satellite observation is vital. It enables more accurate projections, allowing policymakers to decide, for example, whether to build a military base in an area that will flood as sea levels rise; more accurate data also warns the U.S. military that it may have to evacuate people before a devastating tsunami, like the one that killed hundreds of thousands in Indonesia in 2004."

Bill Dawson is assistant editor of SEJournal.

SEJ launches new online freelance directory to connect writers and editors

By SHARON OOSTHOEK

Freelance environmental journalists — are you looking for assignments in all the wrong places?

Editors and producers — do you despair of finding just the right freelancer for your publication or show?

Let the Society of Environmental Journalists' new freelance directory play matchmaker. After all, when journalists who know the difference between PVC and PCB write about the environment, everyone benefits.

Launched in February 2011, the online directory is a place for freelancers to show off a bit, and editors and producers to take notice. With just a few clicks, editors and producers can see samples of SEJ freelancers' work, read short descriptions of their background, and find out how to get in touch. The directory is searchable by name, topics on the beat and region. Check it out at: <http://www.sej.org/freelancers>

Better yet, if you're a freelancer, sign up and let potential clients know they can pick up the phone and find an experienced journalist who covers the environment on the other end of the line. Some SEJ members have already landed assignments through the directory.

Still, this is VERY new, and it may take some time for word to get around. SEJ staff will be publicizing the directory, but you can help, too. Mention it in your social networks to spread the word.

The directory is the brainchild of the SEJ's Freelance Task Force created in 2010 to better serve the growing number of independent journalists covering the environment.

The task force is made up of about a dozen SEJ members — magazine and newspaper writers, broadcasters, podcasters and bloggers. We are constantly on the lookout for opportunities for expanding SEJ programs, services and resources for freelance and self-employed journalists.

To that end, task force members recently created a primer on health insurance for U.S. freelancers (link below¹) and are in the process of putting together a session on copyright and contract law for our annual conference in Miami, Oct. 19-23. The task force also recently beefed up online resources for freelancers on the SEJ's website. (<http://www.sej.org/library/freelance/overview>)

We have more ideas up our collective sleeve, but if in the meantime you have suggestions for us, or want to join, feel free to contact SEJ board member and task force chair Sharon Oosthoek at soosthoek@gmail.com.

¹<http://www.sej.org/library/health-insurance-information-freelancers>
Sharon Oosthoek is a Toronto-based freelance journalist who writes about science and the environment.

Stoking the EJ Conversation SEJ looks at social media upgrades and wants members' input

By PETER FAIRLEY

Can we Talk? You betcha! Well, once a year at SEJ's annual conference. Until that stimulating confab rolls around again, the more apt question is: Can we Post, Link and Tweet to share ideas and thus enhance our collective pursuit of environmental journalism?

A: You betcha betcha betcha! Forgive the exuberance, but the fact is that SEJ is off to a strong start in its use of social media and virtual communication. And with your help we can boost SEJ's interactivity quotient to a higher orbit by the time we re-materialize again in Miami this October.

To be sure, our 11 email listservs and SEJ.org will remain core conduits for SEJ conversations. SEJ-Talk will continue to bubble daily with breaking news, peer-to-peer support on the issues, and media developments impacting reporting on the environment. Niche members-only lists such as SEJ-Edu, SEJ-Freelance, and SEJ-Canada will host more targeted discussions. New lists will break new ground, such as SEJ-Diversity, launched by the SEJ Diversity Task Force this winter to convene both member and non-member journalists around issues that affect minority communities.

And SEJ will maintain lists such as SEJ-TipSheet and SEJ-Announce to push program updates out to members. Note that we're trying to minimize posts and maximize buy-in. To get on or off any of SEJ's listservs, you need but drop a note to the SEJ office.

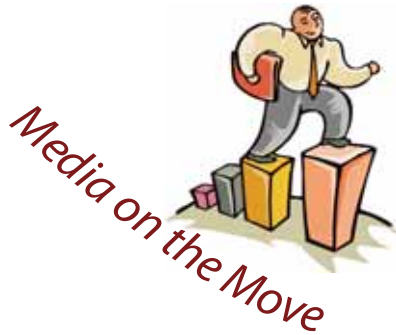
SEJ is also, however, venturing into social media, with a growing Facebook group and a presence on LinkedIn. In the spirit of Adam Smith I exhort you to exploit them shamelessly and, in so doing, to render them a more potent tool for us all.

