



SEJournal

Winter 2009-10, Vol. 19 No. 4

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SEJ ournal

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Cover design by Nathan Skreslet

SEJ reaches out and expands in old and new ways

By CHRISTY GEORGE

Hazardous waste, water pollution, the Exxon Valdez oil spill and difficulties in dealing with the EPA all made it onto page one of Volume 1, Number 1 of the *SEJournal*.

Looking back at the *SEJournal*'s first edition, it's clear the issues haven't changed all that much in 20 years, even if the Journal itself has been transformed from a blue, black and white newsletter to a gorgeous, glossy, full-color magazine worthy of gracing anyone's coffee table.

As SEJ enters its 20th anniversary year, it's worth remembering why we exist, what principles we started out with in 1990 and still retain, what has changed, and what should change.

Let's start there — with what needs to change between now and 2030.

I joined SEJ in 1997, and the board of directors ten years ago. If there has been one constant during my entire time in SEJ, it is the endless fight to clarify that just because we cover the environment, that does not make us environmentalists. I'm not sure the fight will ever be won, but it would be great if we could move on from there by 2030.

However, while SEJ is not green, we ARE white. That's white, in terms of the racial and ethnic makeup of our membership.

We need to become more colorful.

SEJ has long made diversity-building a priority, with mixed results. We've helped create a Latin American environmental journalists' group, we've done outreach events at minority journalism groups' conferences and at the every-four-years Unity conference, we've won grants to help bring environmental journalists of color to conferences, and at the Austin conference we even had simultaneous English-to-Spanish translations during all of the cross-border panels.

And still we are so white that inevitably someone asks what we're doing about it at the annual membership meeting. It happened again in Madison, but this time was different. SEJ member Adrienne Appel stepped up to volunteer to do something about achieving greater diversity within SEJ's membership. The effort may be new, but the spirit behind it is typical of SEJ's 20-year history of running on volunteer power.

Another member, Sara Peach, came to the conference in Madison and left volunteering to help SEJ identify and serve multimedia journalists: the next generation of environment reporters, whose skills defy the old platform distinctions.

Something else new is our push to identify more things SEJ can do to support freelance journalists — our fastest growing membership category. Sharon Oosthoek, one of four new board members and a freelancer herself, has taken that charge as her own.

The Fund for Environmental Journalism, just starting up, is a new venture meant to assist those struggling to keep doing their jobs with far less funding, and those seeking to start up something new.



Over the past year, SEJers have been rewriting our strategic plan. This is no pro forma job, but rather a deep look at who we are and where we're going. We've rewritten our new vision and mission, tailored to reflect the changes within the news business and how SEJ can reposition itself to help those left behind. The new strategic plan will place a greater emphasis on SEJ speaking out about what constitutes journalistic excellence, in part to ensure that new journalists in old and new media still carry the torch of the old enduring values.

Former SEJ president Tim Wheeler came up with an idea to match up editors and freelancers covering the Copenhagen climate treaty summit. Less than a week later, the "Copenhagen Connection" was featured on page one of *sej.org*, and publicized throughout the media universe.

What 2030 goals has SEJ even started doing yet?

I like to think that in the next 20 years, SEJ will reach out internationally. Yes, we brag now that our members come from 30 countries, but our membership base remains predominantly North American — U.S., Canadian and Mexican. There are environmental journalists working the beat throughout Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Australia and Oceania.

Getting to where SEJ can start doing international outreach will require a much bigger operating budget. We have a vast network of potential supporters but organizationally we need to get better at both friend-raising and fund-raising.

SEJ also needs to do better at reaching out to what I call "cross-beat journalists" — people who don't think of themselves as environment reporters, but who nonetheless cover the environment on a regular basis. These are reporters and editors who cover energy, business, health and medicine, politics and government policy, farm and food, land use and real estate, travel and lifestyle, and issues that affect children and seniors, life in rural places and in the inner city. They are our natural constituents, and being part of SEJ will help them do their work better.

Our future, like our past, rests on the willingness of volunteers to make SEJ even stronger.

Why do people give so much of their time and energy to SEJ? I believe it's SEJ's 20-year history of service and institutional integrity.

These days, the journalism profession may be in financial distress, but SEJ's purpose and principles are still rock-solid. We remain an educational organization, dedicated to making the environment beat more comprehensible to journalists who cover the beat, and we're still committed to our founding principles of independence and journalistic objectivity.

There's a great read posted on SEJ's website, in the "About SEJ" section, under "History." It's a 1998 paper, by John Palen of Central Michigan University, entitled, "SEJ's Creation, OBJECTIVITY AS INDEPENDENCE."

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'Letting the cards talk'

A seasoned journalist plays the hand of a grand jury report — 10 years later

By SUSAN FEATHERS

"We're condemned to the past. That's the clearest lesson for me from our editorial series on the environment, which concludes today. This area's most serious environmental problems stem from ignorant errors of commission long ago, or modern errors of omission — failure to do the right thing when we realized how severely we were fouling our own nest."

Delivering such sobering conclusions to a community without rendering them hopeless is not an easy task. That was the challenge that Carl Wernicke, opinion editor at the *Pensacola News Journal*, recently faced.

Assigned by the executive editor to prepare an editorial series on the 10-year anniversary of a grand jury investigation into air and water polluters, Wernicke began research into whether Pensacola's air and water had become any cleaner since the 1999 grand jury had found Pensacola's air a threat to residents and its water dangerously polluted.

A long-time community member and career journalist with the *News Journal*, Wernicke suspected the outcome would not be pretty — or at best, unclear.

While industry has done much to clean up air emissions, more cars on the road have increased ozone-causing air pollution



A great blue heron known locally as Gus surveys his surroundings as the sun sets over Pensacola, Fla.

in Pensacola.

The grand jury had essentially asked a basic question: "What is the quality of the area's air and water?"

Wernicke concluded that 10 years later officials still can't give a consistent answer. As he met with experts it became clear that even though much data aimed at answering the question is being collected, the effort is not well coordinated and investing the considerable funds necessary to find the answer is still an obstacle.

What were some of the secrets to Wernicke's quest?

"Exhaustive research," Wernicke said, "letting the science take the lead, decades of building trust among my sources, and [when it came time to do the writing] simply *letting the cards talk*."

Pensacola has a long, rich history of bountiful, beautiful natural resources. Industry, though, saw it as opportunity.



PHOTO BY TONY GIBERSON, PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Ten years after a special grand jury on air and water in Pensacola, Fla. found its waters polluted by “foul stormwater runoff, plants dumping treated wastewater directly into bayous and bays, and ‘not much hope for change,’” a pleasure craft motors out of Bayou Texar toward Pensacola’s Escambia Bay as the sun rises and a light shower begins to fall.

Five nations’ flags have flown over the white crystal beaches and aquamarine waters of this old city with its expansive bay — a natural deep-water port that drew armies from Spain, France, Britain, the Confederacy and eventually the U.S. Navy.

Stands of towering live oaks and long leafed pines supported shipbuilding, logging and turpentine industries. Gulf waters, rivers and estuaries supported a major fishing industry. Railroads and ships carried products far and wide. As those industries waned, chemical industries replaced them. While each contributed to the economic base, each left behind lethal footprints: creosote, pentachlorophenol, dioxin, fluoride, arsenic, lead and radium 226/228, volatile organic compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and PCP. These became an unwelcome local product — three Superfund sites. Like so many municipalities that have attracted industry to support their economy, Pensacola residents were left with the burden of clean-up after the industry left town.

The Special Grand Jury on Air & Water in 1999 found “Pensacola’s bays and bayous polluted, air quality that harmed the people who breathed it. Superfund sites that polluted wells and groundwater, foul stormwater runoff, plants dumping treated wastewater directly into bayous and bays and ‘not much hope for change.’”

The *News Journal’s* executive editor, Dick Schneider, thought a 10-year anniversary warranted coverage. Wernicke, who was the opinion page editor at the time of the original grand jury report, was assigned the task of sorting out what progress had occurred since the grand jury found much to criticize in 1999.

“I was given an unprecedented two months to focus entirely on the series,” Wernicke said. “In my time on the paper I don’t remember any story that got that much time.”

Wernicke was given more time later to follow up on controversial or complex issues and to polish the articles. “We didn’t actually develop the story budget until much of the research was done because we wanted the research to drive the series, not a preconceived view,” he said.

Discussions about how the information should be published ranged from an in-depth, detailed article (“brain numbing”) to five consecutive days (“beating readers over the head”) to the final format: a series of five consecutive Sunday editions with a short introduction on the front page continued on the opinion page.

“Our thought was that some people who would not read an entire page of reporting on the environment might at least read the introduction where we summarized the results on the series topic,” Wernicke said.

Wernicke kept in mind while writing that it was best to appeal to basic interests like parents worried about their kids’ health or fishermen worried about whether they can consume their catch.

“Over the last decade I’ve noticed that people get involved when it affects them directly, so for example more fishermen are getting active in environmental issues now that certain fish [mullet] can no longer be eaten because of PCB or toxic metal contamination,” he said. “I appeal to those interests as well as to parents of kids whose health could be impacted by water and air quality.” An example from Wernicke’s piece focused on water pollution:

“Mercury is found in a wide variety of saltwater fish in coastal waters across Florida, including here. In an ironic, and sad, commentary the Escambia Health Department has billboards encouraging pregnant women to eat fish low in mercury. Of the five fish recommended, none is caught locally.”

Wernicke dealt not only with critical water issues, but he also identified the most important issues to tackle first, helping readers sort through the material. For example, Wernicke highlighted stormwater pollution as “the biggest and toughest problem.”

Then he illustrated how to go about solving it using information from experts: 1) capture runoff at its source rather than treating it later; 2) institute sustainable growth management rules (low impact development).

Living and reporting for decades in the community helped Wernicke greatly.

“All my sources are well known to me, having written about the issues in Pensacola over three decades — long enough to develop trust with each source,” he said. “They’ve learned over time I’m not going to come back on them when they have talked off the record in an attempt to help me grasp the issues entirely. I’ve tried over the years to act responsibly while still striving for transparency in reporting.”

From such relationships, Wernicke said, he has been able “to gain a solid ground on the issues where another reporter might

have the door shut on him.”

“Listening to my sources and following the issues from their perspective,” he added, “is not only very rewarding but opened up new avenues of investigation we had not thought to cover.”

Some problems have emerged since that grand jury met a decade ago. For example, Wernicke detailed the growing concern nationally over the threat of pharmaceutical remnants and other chemicals from personal care products in both drinking water and surface waters, coming primarily from sewage treatment plant discharges.

“Since a number of local sewage plants discharge into our bays and rivers, and none of those plants uses treatment systems that remove these chemicals, that seems like a likely concern for this area,” Wernicke said. “This is an area we will follow more closely based on the interviews.”