Which brings me to the ultimate information commons for environmental journalism: SEJ.org. The site's 2009 redesign multiplied its value, and it is getting richer. By the time you read this, for example, an opt-in directory should be helping editors find seasoned journalists for freelance assignments (see <http://www.sej.org/freelancers>).

More initiatives are brewing to make SEJ.org fresher and more interactive, but we need the light work of your many hands to make them a reality. Staff are pressed, consultants are pricey, and — most importantly — *you* who live and breathe EJ have the Stuff we're looking for:

- Why not track events by sharing them on SEJ's calendar, which is highlighted on the home page?
- The Board's Programs Committee is considering a moderated blog on EJ to foster a public conversation on environmental coverage. If this biweekly 'EJ Forum' goes forward as proposed, we'll be looking for guest discussants to build a fire and soak up

continued on next page



SEJ members show it pays to “go for it”

By JUDY FAHYS

Society of Environmental Journalists had a few projects of note to mention over the winter.

Among them was **Miranda Spencer**, who reported a couple of interesting adventures in journalism.

First, she found proof that “pitch slams” work. She pitched at the slam at SEJ’s annual conference in Missoula, MT, last October and landed a feature story spot in *American Forests* magazine. The article was slated for publication in the magazine’s Winter 2011 issue.

Then, while in Cancun for COP-16, Spencer pitched a freelance breaking news story to *The Daily Climate* through the unconventional method: the “contact us” form on its website. The story was assigned a couple of hours later and due in under 24 hours. It was published 16 hours after that.

“Which just goes to show you,” she wrote to *Media on the Move*, “you never know, so go for it.”

Michelle Nijhuis is a 2011 Alicia Patterson fellow, <http://tinyurl.com/4nhm5en>.

And **Christy George**, immediate past president of SEJ, started an eight-month gig producing TV for Oregon Public Broadcasting.

“I’ll be producing an hour-long documentary about the Columbia River Gorge, and also another segment for the PBS show, *History Detectives*,” she said.

Meanwhile, **Harvey Stone’s** environmental thriller novel, *Melting Down*, will be published in late March by The Way Things Are Publications. The fast-paced fictional plot rests on real world facts, including the disappearing Arctic sea ice, the increasingly accessible oil and gas reserves under the Arctic and the fact that Russia has the largest landmass in the region. The story embeds climate science and impacts.

Stone noted that his approach is “meant to reach a broader audience at a time when overall climate change media coverage is declining sharply.” To find out more about the novel, see the web page: (www.meltingdownnovel.com)

Sara Peach has been appointed the senior producer of the Reese Felts Digital News Project, an experimental student-run news organization at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her students are finalists for a South by Southwest Interactive award. She continues to produce stories about climate change and energy on a freelance basis.”

A note from the editor: Don’t forget to tell your colleagues in environmental journalism about your latest awards, projects and other noteworthy career news. Send in items to fahys@sltrib.com

for the next upcoming issue. Reminders are sent out quarterly on the SEJ-TALK list.

Judy Fahys is environment reporter at The Salt Lake Tribune.

SEJ News
continued from previous page
the resulting limelight.

- Targeted grant funding is providing for a mobile version of SEJ.org for handheld viewing. Have a few hours for some learning-by-doing?
- SEJ.org has a few rough edges that didn’t get saved in the redesign. The listserv archives, for example, remain locked away on the old site. A few volunteers with web/Drupal skills could blow open that vault (and more)!

If any of the above intrigues or inspires you, we want to hear about it. Drop a line to SEJ executive director Beth Parke or to me, the SEJ Board’s Programs Committee Chair.

(bparke@sej.org) (pfairley@sej.org)

Peter Fairley, an independent author and journalist, is the SEJ Board’s First Vice President.

SEJ supporters give to commemorate SEJ’s 20th anniversary

By BETH PARKE

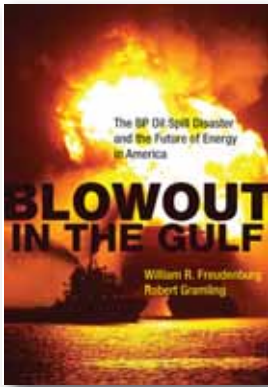
You might have heard something about February 14, 1990 being SEJ’s official birthday and 2010-2011 being SEJ’s 20th Anniversary year. It’s all true, and plenty of people helped us to celebrate.

From the day that SEJ’s 20th Anniversary fundraising campaign was first announced in January of 2010 through the end of February 2011, a total of 341 individual donors contributed \$36,976 to support the organization and its future.