Tackling the last editorial — “Who’s looking out for our air and water?” — presented a challenge with so many agencies responsible for the same resource. “I chose one creek — Carpenter’s Creek — which runs across city, county and state governance boundaries to illustrate how everyone — and no one — is truly in charge of our stormwater management,” Wernicke said.

“An editorial series based on voluminous, often conflicting data, and not very encouraging realities, is tricky: you want to give people the truth but at the same time you can’t leave them hopeless,” he said. “So I concentrated on the most critical data (sources helped me identify these), organized it into concise sections. Then, we laid out what citizens can do on a personal and community level to begin working toward a cleaner environment in 2019.”

After publication, Wernicke grew worried. At first, there was only silence.

“At first it was so quiet we worried we had not reported strongly enough,” he recalled. Florida regulators “had expressed concerns about the direction of the reporting when I first contacted them. After the series was published no comments were forthcoming. Was it because we did it well, that we gave credit where credit was due? I tried to be fair but truthful.”

But response came. A retired Florida Supreme Court justice soon recommended the formation of a new environmental task

force to further study the issues as part of an effort to consolidate city and county government.

The *News Journal*, which is owned by Gannett, is following the Florida offshore drilling hearings this year. Tallahassee, Pensacola, Ft. Myers, and Melbourne papers will provide coverage. And the *News Journal* is planning on more coverage, especially of this new issue of pharmaceuticals in the water supply.

The Journalist:

Carl Wernicke graduated from University of Florida’s School of Journalism. He began his career at the *Press-Register* in Mobile, Ala. as a rookie reporter for three years. He joined the *Pensacola News Journal* in 1978 and has since covered all areas of the news room. He is currently the Opinion Editor, pinch-hitting as an environmental reporter since the loss of a full-time environmental reporter position.

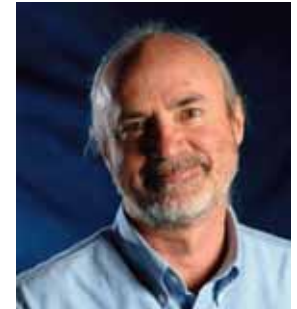


PHOTO BY BEN TWINGLEY, PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Pensacola News Journal
Opinion Editor, Carl Wernicke

Wernicke notes the loss of a full-time environmental reporter as regrettable for an area where so many environmental issues are developing. “Elizabeth Bluemink, an SEJ member, was our last full-time environmental reporter. She was a great asset.”

“My interest in writing about the environment grew over time as I became more educated about issues and the science behind it. Today my wife and I are environmentally motivated citizens. We have taken responsibility for trash removal from a stretch of road near our property and steward our land. Over time, interviewing local scientists and knowledgeable citizens, I’ve become confident reporting on our local environmental issues.”

Not a “24/7 journalist,” Wernicke recommends going home at night and enjoying the weekends — “Live a normal life!” He can be contacted at cwernicke@pnj.com

Susan Feathers is a freelance writer living in Pensacola, Fla. Contact her at susanleefeathers@gmail.com

Sources Used by Wernicke

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (just about everything having to do with pollution regulation, stormwater and TMDLs).
- EPA (Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, toxic chemicals, Superfund sites).
- Escambia County Health Department (water monitoring, impact of pollution, public health).
- City of Pensacola (stormwater); Escambia County (stormwater).
- University of West Florida Center for Environmental Diagnostics and Bioremediation (air and water quality evaluation, studies of toxins in marine life and bottom

sediments, water quality monitoring).

- Web sites on toxic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, etc.
- American Heart Association (air quality rankings).
- Emerald Coast Utilities Authority (sewage treatment and disposal).
- Gulf Power Co. (control of air emissions and reuse of treated wastewater).
- International Paper Co. (industrial waste treatment).
- Individual sources in Pensacola who are either professional experts in their field, or have become “expert amateurs” through their own research and involvement in issues, particularly on stormwater, industrial pollution, pharmaceuticals in treated wastewater, and toxins in fish.



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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The President Says Continued from Page 4

Palen wrote that SEJ "exploded from a handful of journalists in 1989 to a sophisticated national organization with more than 1,100 members eight years later" — a meteoric rise he attributed in large measure to SEJ's principles of independence, played out in our membership and financial policies.

Since 1990, SEJ's membership policies have relaxed to accept more members working the beat, but SEJ has retained the absolute ban on allowing anyone who does PR or lobbying on environmental issues to become a member. It's a policy that has sometimes caused heartbreak, both to otherwise great people who had to be excluded because of their work, as well as to the board members who had to enforce the membership rules.

Twenty years later, we still hold fast our commitment to transparent finances and rely on neither corporations nor environmental groups for our operating funding. Our policies have evolved, though. In 2004, the board created an endowment fund that allows no-strings contributions from any individual who supports SEJ's mission, even if that individual is a corporate CEO, or the president of an environmental group. In fact, we hope to raise money from both, in roughly equal amounts, to safeguard SEJ's future.

This coming year will be one of celebration, but also, I hope, of re-dedication.

Twenty years from now, SEJ will be a collection of different faces. We've had the same core staff for almost the entire 20 years. This continuity has served us incredibly well — our seasoned brain trust in Jenkintown, Pa., keeps SEJ on track and humming. But inevitably, SEJ's staff and volunteer leadership will change, and it will be up to SEJ members to ensure that our new leaders understand and carry on the tremendous legacy left by our founders.

Christy George, SEJ board president, is special projects reporter for Oregon Public Broadcasting.



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Check it out today.

An expansive investigation's key lesson: *Think BIG*

By BILL DAWSON

“The Smokestack Effect: Toxic Air and America's Schools” was a *USA Today* series that won the Society of Environmental Journalists’ 2009 Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting. The newspaper provided this summary at the top of the web page for the project:

“*USA Today* used an EPA model to track the path of industrial pollution and mapped the locations of almost 128,000 schools to determine the levels of toxic chemicals outside. The potential problems that emerged were widespread, insidious and largely unaddressed.”

The SEJ judges had this to say:

“A team from *USA Today* led by reporters Blake Morrison and Brad Heath analyzed millions of government records, led a nationwide canvas of independent air monitoring, and investigated polluting industries near schools in an exhaustive and original reporting project that proved the air outside hundreds of schools was rife with toxic chemicals unknown to parents, school officials and health authorities. With impressive ambition and breadth, the team produced a report that is both national in sweep and chock-full of local details relevant to all 50 states. The team compiled tens of millions of government records about air toxics from more than two dozen sources into what *Editor & Publisher* called “one of the most extensive online database reports of any newspaper.” The newspaper's series has led to a \$2.5 million federal plan to systematically determine pollution levels outside schools.”

Morrison and Heath jointly responded to emailed questions about the project from *SEJournal's* Bill Dawson.

Q: First, please tell me a little bit about yourselves: How long have you worked in journalism? How long at *USA Today*? What are your beats or assignments? What is your background in environmental and/or projects reporting? To what extent did you work together before this project?

A: Blake Morrison joined *USA Today* in October 1999. Before that, he worked at the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in St. Paul, Minn. There, he covered a variety of beats, edited and worked as an investigative reporter. At *USA Today*, Morrison is the deputy enterprise editor and works on investigative projects. His experience covering environmental issues is limited, although one of his projects in St. Paul entailed high rates of mesothelioma among residents of Minnesota's Iron Range. The project raised questions about whether minerals in the soil might have behaved like asbestos fibers. Brad Heath is a national reporter at *USA Today*, where he specializes in data-driven enterprise and has covered subjects ranging from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina



Blake Morrison



Brad Heath

PHOTOS: COURTESY USA TODAY

to transportation safety and the Obama administration's economic stimulus plan. Before joining *USA Today*, he was an enterprise writer for *The Detroit News* and was the investigative reporter for *The Press & Sun-Bulletin* in Binghamton, N.Y. Morrison used to supervise Heath when Morrison worked in *USA Today's* News section. This is the first time the two teamed on a project.

Q: Air toxics has been an on-again, off-again issue for decades. I wrote a five-day series on the subject in 1986 for the *Houston Chronicle* and that was not the first major journalistic attention the topic had gotten in my part of the country. Why and when did you decide to do such an expansive investigation of this subject? Did something in particular — something you encountered in your earlier reporting, perhaps — plant the idea?

A: Morrison was exploring investigative ideas and had seen efforts by the *Chronicle* and other media to explore air quality. Many of those pieces looked at environmental justice issues — whether poor people bore the brunt of air pollution because low-income housing, for instance, was located near industrial facilities. Morrison thought about whether *USA Today* might broaden those stories by looking at locations where the most vulnerable to pollution congregated: schools. Where were our schools relative to polluters? What might we be able to tell parents about what was in the air their children were breathing? As far as Morrison could tell, no one had done such an expansive story.

Q: Did you pitch the idea for the project to your editors or did it originate with one or more of them? If you pitched it, was it hard to persuade your bosses to devote so much time and expense to one subject? If it came to you as an editors' suggestion or assignment, what was your initial reaction?

A: Morrison pitched it in a 12-page proposal. He felt it was important to go beyond the notion of simply modeling pollution and take the broader step of monitoring outside schools ourselves. He met with scientists at Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland and they embraced the idea. So too did the top editors at *USA Today*. They saw the value in its ambition and in its broad appeal. At that point, Heath was brought in. His data skills enabled us to create the interactive online database that enables parents to type in the name of any school in the nation to see what the best government data indicate is likely in the air outside.

Q: The SEJ contest judges admirably cited your compilation of “tens of millions of government records about air toxics from more than two dozen sources” and quoted *Editor*

& Publisher's description of your effort as "one of the most extensive online database reports of any newspaper." Tell me more about the scope of the work. For instance, how much time passed from the project's inception to publication? How many and what types of journalists and news organizations were involved? How many person-hours were devoted, if that's possible to estimate?

A: It was massive. We spent about eight months working on the project before the first story was published. In that time, we enlisted help from dozens of other journalists, both at *USA Today* and in Gannett newsrooms across the country. They are too numerous to count. Within *USA Today*, we teamed with photographers, web producers, programmers, editors, artists,



PHOTO BY GARRETT HUBBARD, USA TODAY

A school bus drives past the Mountain State Carbon coke plant in Follansbee, W.Va. In an exhaustive and original reporting project, a *USA Today* team revealed the air outside hundreds of schools was rife with toxic chemicals. The newspaper's series led to a \$2.5 million federal plan to systematically determine pollution levels outside schools.

designers, and others to craft our report and the online database that accompanied it. Beyond that, journalists in Gannett newsrooms from Detroit to Denver helped us gather air samples from outside schools. We have no idea how many hours that work consumed, other than to say it was a lot. Morrison and Heath basically worked on the project full time. The project's editor, Linda Mathews, oversaw the many moving parts. She helped organize the cadre of reporters and editors nationwide to help us take air samples at various locations.

Q: You worked with researchers at the University of Massachusetts in developing toxicity assessments for comparing the situations at thousands of different schools and with researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland on a methodology for monitoring the air around some of them. How did those partnerships come about? Were they difficult to arrange and pursue?

A: Morrison and Heath traveled to Massachusetts to meet with the researchers there. They had spent years — and quite a bit of money — to get raw data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. That data — the basis of the EPA's Risk-Screening Environmental Indicators model — would become our foundation. The researchers there seemed intrigued by our idea. Essentially, we told them we wanted to overlay the locations of the

schools onto the mapped data (which gave each square kilometer of the nation a "toxicity score"). Hopkins and Maryland scientists agreed to work with us at cost, constructing for us a monitoring protocol and then analyzing the samples that we sent them. It was important for us that Hopkins/Maryland took authority for the analysis. They were the experts and we wanted them to tell us what the samples showed.

Q: You ended up ranking 127,800 schools according to relative impacts of air toxics nearby. In addition, you measured pollutant levels near 95 schools. Tell me about the process involved in translating the statistical information that you amassed into story decisions. Were some of the stories planned before the numerical results of your work were available, because you already knew the situations there were so compelling or representative of the problem?

A: Making sense of the numbers was one of the most challenging parts of our investigation.

That was especially true with the EPA pollution model we used to rank the nation's schools. The EPA uses that model, called Risk-Screening Environmental Indicators (RSEI), to rank industrial sites based on how harmful their emissions are likely to be. It does that by producing a score that estimates the concentrations of particular chemicals in the surrounding area, and weighting them based on their relative danger. In other words, the model gives you a number that tells you one place is likely worse than another, but is not based on any unit

or measure, so it has little real-world meaning. There is no standard for deciding when a score is too high. Searching for one, we consulted with dozens of scientists, engineers, and government officials; Heath attended a conference of RSEI users. In the end, we settled on one approach: We compared schools' rankings in the model to the ranking of an Ohio elementary school that was shut down in 2005 after air samples collected on its roof showed carcinogens in the air at levels 50 times higher than what the state considers acceptable. We found 435 schools where the model suggested air pollution was even worse.

Those results were indispensable. They shaped much of our reporting, guided our decisions about air monitoring, and helped us identify the stories we could tell.

Translating the results of our air monitoring was easier, mostly because the scientists with whom we partnered do this every day. We depended heavily on their expertise. We gave them the samples, and when they came back with a report, we asked them to tell us what the numbers meant. They gave us a simple framework: In a few schools, they said, the results were troubling: the concentration of at least one chemical was high enough that people could be harmed if they were exposed over a long period of time. At many more, they said, elevated levels suggested a need for additional testing.

That reflects the conclusion we reached early in this investigation that we would never be able to say definitively whether the air is safe. Even the best models are only estimates, and our air monitoring, while extensive, offered only a snapshot of what was in the air. Rather, we used both tools to identify places where the best data available raised enough red flags that people should want to know more.

Q: How did you choose the 95 schools where pollutants were monitored?

A: We based our choices mainly on the rankings we had produced from the EPA's pollution model. In doing so, we were careful not to select only the schools where the model suggested air pollution would be worst. Rather, we made sure our selections included some of the schools that ranked among the best for likely exposure to toxic pollution, and others that ranked among the worst. Because the monitors we used in most locations could detect only a fairly narrow set of pollutants, we also focused on the particular chemicals the model indicated were likely to have been in the air. To the extent we could, we focused on schools where the model suggested the presence of chemicals we'd actually be able to detect.

Practical considerations also played an important role. We did most of our monitoring in places where *USA Today* has bureaus, or where our parent company, Gannett, operates other newspapers or television stations. That let us rely extensively on our colleagues from across the company. When we conducted more intensive tests — samples to measure metals and other chemicals, which required that equipment be checked daily — we tried to pick clusters of schools that were all within a day's drive of one another.

Q: Describe the public — as distinct from governmental — reaction to your findings. For example, was the response different in different parts of the country? Have you tracked the extent to which people have used the database and what they may have been prompted to do because of what they learned?

A: The public reaction has been astounding. One advocacy group set up a template to help track letters sent to Congress that cited our work and called for guidelines on school siting; in the first weeks alone, thousands of letters were sent. We received hundreds of emails from readers who wanted more information. Some, such as Mary Peveto in Portland, Ore., now lead ad-hoc environmental groups that are seeking answers from local industries and regulators. She cited our stories and database as the catalyst. In the first weeks after we published, we had more than 1.2 million page views on the database. We suspect we've had tens of thousands more since.

Q: Regarding the governmental response, a couple of questions: How closely have you been continuing to track the initiative undertaken by the EPA because of your work? Also, please give me an idea about the governmental response at the



At the Senate confirmation hearing last January, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) asked about toxic industrial emissions near schools, the subject of USA TODAY's series, "The Smokestack Effect," displayed at the hearing.

local and state levels that you're aware of. Have you been reporting on these state and local developments, or is that up to your colleagues at affiliated news organizations?

A: We've closely tracked most of the monitoring that has been done since we reported. The U.S. EPA launched a \$2.25 million program to monitor the air outside 63 schools in more than 20 states. We've reported what they've found — in some places, high levels of chemicals such as manganese and acrolein. The EPA has been exceedingly transparent about what its regulators are finding, what the limitations of the findings are, and what further action is necessary. State regulators have handled matters differently. In Louisiana, for instance, regulators visited one school located about six blocks from the nation's second-largest oil refinery. EPA data showed the school ranked in the worst 1 percent for air quality, and *USA Today* tests nearby bore that out. But we spent only about four days testing, something that Hopkins explained as being more illustrative than definitive. Louisiana regulators did far less than we did there.

In fact, they took a grab-sample — a few hours' worth of air on a single day. They say they found nothing and subsequently declared to residents that all was well. In Pennsylvania, we found high levels of chromium outside a school. When we sampled, the nearby steel mill was operating. When Pennsylvania regulators sampled, it wasn't. They didn't find high levels of chromium, and to our knowledge, they have no plans to return to take measurements when the plant is operating at full capacity.

Q: Of all the findings produced by your research and reporting, of all the things you learned, what surprised you the most?

A: How little the U.S. EPA knew. The agency had the model. It had the data. It even had an office for children's health protection. Yet for some reason, officials seemed disinterested in what we were undertaking. One, the former head of the children's health protection office, told Morrison that it wasn't her responsibility. It became the agency's responsibility after Lisa Jackson became administrator, and the tone at the EPA has changed dramatically since.

Q: Few reporters ever have the kind of resources you were able to marshal on "The Smokestack Effect." Still, are there some lessons you learned in producing the project that might be instructive for other journalists embarking on investigative work of their own — in the environmental arena or otherwise?

A: Three big lessons. First, think big. Do something people haven't tried before, even if it feels overwhelming at first. Second, enlist experts. We sought people who knew more than we ever will about testing, for instance. Third, look for ways to ensure your work can make a difference. We explained what we did to anyone willing to listen — from local groups and regulators to EPA officials to staffers with the Senate Environment and Public Works committee. The staffers, for instance, pushed the issue forward in Congress and were largely responsible for persuading the EPA to embark on the \$2.25 million monitoring effort.

Bill Dawson is assistant editor of the SEJournal.



It can be dangerous being an e-journalist in the digital age

By BUD WARD

Be careful out there.

With all its wealth of riches and extraordinary research opportunities, the digital age of environmental journalism has brought with it an ugly underbelly characterized by increasingly bitter personal exchanges and accusations and a sucking-up of countless hours of productive reporting time and effort.

Were it not for the overall down-sizing challenges in the current news and economic climate, one might think covering the environment would surely qualify as hazardous duty pay.

The push-back from aggressive independent reporting is felt nowhere so much as when journalists plow into the issues central to reporting on climate change or “global warming,” as numerous SEJ members have noted concerning their own in-boxes.

A frequent concern among a growing number of journalists is how precisely — and in some cases indeed whether — they should respond to sometimes vile online criticisms not only of their reporting in a particular story, but also of their fundamental integrity and journalistic skills. It’s a dilemma some leading climate scientists have been grappling with for years: Feed the beast of online and often partisan criticisms, the thinking goes, and you only legitimize it and further enable it: You become engulfed in a seemingly endless and no-win series of sometimes nasty exchanges and personal attacks.

But let them go unanswered and the criticisms are just that — unanswered and with uncertain validity. Heads you lose, tails your critic wins.

Recent examples abound of reporters getting sucked into the endless muck of charge and counter-charge stemming from their coverage of climate change, some sad and ironic in their tone and others simply shameful:

ITEM: Climate contrarian and blogger Marc Morano, he of former Senator Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) fame, takes on a part-time blogger for *The Washington Post*, strangely attributes that blogger’s comments to the newspaper as a whole (as if it were an editorial), challenges the blogger to a face-to-face debate (the internet age’s version of the duel), and then gloats obsessively because the blogger — i.e., the *Post* — doesn’t deign to agree to a face-off on a snarky pretend-TV network operated by pseudo-journalism interests.

ITEM: Respected science and environmental writer Andrew C. Revkin of *The New York Times* engages by Skype interview in what he called a “mind experiment” before an audience of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Revkin’s sin:

pondering, always risky, the relationship between population growth (read smaller families) and the greenhouse gas emissions linked to a warming planet. The blogs go ballistic, and within days bloviating talk show host Rush Limbaugh proposed a solution: Revkin could call it a day (suicide, that is) to make the world a better place. So much for discourse.

ITEM: Another example. In this time when discerning who is and who is not a reporter or a journalist is often difficult, a “special correspondent for the Heartland Institute” blogged on the conservative American Spectator site under the headline “Juliet Eilperin is a Joke,” referring to the *The Washington Post*’s environmental reporter. (SEJers may want to note also the writer’s opening words introducing Eilperin as “yet another template-follower from the Society of Environmental Journalists.” The gripe here? Eilperin’s acceptance of the climate science as espoused by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the National Academy of Sciences, and virtually every professional scientific organization deserving of the name. The “attack,” as it’s labeled in a blog the next day on the same site, is countered by a piece headlined “Juliet Eilperin is No Joke.” It ends up being a defense with its own line of attack embedded, by a writer who says “I think this whole idea of a crisis of man-made global warming is an absolute, irredeemable farce.” So much for science.

ITEM: Don’t dare conclude from this partial listing that all the barbs at serious journalism are coming from just the conservative or climate-science-skeptical wing of the spectrum. Prolific Center for American Progress blogmeister Joe Romm is scarcely the darling of the denial crowd, but his pointed, and often downright vicious, barbs at Revkin, *The Times* generally, and other independent journalists raise vexing questions even among those who find his scientific writings worthy of review and consideration. His attacks on real journalists leave some wishing his laser would focus with unremitting force on increasing greenhouse gases, and not on those reporting the hard (in many senses of that term) news as best they can.