Of that total, \$26,996 was for general support of SEJ’s programs, and donors designated \$5,891 for SEJ’s 21st Century Endowment fund. Another \$4,089 was contributed to the Fund for Environmental Journalism, our mini-grants program to support specific reporting projects through a competitive process.

Gifts ranged in size from \$5 to \$2,500. To each and every one of our “SEJ Sweethearts,” thanks for helping SEJ to serve an important mission: credible and robust journalism that informs and engages society on environmental issues.

Beth Parke is executive director of SEJ.



A compelling case for how we must decrease our oil dependence

Blowout in the Gulf
The BP Oil Spill Disaster and
the Future of Energy in America
by William R. Freudenburg
and Robert Gramling
 MIT Press, 2010, \$18.95

Reviewed by JENNIFER WEEKS

Blowout in the Gulf starts and ends with BP’s oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, but it’s really about something much bigger: America’s unrealistic thinking about oil. In the Gulf and elsewhere, the authors argue, “we have been getting into increasingly dangerous waters without being sufficiently vigilant about the implications of our actions.” They use the BP spill to show how bankrupt that approach is, and to argue for rethinking our national culture of oil consumption.

The late Bill Freudenburg (commemorated on page 5 of this issue of *SEJournal*) and his coauthor, University of Louisiana sociologist Robert Gramling, wrote many books and articles together and separately examining how we think about natural resources, and how those perceptions drive environmental policies. Drawing on the field of risk studies, they point out connections between the BP spill and other disasters. While the Macondo well’s blow-out preventer failed to work, Freudenburg and Gramling point to an even bigger problem: humans who assumed it was fail-safe.

For example, cost-cutting by BP, Transocean and Halliburton reduced safety margins and reduced the number of barriers against a well blowout on the *Deepwater Horizon* as its crew was closing down the well. The rig’s strong safety record convinced company officials that it was a state-of-the-art system, but in practice it was operating with many important safety features disabled. And federal regulators accepted the numbers and assumptions in BP’s spill response plan without asking any questions.

But as the authors see it, the problem is broader. They shift their focus to the history of the U.S. oil industry, noting how policymakers gave it generous subsidies and tax breaks for decades (and charged lower royalties on oil production than almost any other nation). And they recount how presidents from Nixon to Obama have pledged to reduce U.S. dependence on imported oil, even as our dependence on foreign sources has risen to over 66 percent of total U.S. oil use.

“Our expectations for the future continue to be shaped by the exuberance of the past,” they write. “We seem to have become so caught up in the excitement of oil strikes that we’ve started to share the wildcatters’ conviction — surely, there must be even more spectacular finds out there, perhaps just beyond the next horizon.”

That’s especially true in Louisiana, as Freudenburg and

Gramling learned when the Interior Department’s Minerals Management Service commissioned them in 1990 to study public risk perceptions of offshore oil development. MMS wanted to understand why some states, like California, strongly opposed broader offshore oil leases. Freudenburg and Gramling concluded that many factors made Louisiana unusually receptive to offshore oil production. The industry developed there in the 1930s and 1940s, well before the first environmental laws were passed, and in parallel with the expansion of the local fishing industry. Few of the state’s residents live near the coast, which is marshy and hard to access by road. The region’s economy was dominated by extractive industries, and average levels of education were relatively low in southern Louisiana, a finding that usually correlated with lower-than-average environmental awareness.

These findings suggested — correctly — that offshore drilling would be a much tougher sell on the east and west coasts than in Louisiana. What’s more, policies initiated during the Reagan administration by Interior Secretary James Watt (so-called “area-wide leasing”) vastly expanded the amount of territory offered for oil exploration. Only the biggest companies could afford to do seismic surveys on massive offshore tracts, so small producers were crowded out of the Gulf, and corporations like BP came to dominate the region.

Putting this all together, Freudenburg and Gramling conclude that federal offshore energy policies have emphasized “the transfer of valuable, resource-rich undersea lands from the general public to a handful of the richest corporations in the history of money.” Given that oil is a finite resource, and that a growing share of what’s left lies in hard-to-reach places (like ultra-deepwater formations), they argue that it’s time to start reducing our oil dependence. They don’t lay out a detailed energy plan, which is beyond the scope of this book, but they do build a powerful case that we need to make better choices.

Freelancer Jennifer Weeks lives and writes in Watertown, Mass.



Peek into the world of animal smugglers proves fascinating and powerful

The Lizard King:
The True Crimes and Passions
of the World’s Greatest
Reptile Smugglers
by Bryan Christy

Twelve, Hatchette Book Group,
New York, 2008
Paperback edition \$13.99

Reviewed by CHRISTINE HEINRICHS

This is a book about passions and the men whose souls are gripped by them: the passion to collect rare animals, the passion to make money, the passion to defend wildlife and collar the criminals.