ITEM: Is the press event real or a joke? Remember the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s recent petition of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a trial on climate science (a chamber official actually compared it to infamous Scopes monkey trial)? Talk about slapstick. But then along comes something called theyesmen.org staging their own faux chamber press conference that mocked the business group’s long-standing opposition to

regulating carbon dioxide as a pollutant. (Memo to Files: When your adversary is self-destructing, don't offer up silly distractions, even if a few less-than-meticulous news outlets do briefly fall for the gag, hook, line and sucker.)

The climate, of course, and long-term climate trajectories and trends pay no heed. While erstwhile reporters spend precious time distracted by silly blogosphere sideshows, greenhouse-gas concentrations continue to mount, politicians continue to fiddle, and international negotiations continue to flounder. Public understanding of the complex challenges and riddles, and also of the potential opportunities, goes nowhere fast, worsens even.

If one wanted to arrest serious journalism on what most knowledgeable journalists accept as a serious issue ...

If one wanted to stall public understanding of climate science needed to support strong public policy ...

If one wanted to confuse the electorate, their political leaders, compliant editors, and more ...

Then you take a page from the playbook just detailed in the above items.

And the problem is that there are a lot more examples where those came from. How, and whether, reporters grapple with these distractions may go a long way in shaping how well the American public understands, or doesn't understand, the climate challenge they and future generations will face.

Commenting recently on the challenges facing responsible journalism in the digital age, respected KQED and *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Paul Rogers thought about his 2 1/2-year-

old son's recent Halloween outing. "He was a fireman for Halloween. His daddy convinced him it was safer than being a journalist in the internet age," Rogers joked.

Funny, huh?

And also true. Just one more challenge facing today's environmental journalists.

Bud Ward, a founding SEJ board member, is an independent journalism educator and former editor of Environment Writer. He edits the Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media.

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Reflections on the organization's founding 20 years ago

By JIM DETJEN

In the late 1980s, environmental issues were growing in importance. A hole in the ozone layer had been discovered over Antarctica in 1985. The Chernobyl power plant in Ukraine had melted down, spreading radioactive contamination throughout Europe in 1986. A scientist named James Hansen was making increasingly provocative statements about global warming.

Despite the prominence of these environmental concerns, there was no national association to support journalists who wrote about these issues.

At several national conferences of Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE), I talked to Mark Schleifstein, an environmental reporter at the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, about the importance of creating such an association. We both agreed there was a need, and we laid out a sketchy vision for such a group, patterned at least partly on IRE's structure.

But when we returned home to our newspapers we became caught up again in our busy lives as reporters and we'd drop the discussion — until we met again the following year.

In 1988, David Stolberg, assistant general editorial manager of Scripps Howard Newspapers, also thought there was a need for such an organization. He floated the idea of creating such a group to the winners of the Edward J. Meeman national environmental writing award, which he administered.

"I asked if there was interest — and there was none," he recalled with a laugh. "The idea could have died aborning."

But by the spring of 1989 environmental stories were continuing to ratchet up in importance. On March 24, 1989, the Exxon Valdez oil tanker struck Bligh Reef in Prince William

Sound off the Alaskan coast and spilled 11 million gallons of oil, contaminating more than 1,100 miles of Alaskan shoreline. *Time* Magazine described it as "an unprecedented ecological disaster."

Stolberg asked that year's Meeman winners — Dennis Anderson of the *St. Pioneer Press Dispatch* and Kate Long and Paul Nyden of the *Charleston (W.Va.) Gazette* — if they thought there was a need. They enthusiastically said yes.

Nyden and Anderson sent a letter to me and previous Meeman winners to see if we'd be willing to support such a group. I immediately called up Stolberg and resoundingly endorsed the idea. I felt the time had come to launch such a group.

I knew there was a professional need for such an association. But there were personal considerations as well. My Dad had died in 1988 and his death made me realize how finite life is. It convinced me of the importance of finally moving forward to achieve a vision that had not yet been realized.

On Sept. 1, 1989, I was one of 17 former winners of the Meeman and Thomas Stokes national journalism awards who signed a letter that was mailed out to journalists around the country. We wanted to see if there was interest for an organization of environmental writers. "This will not be a fluffy group. The threat to the environment in the early 1990s is enormous. Whether we write about air and water pollution, strip mining abuses, vanishing wildlife, or hazardous waste, we are writing pieces of the most important story of the decade. We need a forum where we can meet each other and see how those pieces fit together."

Among the signers were Marla Cone of the *Orange County*



Register in Santa Ana, Calif.; Kevin Carmody of the *Potomac News* in Manassas, Va.; Bill Dietrich, Tom Long and Natalie Fobes of the *Seattle Times*; Jane Kay of the San Francisco *Examiner*; Deborah Frazier of the *Rocky Mountain News*; Shannon Tompkins of the *Beaumont Enterprise* in Texas; Bob Anderson and Michael Dunne of the *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*; Thomas Morton of the *Colorado Springs Gazette*; Richard Boyd of the *Enterprise* in Lexington Park, Md.; Steve Meissner of the *Arizona Daily Star*; Jonathan Harsch of Maumee, Ohio; as well as Anderson of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and Nyden of the *Charleston Gazette*.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. More than 100 journalists said there was a need for such a group. We held a conference call, followed by three organizational meetings on Dec. 5, 1989 and Feb. 5 and April 2, 1990. Stolberg prodded us along and convinced Scripps Howard newspapers to pay the \$2,700 in legal fees that were needed to become a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization.

The early organizers discussed possible names, including the National Association of Environmental Journalists. Finally, we agreed to call the non-profit organization the Society of Environmental Journalists, or SEJ. On Feb. 14, 1990 — St. Valentine's Day — SEJ was formally incorporated in Washington, D.C.

SEJ's first interim officers included me as president; Rae Tyson of *USA Today* and Teya Ryan of Turner Broadcasting as vice presidents; Noel Grove of *National Geographic* as treasurer; and Bob Engelman of Scripps Howard News Service as secretary. Other board members included George Dwyer of ABC News; Julie Edelson of *Inside EPA*; Janet Raloff of *Science News*; Howard Chapnick, a photojournalist at Black Star Publishing; Bowman Cox of Pasha Publications; Tom Meersman of Minnesota Public Radio; Carmody, Anderson and Nyden.

The energy and enthusiasm of the original founders was overwhelming. We determined SEJ's structure by speaking to officers in IRE and the National Association of Science Writers. We decided to exclude public relations officials and made it an organization for journalists and journalism educators. We debated endlessly the categories of membership and possible sources of funding.

Everything seemed new and exciting. We designed brochures and application forms. We gathered lists of potential members. We decided to keep dues low — \$30 a year — to make it possible for journalists at smaller news organizations to join.

Those were the days when e-mail was in its infancy so we used the U.S. mail, the telephone and talks at other journalism organizations to spread the word. In the spring of 1990 we were ready to begin soliciting members. I thought we might attract about 250 members.

In July we accepted our first 79 members. By October that number had grown to 160. By December 1990 we had 350 members. By the end of 1991 we had 622 and by the end of 1994 we had reached 1,000 members.

"SEJ's membership grew way beyond our wildest expectations," Tyson recalled.

Each application was scrutinized to make sure the applicant was eligible for membership and to determine the proper category. It wasn't easy and there were frequent debates about an applicant's eligibility.

The founding officers were running SEJ out of their desks in their newsrooms, after hours and on weekends. All of us worked very long hours to build a fledgling organization while juggling demands of our jobs and families. But none of us complained; it was a task we passionately believed in. "The work

Several of the people instrumental in founding SEJ 20 years ago were asked to reflect upon what SEJ has meant to them and to give their views of the future. Here are some of their responses.

Emilia Askari

Role: SEJ's second president and co-organizer of SEJ's second national conference in Ann Arbor

Job in 1989: Environment reporter for the *Detroit Free Press*

Job today: Freelance journalist and a master's degree student at the University of Michigan's School of Information

Memories: Moderating a panel discussion about Alar between Warren Brooks, the late *Detroit News* conservative columnist, and Ellen Silbergeld, who is now a professor at the Johns Hopkins University ... "They really went at it, raising the decibel level of the debate and jabbing fingers."

Importance of SEJ: SEJ was and continues to be very important to me as a job resource and also as a community of professional friends.

Optimistic?: I'm very optimistic about the future of SEJ.

Jim Detjen

Role: Founding President from 1990 to 1994.

Job in 1989: Science/environmental writer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Job today: Director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism at Michigan State University

Memories: Incredible camaraderie of the founders and staff members... Very long, sometimes chaotic early board meetings ... Beth Parke called me Dr. Pangloss because of my ever optimistic view of life.

Importance of SEJ: More important than any of us could have predicted.

Optimistic?: Yes. There will always be a need for accurate environmental information ... Smart people will figure out successful economic models to support environmental journalism.

Bob Engelman

Role: SEJ's founding secretary

Job in 1989: Environmental writer for the Scripps Howard News Service in Washington, D.C.

Job today: Vice President for Programs, Worldwatch Institute, Washington, D.C.

Memories: They're dim but he recalls the difficulty back then winning the support of editors, which helped to eventually push him into a new career in advocacy.

Importance of SEJ: I've been excited and gratified to see SEJ grow so impressively.

Optimistic?: I'm a bit of a curmudgeon about environmental journalism — I feel it's failed to convey the magnitude of the risks we face with confidence and courage, especially on climate change.

OCT 1 1990
FIRST SEJOURNAL
PUBLISHED

FEB 5 1991
MEMBERSHIP
TOPS 400. FIRST PAID
EMPLOYEE, AMY GAHRAN

OCT 3-6 1991
FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE
HOSTED BY THE UNIV OF
COLORADO, BOULDER.
MEMBERS ELECT FIRST BOARD

Noel Grove

Role: SEJ's founding treasurer

Job in 1989: *National Geographic* Magazine's first senior editor for the environment

Job today: Freelance writer, mostly of books

Memories: Our first bank deposit on June 22, 1990 was for \$1,470. By the time I relinquished bookkeeping duties to a professional accountant in November 1992, SEJ had a bank balance of \$142,894.

Importance of SEJ: Very important

Optimistic?: Yes. As long as there is concern about what we are doing to Planet Earth, there will always be someone to write about it.

Julie Halpert

Role: Founding SEJ board member, co-organizer of second SEJ conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan

Job in 1989: Editor of the newsletter, *Inside EPA*, in Washington, D.C.

Job today: Freelance environmental writer in Ann Arbor, Michigan and instructor of an environmental journalism class at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor

Memories: Except for Teya Ryan, I was the only woman involved in those early meetings

Importance of SEJ: Vitally important

Optimistic?: I'm unsure what it holds.

Jay Letto

Role: SEJ national conference organizer since third conference at Duke University in 1993

Job in 1989: Environment Program Director at Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI)

Job today: SEJ's Director of Annual Conferences

Memories: Meeting founding president Jim Detjen at a Chinese restaurant in New York City and learning about SEJ for the first time. "I almost knocked Jim out of his seat I was so excited. I've never looked back since that moment."

Importance of SEJ: It's been everything to me. It's been my professional home for 20 years.

Optimistic?: No. Like the rest of journalism, we need to find something new and fast or we risk losing our audiences ... We must figure out new models of delivery and support ... If there is a way out of this mess, SEJ will find it.

Beth Parke

Role: First and only executive director

Job in 1989: Senior producer and host of *Consider the Alternatives*, a nationally syndicated radio series

Job today: SEJ executive director. "I'm still in this job. Can you believe it?"

Memories: I remember meeting at the Freedom Forum (in Virginia), thinking that the furniture in that board room probably cost more than SEJ's whole annual budget ... The 1995 national conference at MIT when over-eager student volunteers turned away Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt from the keynote lunch with E.O. Wilson because he didn't have a ticket. We chased the limousine a whole block to catch him.

load grew and we knew that as soon as we were able to afford it we would have to hire some staff," Tyson said.

I had been teaching a weekly class in environmental journalism as an adjunct instructor at Drexel University in Philadelphia. One of my former students, Amy Gahran, was a computer whiz and she was hired on a part-time basis to create and manage a database of our members.

In the fall of 1990 we published the first issue of our quarterly newsletter, *SEJournal*. We decided to begin planning for our first national conference. In November 1990 I was invited to speak at the University of Colorado at Boulder. During my trip, university officials pledged to give SEJ \$10,000, if we held our first convention in Boulder. We decided to accept the offer.

Like so many other things in those wild days of SEJ's early history, the first national conference was planned on a wing and a prayer. We convinced U.S. Sen. Tim Wirth, D. – Colo., to speak at the conference planned for Oct. 3 to 6, 1991. Other speakers included Steve Schneider, an expert on climate change, and Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute.

Two weeks before the conference only 35 people had registered. The U.S. economy was in a recession and we didn't know what to expect. But environmental journalists flew in from all over the country and we were delighted — and a bit shocked — when more than 250 people attended.

Dave Ropeik, a television journalist from WCVB-TV in Boston who was elected to SEJ's board at that first meeting, recalls his desire to take an evening stroll. "When I got to the doors to the rear, however, a sign said something like, "Do NOT go out this door. Mountain lions are known to frequent the area!" I chuckled to myself at how esoteric and abstract environmental dangers like hazardous waste and dioxin suddenly seemed, compared to this concrete, immediate, easy-to-understand threat — and went back to the group to get more wine and munchies."

We knew that in order to grow we needed a full-time staff and we decided to apply for grants from foundations. I called up Pete Myers, a biologist I had interviewed as a reporter for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He was now the director of the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Pete was enthusiastic and he came to the *Inquirer* newsroom where he assisted me in crafting a grant proposal. Within a short period of time, we received a grant of \$50,000 from the foundation.

By the summer of 1992 we were planning our second conference, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It became clear that we were drowning in details and we hired Beth Parke, a former radio journalist, to assist us part-time. Her first job title was director of program development.

The second conference attracted more than 300 people. We invited Ted Turner, the founder of CNN, to give a major address. Teya Ryan, one of SEJ's two vice presidents, told us that Turner ran hot and cold and that he had to be charged up to give an enthusiastic talk. Teya flew to Michigan with him on his private plane. When he arrived in Ann Arbor, Teya told me to rev him up by enthusiastically talking about SEJ. I recall walking beside him outside the University of Michigan auditorium where he would speak. He was like a caged lion, pacing at an intense pace, while we walked beside each other before he spoke.

The strategy worked. Turner gave a very funny, idiosyncratic talk and charmed the SEJ audience. As soon as he was done, he went back to his plane where his wife, Jane Fonda, waited for him. And they then flew to his ranch in Montana.



In the fall of 1992 we advertised for a full-time executive director and reviewed applications from more than 40 people. We selected Parke as our first executive director because of her experience both as a journalist and an administrator.

In December 1992 we opened up SEJ's first office in a 12-foot-by-20-foot room in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia. By that time SEJ's membership had grown to more than 800 and we needed an office to house a desk, copying machine, filing cabinets and office equipment. The rent was \$175 a month, including utilities.

SEJ had grown amazingly quickly in a very short period of time. By the fall of 1993 the organization had 870 members, an office and an annual budget of about a quarter of a million dollars a year. Noel Grove, our founding treasurer, described the transition this way, "It's like piloting a Sopwith Camel and then a Concorde."

He recalls making SEJ's first deposit of \$1,470 with the dues of our first 49 members in June 1990. "By the time I relinquished bookkeeping duties to a professional accountant in November 1992, SEJ had a balance of \$142,894.18," he said.

In 1994 I was approached by Michigan State University with an enticing offer — an endowed chair in environmental journalism — and a chance to build a university program in environmental journalism. I agonized whether to accept the offer. I had spent my career as a professional journalist and understood the politics of newsrooms. How would I fit into the environment of a major university?

I decided to accept the offer and stepped down as SEJ's first president in January 1995 when I joined the MSU's faculty as the Knight Chair in Environmental Journalism. It was — and is — an excellent job and I've enjoyed teaching at MSU.

The hardest part of leaving the newspaper wasn't giving up daily journalism. I was ready for a change and a new challenge. The hardest part was stepping down as SEJ president, a volunteer job that I thoroughly loved. Under SEJ's rules only journalists who are active members of SEJ could hold office. I knew the rules well because I had helped write them.

Today, I am an academic member of SEJ and have remained an ex officio board member since SEJ was founded. As far as I know, Jay Letto and I are the only two people who have attended every SEJ national conference.

It has been a delight to watch SEJ grow and develop, adding many new programs and continuing to flourish. SEJ has been blessed with a remarkable staff and incredible stability. Its volunteers have given their hearts to this organization and enabled it to thrive despite economic downturns, and a dramatically changing media landscape.

I have no doubt that SEJ will continue to be a remarkable organization that invents new ways to adapt and prosper. Beth Parke always said I was Dr. Pangloss, the incurable optimist in Voltaire's novella *Candide*.

On the wall of my MSU office is a plaque that the SEJ board of directors gave me on January 7, 1995. It is an honor that I will always cherish. It reads, "Presented to Jim Detjen, Founding President, Society of Environmental Journalists, 1990-1994, With Deep Appreciation for Outstanding Generosity, Dedication and Leadership. From the SEJ Board and Staff."

Jim Detjen, SEJ's founding president, is director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism at Michigan State University. As SEJ's founding president he is an ex officio member of the SEJ board of directors.

Importance of SEJ: It's consumed the prime of my life ... It's been such a worthy endeavor ... There are so many folks who got involved early on who never drifted away ... Everyone who's given time, money, big pieces of their lives in different ways to keep SEJ going.

Optimistic?: Yes. I have no doubt that journalism will continue to play a crucial role for our democracy.

David Ropeik

Role: Elected to board of directors at SEJ's first conference in Boulder, Colorado

Job in 1989: Reporter for WCVB-TV, Boston ABC affiliate

Job today: Consultant on risk perception and risk communication. Instructor at Harvard University's environmental management program at the extension school.

Memories: At the first SEJ conference in Boulder in 1991 he considered going outside for an evening walk. "When I got to the doors, a sign said something like: "Do NOT go out this door. Mountain lions are known to frequent this area!" I chuckled to myself at how esoteric and abstract environmental dangers like hazardous waste and dioxin suddenly seemed ... and went back to the group to get more wine and munchies."

Importance of SEJ: SEJ has strengthened respect for environmental journalism as a separate discipline... SEJ offers a supportive professional community for journalists working on environmental issues, and that sense of belonging alone is empowering.

Optimistic?: Uncertain.

Rae Tyson

Role: SEJ's founding vice president and third president

Job in 1989: Environmental writer for *USA Today*

Job today: Director, Media Division, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Memories: It was an incredibly fascinating, challenging time. We were literally running the organization out of our newsroom desks ... The first conference in Boulder was especially rewarding because we were afraid that no one would come. And the turnout was terrific.

Importance of SEJ: Vitally so for the profession. It has done exactly what we hoped.

Optimistic?: Yes. As the communications evolve, the need for specialists will be ever greater.

Bud Ward

Role: His office hosted the first organizational meeting of SEJ in Washington, D.C. in Dec. 1989.

Job in 1989: Editor of *Environment Writer*.

Job today: Self-employed. Acts as a consultant for Yale University, the National Science Foundation and the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting.

Memories: The energy of the initial founders ... Late-night calls on various organizing issues — mostly, overwhelmingly, from Detjen.

Importance of SEJ: Far more important and valuable than any of us could have imagined in those early days ... a veritable watering hole, a community of spirits.

Optimistic?: I'm hopeful, but I find it hard to be optimistic about the future of journalism in its entirety, and the sinking of the whole ship could take the lifeboats with it.



Twenty Years of SEJ

For space considerations, we have only listed the board-appointed conference chair(s), members and university liaisons who have helped organize each conference and with



By JAY LETTO

COMING IN 2010 !

★ **Portland State University, Portland, Ore., 2001**
Conference chair Christy George. 650 attend. Keynotes from Gail Norton and Christine Todd Whitman with the Bush Administration and Russell Mittermeier of Conservation International. Focus on salmon and forestry issues. Wednesday programming added to the agenda.

★ **University of Montana, Missoula, Oct. 13-17, 2010**
Conference chairs Jim Bruggers and Ray Ring. Focus on national parks and public lands and the climate-changing West.

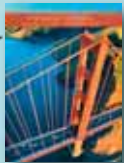
Brigham Young Univ. & Utah State Univ., Provo, 1994
Conference chair Marla Cone. 400 attendees. Keynotes from Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary and EPA Administrator Carol Browner. Opening plenary on environmental reporting and heavy focus on Western issues, including our first all-day tours. Robert Redford welcomes us to Sundance on Sunday morning. First Sunday session featuring book authors Terry Tempest Williams, William Least Heat-Moon and Andy Revkin.



★ **University of Colorado, Boulder, 1991**
Organized by Founding President Jim Detjen and the SEJ board of directors. 250 attend. Keynote address from former EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus. Other speakers included U.S. Senator Tim Wirth, Steve Schneider and Amory Lovins. Heavy focus on risk and toxics, featuring a plenary session, where *Detroit News* columnist Warren Brookes and the Natural Resources Defense Council's Janet Hathaway "nearly came to blows," according to the Fall 1991 *SEJournal*.