Lizard King author Bryan Christy, an SEJ member, gives a good guys-bad guys account of reptile smugglers and the special

agent who chased them. The bad guys are so crafty, ingenious, charming and lacking moral inhibition that only the arrival of an equally determined good guy can match them. It's a great story, the best kind for journalists, because it's all true.

The book's modern-day characters include U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Special Agent Chip Bepler and Mike Van Nostrand, who ran a smuggling network out of South Florida. But Christy's story begins in the 1940s, long before public interest in biodiversity took hold, when Van Nostrand's father Raymond was a boy who loved reptiles. A natural salesman and shyster, Raymond was making money before he was out of high school and became involved in supplying zoos and smuggling reptiles.

Raymond was willing to supply other things, too, like cocaine. Eventually, he was convicted on drug charges and sent to jail, though he went on to give evidence against a smuggling kingpin. His son Mike, less attracted to illegal activity than his father, was studying accounting when his father was sent to prison but reluctantly took over the family business. His knack for numbers turned the reptile and cocaine business his father had run out of the garage into Strictly Reptiles, the dominant wholesale reptile business in the nation. The company was part legal and part not.

Enter Bepler, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service agent. Bepler had gained his love of wildlife through catch-and-release fishing with his father. Sometimes they brought fish home to raise in a pond. After earning a degree in marine biology, Bepler got a job with NOAA, monitoring tuna boats for dolphin bycatch. Though NOAA's rules don't allow its monitors to do anything but observe, that didn't stop Bepler from donning a wet suit and diving down to help dolphins escape the nets.

Tired of life on tuna boats, Bepler joined the Fish & Wildlife Service and was assigned to New York, where he learned the subterfuges of reptile smugglers. Techniques included taping the legs of tortoises together and balling them into socks, hiding snakes in false crate bottoms and secret compartments in luggage, and packing rare species in with legal ones. "Importers tested your knowledge, counting on you not to know whether fifty dirt-covered baby tortoises were all Indian star tortoises, Burmese star tortoises, or Madagascan plowshare tortoises — a crown jewel in the smugglers' world," Bepler said. Rare Gray's monitor lizards were unlikely to be found under fifty legal jumping and biting Tokay geckos.

"Bepler had a vision, a willingness to look at all of the wildlife crime going on in the United States and ask, 'What is the engine, and how do I stop it?'" Christy writes. But Bepler's work on barn owls and alligators got laughed at by federal attorneys in New York who were making racketeering cases against John Gotti. Bepler saw that he'd have to take down Strictly Reptiles on Van Nostrand's home turf, South Florida.

Bepler transferred from New York to Miami — one major wildlife entry port to another. The new South Florida assignment was like "Siberia with mosquitoes and paperwork," Christy writes. The tale of how he caught Van Nostrand is as compelling as any suspense bestseller. Tough interviews with mules who agreed to turn over evidence, dogged surveillance and teamwork with foreign law enforcement officers gave Bepler enough evidence to raid Strictly Reptiles' warehouse. At the same time, raids were executed on Van Nostrand's partners in New York, North Carolina and New Mexico, plus 10 locations in the Netherlands and

two in Indonesia.

Van Nostrand decided to cooperate in exchange for a lighter sentence. He served eight months and his information helped take down many other South Florida reptile smugglers. The ripple effect of major U.S. arrests resulted in arrests around the world of other conduits in the global smuggling operations.

After Bepler made the case against Van Nostrand, he went on to join Fish & Wildlife's special operations team, going undercover to find other ways to stop the illegal wildlife trade engine. But three months after he completed training, he was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme, an aggressive brain cancer. He died 25 months later.

Van Nostrand spoke at Bepler's funeral, describing him as a good father and tenacious investigator. He told the mourners if Bepler hadn't come down from New York, he never would have stopped smuggling and realized the error of his ways. "I'm gonna miss him," he said.

Strictly Reptiles is still in business in Florida, trading in insects and other invertebrates such as scorpions, hermit crabs, spiders, centipedes and some small mammals, such as rare gerbils, hedgehogs and sugar gliders. The list of rare species is long. I wrote the names down while reading this book, looking up critters such as tuataras and Sandy Cay Rock iguanas. These creatures are beautiful and exert a powerful appeal, and it is unfortunate that illustrations were not included in this book.