No program book at this early conference

★ **Stanford University, Palo Alto, Calif., 2007**
Conference chairs Chris Bowman and Carolyn Whetzel. 940 attend. Speakers included George Shultz, Stephen Schneider, Heidi Cullen, and Patricia Limerick. Focus on innovation and solutions to environmental problems. Full-day climate change roundtable with news executives.



Washington University, St. Louis, 2008
Conference chairs Kevin Calman and Mansur. 520 attend. Opening plenary on the Environment, Energy, and Congress and Environmental Policy. Speakers included Sen. Kit Bond (R-MO), Rep. Scott Brown (R-NY), Rep. George Miller (D-CA), and EPA Administrator Carol Browner. Friday and Saturday mini-tours are also available.

★ **University of California, Los Angeles, 1999**
Conference chair Gary Polakovic. 560 attend. Opening plenary on Hollywood and the Environment including Ed Begley, Jr., Ted Danson, and Keely Shaye Smith. Keynotes from David Brower and Barry Lopez. First film fest at SEJ.



★ **The University of Arizona, Tucson, 1997**
Conference chairs Russ Clemings and Randy Loftis. 480 attend. Speakers included Stewart Udall, NPS Director Robert Stanton, and Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ). Focus on NAFTA and Latin American issues. Extra tours included the Desert Museum, Biosphere 2 and a post-conference tour to the Grand Canyon.



★ **The University of Texas, Austin, 2005**
Conference chairs Dina Cappiello and Randy Loftis, who stepped in following the death of Kevin Carmody. 540 attend. Speakers included Molly Ivins, Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA), and Bill Moyers. Agenda included SEJ's first commercial flight tour (to Houston to visit the chemical corridor).

Jay Letto has been SEJ's conference director since the third annual conference and is one of only two people (the other being founding President Jim Detjen) known to have attended every SEJ annual conference.

SEJ Conferences

for each year. SEJ would like to recognize the many great events throughout which we could not have pulled off our successful events.

University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2009

Conference chairs Peter Annin and Chuck Quimbach. 775 attend. Speakers included Governor Jim Doyle, Al Gore, CEQ Chair Nancy Riley, NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco, Duke Energy CEO Jim Welsch, and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. Focus on fresh water, agriculture and Aldo Leopold.



University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1992

Conference chairs Emilia Askari and Julie Edelson (now Halpert). 300 attended. Keynote talks from Ted Turner, Lester Brown, Lois Gibbs and Jeremy Rifkin. Heavy focus on the auto industry and the new Clinton Administration. SEJ's first tours, including the EPA emissions testing lab and a new Chrysler assembly plant.

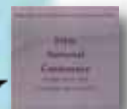
The Univ. of Vermont & Vermont Law School, Burlington, Vt., 2006

Conference chair Nancy Bazilchuk. 810 attend. Speakers included Vt. Governor James Douglas, Sen. Patrick Leahy, Ben Cohen, and James Hansen. Slowfood dinner at Shelburne Farms. First all-day pre-conference workshop (on environmental law) added to the agenda.



Mass. Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass., 1995

Conference chair David Ropeik. 700 attend. Keynotes from Vice President Al Gore, E.O. Wilson, and U.N. Environment Programme Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell. Expanded the conference an extra day to include the all-day tours on Thursday. John Stossel and Ellen Silbergeld exchange heated words during an environmental risk plenary. Sunday morning at Walden Pond.



Michigan State University, East Lansing, 2000

Conference chair Jim Detjen. 510 attend. Keynotes from David Suzuki and Bill McKibben. Focus on the auto industry, including SEJ's first ride-and-drive exhibit, and on the 2000 election, including a debate between the presidential candidates' top environmental advisors.



No program book at this early conference

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, 2004

Conference chair Don Hopey. 720 attend. Speakers included Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Michael Leavitt, Russell Train and Ted Danson. Focus on river restoration and industrial revitalization. Rocked the Riverboat on Saturday night.



University System of Maryland, Baltimore, 2002

Conference chair Tim Wheeler. 850 attend. Speakers included former Sen. Gaylord Nelson, Paul Ehrlich, Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) and James Connaughton, Chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Heavy focus on estuarine and marine issues. Awards program added to the agenda.



St. Louis, 1996

Conference chairs Tom Armody and Mike Denney on The 104th Street Bridge. Focus on air quality protection, featuring Sherwood Boehlert (D-CA) and EPA Administrator Douglas M. Costle. Friday network lunch added to the agenda.



Virginia Tech University, Roanoke, 2008

Conference chairs Bill Kovarik and Ken Ward, Jr. 865 attend. Speakers included Governors Tim Kaine and Joe Manchin, Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV), Nobel laureate R. K. Pachauri, chairman of the IPCC, and author Wendell Berry. Heavy focus on coal and energy, including Grammy-winner Kathy Mattea welcoming us with songs from her album, "Coal."



The Univ. of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 1998

Conference chairs Peter Dykstra and David Sachsman. 450 attend. Speakers included Ted Turner, Ray Anderson, and Sylvia Earle, who gave a dinner keynote at the Tennessee Aquarium. Post-conference tour to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



Duke University, Durham, N.C., 1993

Conference chair Wevonneda Minis. 400 attend. Keynote talks from EPA administrator Carol Browner, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, CEQ chair Katie McGinty and Rep. Jimmy Hayes (D-La.). Focus on environmental politics and trends in environmental reporting, including one plenary of former EPA Administrators and another with Phil Shabecoff and Keith Schneider squaring off over environmental coverage.



Loyola University, New Orleans, 2003

Conference chairs Mark Schleifstein and Robert Thomas. 600 attend. Speakers included Robert Luft, chairman of Entergy Corporation, and a panel of Utahans addressing the environmental record of then-nominee Michael Leavitt for EPA administrator. Heavy focus on hurricanes and environmental disasters. Beat dinners added to the agenda.





Top universities rethink how to prepare e-beat journalists

By BILL DAWSON

The Beat usually examines recent coverage of environmental issues. This time around, though, The Beat looks at the environmental beat itself — specifically, at a couple of recent developments related to the training of journalists to cover environmental issues.

The first event was the October announcement that Columbia University was suspending for review its two-year, dual-degree graduate program leading to one master's degree in journalism and another in environmental science.

Curtis Brainard, a graduate of that very program, reported on *Columbia Journalism Review's* website that the program's directors "cited falling employment in the field, the rising costs of education, and a lack of financial aid for students as the reasons for their decision."

He quoted a letter to the faculty of the university's Graduate School of Journalism, Department of Environmental Sciences and Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, which presented a context for the decision that will come as no surprise to readers of *SEJournal*:

"As you know, media organizations across the country are in dire financial straits and thousands of journalists' jobs have been eliminated. Science and environment beats have been particularly vulnerable. Although our graduates have done well in their careers, even those still employed are finding few opportunities to do the kind of substantive reporting for which the dual degree program has trained them, as they scramble to do their own work plus that of laid-off colleagues."

Not long afterward came a contrasting development in the world of journalism education. In November, the University of Montana announced it was establishing a two-year graduate program leading to a master's degree in environmental science and natural resource journalism.

"At least somebody gets it," Brainard approvingly wrote in the lead of his *CJR* story on the Montana announcement. He added that "many journalists, students, and bloggers criticized Columbia's decision, noting that environmental issues are at the forefront of many economic and policy debates and that specialized journalistic training prepares students for a wide array of jobs within the industry and out."

Coverage of the Columbia program's suspension included items such as these:

- Extensively quoting from the *CJR* story, a post on the *ClimateProgress* blog was headlined "Media stunner: Columbia

suspends Environmental Journalism Program even though 'our graduates are doing well in their careers.'" Blog editor **Joe Romm** found the decision "startling and depressing" and "amazingly shortsighted" and offered his "jeers to Columbia."

- Journalist and author **Chris Mooney** had a brief blog post on *Discover Magazine's* website, excitedly headlined "Columbia Journalism School Cuts Environmental Journalism!" Mooney called the program suspension "yet another woeful sign of how the media industry is going" and "a horrible sign of the times."

- In a blog post on both *Huffington Post* and *TreeHugger*, journalist **Alex Pasternack** reported the Columbia announcement with this skeptical note: "The program has not been canceled outright, not yet. Its directors will evaluate 'its accomplishments to date and prospects for the future.'" If a dictionary definition of the verb "ax" is accepted ("end, cancel or dismiss suddenly and ruthlessly,") then the headline seemed to indicate the deal was already done: "Columbia Axes Environmental Journalism, and Malcolm Gladwell is Okay with That." (Pasternack also cited a *Time* interview with the journalist and author Gladwell, who did not comment directly on the Columbia news, but suggested that "aspiring journalists should stop going to journalism programs and go to some other kind of grad school.")

Kim Kastens, co-director of the Columbia dual-degree program and a faculty member in the university's Department of Earth & Environmental Sciences, was not enamored of a lot of the coverage the suspension received.

Kastens, also affiliated with Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, had no complaints about Brainard's detailed reporting. But she told *SEJournal* that some other accounts about the Columbia suspension left the erroneous impression that the program had been terminated permanently, when it was actually announced only that no applicants would be accepted for the 2010-11 academic year.

"The most alarming misconception," however, was "the notion that this was imposed from above by know-nothings elsewhere in the university," which was not true, Kastens said. "A lot of bloggers seemed to leap to that conclusion."

In her own department, she added, it is not uncommon for a program to suspend admissions for a time when faculty members decide enough students are already in that degree pipeline.

Given the current journalism job market, the high cost of getting two degrees from Columbia was a factor in the suspension

decision, she acknowledged, but added that, in light of such actions in her department, “it didn’t seem like that huge a deal from my perspective.”

Apart from Brainard and *SEJournal*, Kastens said no one writing about the program suspension interviewed her or the other co-director, **Marguerite Holloway**.

“I was just shocked that people would write so extensively without any effort to contact anyone,” she said. “The whole notion that you check things twice and you don’t just spout off did not come into play in that particular incident.”

While the future of the dual-degree program is being evaluated, Columbia continues to offer other ways that students can prepare to cover environmental and related issues, Kastens said.

One still-open route is the Graduate School of Journalism’s long-standing one-year program that leads to a Master of Science degree, in which students can take elective courses in environmental and science reporting. (The Master of Science in journalism was one of the two degrees offered in the dual-degree program.)

The other route is a newer program, aimed at journalists with more professional experience who want to concentrate in one subject area. In it, students can choose a science-environment-medicine concentration on their way to an MA degree. (Religion, business and arts are the other options.)

With those two single-degree programs still in place, the notion that the suspension of the two-degree program meant Columbia was no longer offering any training for environmental coverage “was a complete misconception and caused us no end

of grief,” Kastens said.

Comparing the new Montana program’s 2010 launch with the Columbia program’s suspension was an obvious point for CJR’s coverage to address, though the timing of the two announcements did not figure in all of the more limited coverage of the Montana program.

The eight-paragraph version of an *Associated Press* story about the Montana program that appeared on the website of the *Billings (Mont.) Gazette* did not mention the Columbia suspension, for instance.

Henriette Lowisch, an associate journalism professor and director of the new graduate program at Montana, told *SEJournal* that the program has been in the works for three years, so its announcement soon after news of the Columbia suspension was a coincidence.

The increasing prominence of associated energy and environmental issues in Montana and across the West was a highly important factor in the decision to create the program, Lowisch said.

“What actually happened in Montana was that environmental and natural resource issues became a mainstream story instead of a niche story,” she said.

“Now, it’s not a special interest kind of deal. It’s something, politically as well as journalistically, that comes up every day in the local press, so we don’t have to look for it like for a needle in a haystack. It’s here. These stories are jumping in your window all the time.”

The new journalism program’s approach is also in keeping with a broader University of Montana strategy aimed at making

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natural resources and environmental subjects “one real pillar in many departments,” she said.

The new Montana journalism program was not modeled after Columbia’s dual-degree program, she said. Instead, it will lead to a single degree with more than half of the course work in journalism and the rest in science.

Montana’s master’s degree program in journalism formerly accepted students without undergraduate journalism degrees. Now, Lowisch said, it will be structured so “the ideal, typical student will have either an undergraduate journalism degree or substantial journalism experience out in the profession.”

A smaller proportion of admitted students will be people with science backgrounds, she said.

“Part of journalism education today is to assemble a group that can collaborate on projects,” she added.

“I think actually that journalism is in a really good phase because this is a time of change,” she said. “I personally think change is always a time when you rethink how to do things.”

A “classic” career path in journalism was typically seen as enrollment at a highly regarded university that costs a lot to attend, then “a great job at a good-paying newspaper,” she said. “Those times are over.”

Looking ahead, she said, the successful job-seeker will typically be “a type of journalist that’s very versatile, creative, able to work with limited resources and create quality based on limited resources.”

That vision underlies the new Montana effort to prepare journalists to cover the environment, she said.

“This is a huge story. We want to train journalists to cover a story that’s very important to the public debate, to harness everything we have to produce some creative, entrepreneurial people.”

Journalists educated to cover environmental subjects will find opportunities to earn a living, in part because reporting on many angles such as recycling, food quality, water conservation and consumer news offers “a tangible advantage” to the public, Lowisch said.

As faculty members at Montana ready their new graduate program, Kastens at Columbia said she sees exciting prospects in the “liberating” opportunity offered by the decision to stop and evaluate whether and how the Columbia program will continue.

Now that enrollment has been suspended for the time being, “we’re thinking about how to restructure the program so it will be better than what we’ve been doing,” she said.

Possible changes could include things like more training in investigative reporting and team reporting and more integration of systems thinking into the curriculum, she said.

“I’m really deeply convinced that the public’s need to know about this stuff has not gone away and is stronger than ever,” she said.

Given the “total coincidence” that Columbia has “world class” programs in both journalism and earth science, she voiced hope that the university will “find a way to help people link between earth science and the public in the future.”

Bill Dawson is assistant editor of the SEJournal. He can be contacted at b.dawson@earthlink.net.

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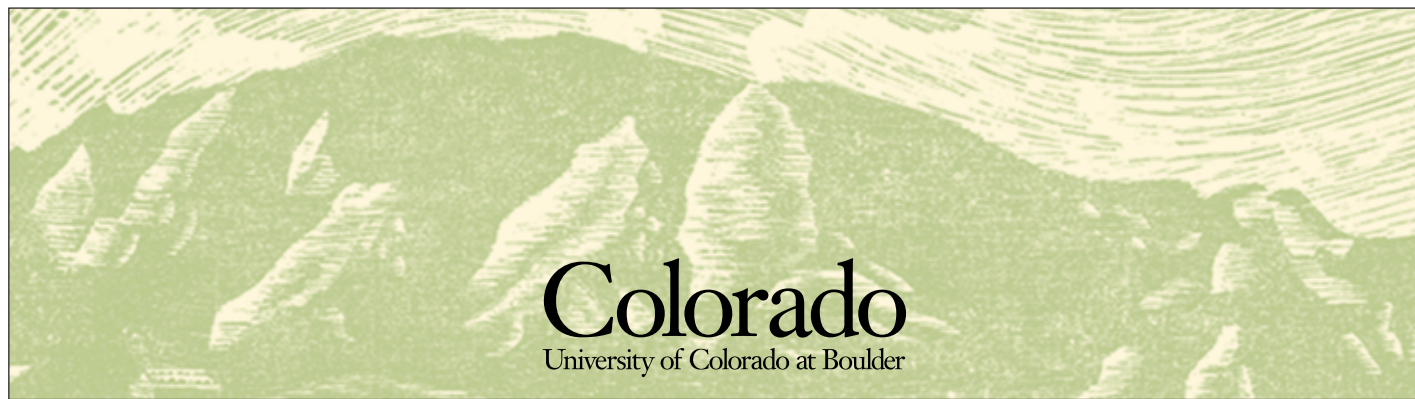
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Board election draws many candidates, record votes

By CAROLYN WHETZEL

SEJ members have elected four new board members and re-elected five incumbents.

The 2009 election on Oct. 9 saw the highest number of available seats since the first board election in 1991. The greatest number of candidates since the 2000 election — 14 — sought votes for eight Active seats and one Associate seat, according to Director of Programs and Operations Chris Rigel.

Of the 11 candidates running for the eight Active seats, Christy George, Robert McClure, Jim Bruggers, Sharon Oosthoek, and Jeff Burnside garnered the most votes, each winning a three-year term on the board. Don Hopey and Rob Davis tied for the remaining seat with a three-year term. By a vote of the board, Hopey took the three-year seat and Davis filled the seat for a two-year term previously held by Mark Schleifstein, who had resigned from the board. Douglas Fischer won the slot for a one-year term once held by Chris Bowman, who earlier in the year moved to the associate membership category.

Heather King won a three-year term as the board representative for associate members by a slim margin over incumbent Rebecca Daugherty.

SEJ members also approved two proposed bylaws amendments, Rigel reported. Article VI (Committees), Section 2 (Executive Committee) of the bylaws now requires the SEJ Board Executive Committee to report any action it takes on behalf of the full board outside of ordinary board meetings at the next regular



meeting and allows the full board to review and, if necessary, rescind the action.

Members further approved Article VIII (Miscellaneous Provisions), Section 2 (Notice) outlining SEJ procedures for the delivery of notices required by the bylaws or other policies. Specifically, the revision states such notices shall be given in writing to a director, member, committee member or officer at his or her postal or electronic address as it appears in SEJ's records. The updated provision also states that the notices may be sent via email or deposited in

the U.S. mail or other delivery service.

Final Tally for Bylaws Amendments: Yes, 247; No, 15.

Rigel noted that judging from the number of votes cast on the bylaws questions, SEJ had twice as many members vote this year than last year. This is possibly because of the electronic ballot, she added.

The board elected Christy George as president; Carolyn Whetzel, first vice president (Programs); Peter Fairley, second vice president (Membership); Don Hopey, treasurer; and Peter Thomson, secretary.

Carolyn Whetzel is staff correspondent for BNA Inc. and is programs committee chair and first vice president of SEJ's board of directors.

Four new SEJ board members elected in 2009



Rob Davis



Douglas Fischer



Sharon Oosthoek



Heather King

Notes on nature can be a telling scientific record of home

By CATHERINE M. COONEY

Are you searching for a new angle on global warming that you and your editor might both love?

How about investigating people in your own neighborhood — the so-called citizen scientists — who are tracking the tiny changes occurring in your local ecosystem?

These amateur researchers are engaged in a discipline known as phenology, or the study of the seasonal timing of cyclical life events of plants and animals. They observe insects emerging and laying eggs, plant leafing, blooming, fruiting, and the changing of leaf colors in autumn, for example. University and government researchers use this information to monitor the influence of seasonal cycles on biological resources.

These observations help detail how disease might affect particular species, if a species is in decline, or describe the differences of diversity in city versus rural or natural areas. The data can also help paint a picture of future ecological changes stemming from climate change.

Dave Bertelsen, 66, is a great example of an amateur scientist. Bertelsen hikes the Finger Rock trail in the Santa Catalina Mountains near Tucson once a week, each time jotting down notes about the flowering plants and mammals that he sees. He recently completed his 1,246th hike, each time covering an elevation gain of 4,158 feet. “One of the reasons [this trail] attracted me was the elevation gain enabled me to move from desert scrub, through riparian scrub, scrub grassland, oak woodland, oak pine woodland, and pine forest, and all in one day,” he says.

Bertelsen has collected more than 200,000 records of flora and fauna observations over the past 25 years. His notes are helping professional scientists flesh out what the effects are of the changing climate near Tucson. With assistance from two researchers at the University of Arizona, part of his data was published in the online Early View of the Journal *Global Change Biology*. They show earlier flowering along the Finger Rock trail, which the paper authors attribute to changes in climate.

Other citizen-scientist projects abound. Students, retirees, and other volunteers are walking trails in the Santa Monica Mountains outside Santa Barbara, Calif., and watching plants as part of a program sponsored by the University of California, Santa Barbara and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Volunteers are tracking more than 100 species in New England through the Invasive Plant Atlas of New England. And students at the University of Arizona are recording observations on the blooming of the creosote bush for Project BudBurst, a citizen-scientist project managed by the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, the University



PHOTO: © DAVE BERTELSEN

Elada checkerspot butterfly (*Texola elada*) at rest on a netted anoda (*Anoda reticulata*), a member of the mallow family.

of Montana, and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

U.S. birdwatchers flock to participate in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count, held during a week in February. It asks participants to submit checklists of birds they see to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. Last year, participants in the Bird Count turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, “creating the continent's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded,” according to the program.

But such efforts aren't limited to the United States. Amateur scientists are busy watching in countries around the world. Birdwatchers in India, for example, are listening to birdcalls to track changes in bird migration for a program called MigrantWatch.

Anyone can contribute to these data sets by clicking on the loads of online sites advertising for volunteers. On these sites you'll find blogs where amateurs compare notes with scientists; pages describing plants that can be studied; and tutorials on how to collect data and how to submit observations and photographs. One program collects photographs for an annual contest.