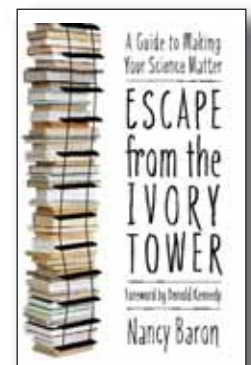
Christy found great material and did it justice. I miss all the characters in it already and look forward to his next book.

Christine Heinrichs is author of two books on traditional breed domestic poultry but is turning her attention to marine mammals on California's Central Coast.

A real "how-to" guide for communicating science to journalists, public

Escape From the Ivory Tower: A Guide to Making Your Science Matter

*by Nancy Baron
Island Press, 2010, \$27.50*



Reviewed by SUSAN MORAN

Climategate. Global food shortages. Peak oil. The endangered species count on the rise. These are just a few headlines that have emerged or re-emerged in the last couple years, raising public awareness but also creating confusion about the underlying science. The latter consequence underscores the need for scientists to speak out beyond their professional circles to make their research understood and describe why it matters.

In her book *Escape From the Ivory Tower: A Guide to Making Your Science Matter*, author Nancy Baron, a communications trainer at the Leopold Leadership Program and COMPASS

(Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea) at Stanford University, advises scientists on how to take the leap. In doing so, she argues, they'll make more people care about science and want to take action. Baron, an SEJ member, offers tips on how to better communicate with journalists as well as policy makers.

Reading her book I felt like I was in the training room at the Leopold Institute, looking around the table at wary scientists who felt burned by journalists like me who took an hour of their time only to quote them briefly, or who were disappointed to see their findings dumbed down in print. These are common, well-founded complaints. What makes Baron's book important is that she offers step-by-step exercises and advice for scientists who want to deliver their message to a broader audience. A whole section of the book is titled "The How-To Toolkit." Baron also offers insights that help journalists and scientists better understand their different work cultures — journalists' deadline and space constraints, for instance.

Some of Baron's messages apply well to journalists covering science, though they're nothing we haven't learned in journalism school or from editors. But they're worth the reminder: Know your audience. Avoid jargon (say "bottom-dwelling," not "benthic," she says). Be succinct. Think in pictures. Baron also invites journalists to offer their advice and lessons learned so that scientists can understand them a little more. One observation that gave me cause for reflection (and a little remorse) was from SEJ member Tom Hayden, a former scientist turned science writer. "An interview between a journalist and a scientist is like a conversation. Or, no, maybe more like a dance, but with each partner trying to lead." This sure beats the "Can I pick your brain?" interview approach, which is more like brain surgery than a duet, and hardly engenders trust and respect. Hayden's dance metaphor can apply to reporter-source relationships well beyond

science journalism.

So should scientists be activists, and for what? Baron does not say scientists should become activists for a cause. That can tarnish their own and other scientists' credibility. Rather, Baron argues that "the urgency of climate change, our need for energy alternatives, the degradation of the planet's life support systems," and other pressing issues of our day require, more than ever, that scientists offer their expertise to the public, not just to their peers.

Barry Noon, an ecologist at Colorado State University, shares in the book what motivated him to dive into the public policy foray many years ago — a sense of loss over places he enjoyed as a child, and later, anger over how scientific findings based on his and others' research about spotted owls were distorted by agenda-driven groups and the media. "Scientists have a responsibility to communicate their scientific findings and, when asked, to discuss their policy implications," he says. "I believe that scientists must find their own comfort zone when it comes to the public communication of science and should not be criticized for their decision."

Baron's book is a practical, no-nonsense guide, as the title suggests. It is not as philosophical as, say, Cornelia Dean's *Am I Making Myself Clear? A Scientist's Guide to Talking to the Public*. But I wish university departments would give it to all science undergraduates and especially graduate students to help them learn to think more about the importance of communicating their work outside the comfort zone of academia. Maybe their findings, and their voices in general, would eventually sound above the deafening science deniers in Washington.

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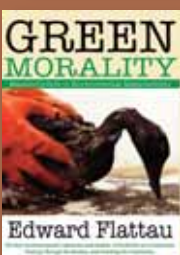
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With the support of SEJ's Fund for Environmental Journalism, reporter Jude Isabella was able to travel with scientists to a remote location on the coast of British Columbia where they found stone fish weirs, some of the oldest evidence of Pacific salmon exploitation by humans on the West Coast. The FEJ awards up to \$2,500 for environmental reporting projects and other journalism-related entrepreneurial ventures to applicants who meet SEJ's membership eligibility requirements. So far, 30 journalists have received grants. For more about the FEJ, see story on page 9 .