Decoding the historical data

In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognized the efficiency of phenology in the study of climate change. IPCC members wrote, “Phenology ... is perhaps the simplest process in which to track changes in the ecology of species in response to climate change.” Indeed, nature enthusiasts have been observing changes in nature for as long as there have been people on Earth. Examples can be found in museums, or scrawled on barn doors where farmers note changes in the weather and dates when crops are ripe for harvest, says Jake Weltzin, a U.S. Geological Survey scientist and the executive director of a new national program, the USA National Phenology Network (USA-NPN).

A top priority for USA-NPN is to collect and compare all of this information jotted in notebooks and posted online, says Theresa Crimmins, network liaison for USA-NPN. Recently created with funds from several government agencies and universities, the program has its own site for citizen volunteers and professionals alike to submit their observations, and staff scientists are in the process of collecting historical phenology datasets for plants and animals.

Abraham Miller-Rushing, wildlife phenology program coordinator with USA-NPN, has tackled a particularly rich source of historical citizen-science data. He has spent months deciphering Henry David Thoreau's diaries. Written more than 150 years ago,

they are jam-packed with notes on blooming dates, location changes, and appearances of over 600 species growing near Walden Pond in Concord, Mass.

Decoding the historical data so today's researchers can use it is not easy. Miller-Rushing's work on the Thoreau diaries, for example, presented a "bigger problem than you might think. Not only was his handwriting really, really messy, but they actually called plants by different names then," he says. This type of historical data provides the raw material researchers need to be able to monitor how today's changing climate might affect ecosystems in the future. Many researchers would love to study these changes, but they just don't have the information, Crimmins says.

To ensure there is no false data submitted by over-zealous volunteers, USA-NPN is comparing data collected by volunteers with studies of nearby ecosystems conducted by scientists. What the researchers see, Miller-Rushing says, is that as temperatures rise, plants flower earlier. "This is exactly what you would expect to see with global warming," Miller-Rushing says.

Next: tracking animals

In 2010, USA-NPN will launch an online data collection program for wildlife animals such as yellow-bellied marmots, ruby-throated hummingbirds, northern painted turtles, wood frogs, coho salmon, and bumblebees. The network is developing the list of protocols and methods for animal monitoring, says Weltzin, but the protocols for observing wildlife are more complicated than those designed for watching plant changes. The team is partnering with other programs, such as Frogwatch USA, eBird, and Journey North, to create a nationally standardized set of monitor-

ing protocols. "Imagine the power of the dataset for increasing understanding of climate change impacts across the U.S. if everyone used the same monitoring approach," Weltzin says. "That's what a national network is all about."

So pitch the story, but first check with your neighbors. They just might be bird-watching in their backyards.

Online sources for Phenology-related citizen science programs:
USA-APN: www.usanpn.org

Project BudBurst:
www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/budburst/

Cornell Lab of Ornithology:
www.birds.cornell.edu

Publications:
Environmental Science & Technology, Volume 42, Issue 11, Date: June 2008, Pages: 3911-3913

Global Change Biology, Volume 15, Issue 5, Date: May 2009, Pages: 1141-1152

Other resources: For experts at the U.S.G.S. who are familiar with volunteer programs, contact Catherine Puckett, at 352-264-3532.

For volunteer programs related to invasive species, see the SEJ *TipSheet*, April 15, 2009: www.sej.org/node/1105

Catherine M. Cooney is a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C.

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A newbie's advice on getting started with video



SEJ President Christy George considers her workstation editing options during the one-day video production workshop preceding SEJ's annual conference in Madison, Wis. last October.

By ROBERT McCLURE

Video? Me? Shooting video? Me *editing* video? Just shoot me now, huh?

That describes my initial reaction to the idea that I, a print guy for three decades, would soon join the broadcast brethren for whom I'd often held out reporter's notebooks to help with their "white balance." (It was always so mysterious ... what is this white balance of which you speak? And ... why are all your questions so short?)

Video was an intimidating prospect, I have to tell you.

But now that I'm shooting and beginning to edit video, I'm seeing that it's simply another form of storytelling with different equipment and different rules. No doubt we'll have future Toolbox authors offer in-depth, expert opinion about how to take on this increasingly in-demand skill. But for this issue I thought I'd give my fellow video newbies the real basics, as seen by another neophyte.

Believe me, it isn't that hard. Now, producing really high-quality, award-winning stuff is something that will take years to master, I'm sure. But as many of us learned at the daylong SEJ video workshop at SEJ's 2009 annual conference, today's technology is sophisticated enough that even beginners can put together a credible broadcast report.

Here are some of the real basics:

1) Get good audio. Since photographer-turned videographer Rob Sheppard did such a thorough job on this in the last *SEJournal's* Reporter's Toolbox (<http://www.sej.org/node/3226/>), I won't go into that. But it's key. The audio will become the spine of your story. Use an external microphone. Do *not* rely on the one in the camera if you can help it. (That said, the audio I've been getting from a Flip camera is pretty good.)

2) Use a tripod. There's a bit of a debate about whether news video as shaky as the Blair Witch Project is OK for the web. But why do that? Why not go for a professional look that at least *could* go broadcast? A tripod is essential. At InvestigateWest we dropped \$300 on a Manfrotto tripod that allows smooth panning and

up-down-and-around movement.

3) Think of shooting a scene much the way your brain would work as you walk into a room (or a field or a stadium or whatever) and get your bearings: First get the big, broad shot that takes in the whole scene. Next, take a medium shot of the part of scene you're interested in. Then focus in on the subject you will feature.

4) Before you start an interview, tell the person to look at you, not at the camera. Also ask the person not to say things like, "As I mentioned earlier ..."

5) This one's really hard: If you're a longtime print person like me, you're in the habit of encouraging your interview subject, often saying "yes," and "uh-huh," and "I bet!" **DON'T DO IT.** Just nod vigorously. And smile.

6) Ask open-ended questions. Then shut up.

7) Same as print: Interview only one person at a time.

8) You need to think about whether to do a "pre-interview" and then follow up with a shorter and more focused exchange on camera, or whether to just start rolling from the get-go. On an early assignment for InvestigateWest, I gathered great stuff in my notebook from a guy I met at a campground in Oklahoma. But the spark wasn't there when photographer Paul Brown and I returned the next day with a video camera. On the other hand, you probably don't want to edit down an hour-long interview with a scientist. You want to hear what she has to say and then, in a 10-minute follow-up interview, ask her to focus on what's likely to make it into the finished product. If you're doing both print and video, as we are, you may want to do an off-camera interview to make sure you fully understand the subject, then do an on-camera interview to cover just the best stuff.

9) Be aware of what your subject is doing, not just what she's

Q. Are you well-versed in an environmental news topic, skill or technique you're dying to share with fellow environmental journalists? Is there something you'd like to see covered in a future Reporter's Toolbox? In either case, please send suggestions to Robert McClure, editor of the Toolbox section, at reportermcclure@aol.com.

saying. A woman I interviewed in Michigan constantly fidgeted with her keys, which she kept in her hands as we made various stops around town. I didn't notice how distracting those keys were until I watched the video. Similarly, if there is an annoying noise that's not relevant to the story, such as a squeaky chair, eliminate it. Put the person in a different chair, for example.

10) Listen for possibly distracting noises while you're shooting "b-roll," or video which is intended to be used with a voiceover. Shoot b-roll for 15 seconds going into a shot and 15 seconds coming out, if you can. And shoot standalone b-roll. It's what will go between the interviews with a voiceover.

11) Minimize pans and zooms, particularly if you're shooting for the web, because they take a lot of bandwidth. If you're going to do them, start with the camera stationary for a good four or five seconds and then pan or zoom *slowly*. And evenly. Then at the end, hold the camera steady for another four or five seconds. Both pans and zooms are much better shot from a tripod.

12) The rules about light that you know from still photography also apply with video. Try to avoid shooting at midday in harsh light. The "magic hour" or "golden hour" at sunrise and sundown is gorgeous. Also, be aware of the glare that fluorescent lights can produce in an office. Shoot with natural light when possible. (If you do have to shoot in harsh sunlight, try holding your hand over the top edge of the lens to help the camera adjust better to the lighting conditions.) Similarly, try to shoot with the sun behind you. Don't have the sun or a harsh white wall or a snowbank behind your subject.

13) Similarly, as with still photography, remember the "rule of thirds." Don't put your subject in the middle of the frame. Imagine the frame sliced into 12 equal-sized pieces, with two lines running horizontally through the frame at the one-third and two-thirds marks, and two running vertically through the frame at the one-third and two-thirds marks. Try to have your subject intersect with one or more of these lines.

Well, there's a lot more I could say, but these will help you get started in what I'm finding is an exciting new way



for me to tell stories.

Just shoot me now? Nah. I'll just go do some shooting now.

PHOTO: BY EMILY J. GERTZ

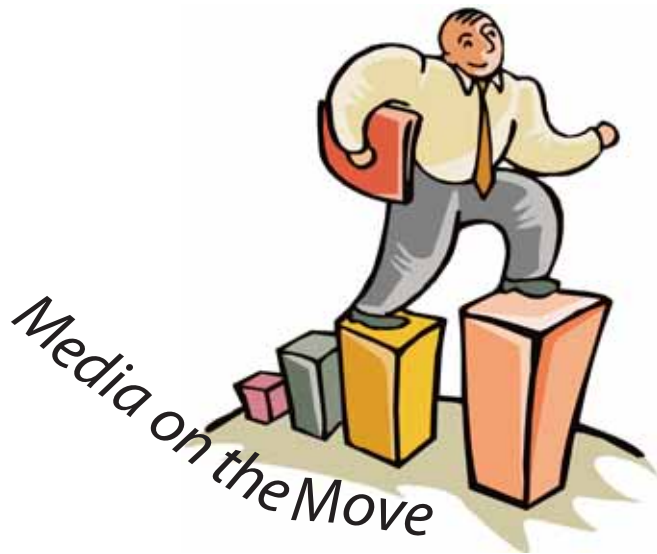
New Hampshire freelancer Bill Birchard, a participant in the video production workshop preceding SEJ's annual conference in Madison, Wis., goes to extremes — the far end of a dock extending out into Lake Mendota—to get just the right shot.

Robert McClure is chief environmental correspondent for InvestigateWest, a non-profit, multi-platform journalism studio offering in-depth coverage of the environment, public health and social-justice issues in western North America. He thanks for information presented here Erik Olsen of The New York Times; Sue Robinson and Pat Hastings of the University of Wisconsin; Amol Pavangadkar of Michigan State University; Christine Umayam of Q13 FOX News in Seattle; and the Western Washington Pro Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. Not to mention SEJ, of course!



Peter Thomson (left), environmental editor for the BBC's The World at WGBH in Boston, and Sara Shipley Hiles (center), a freelancer and part-time journalism faculty member at Western Kentucky University, absorb fast-paced editing instruction from the one-day video production workshop preceding SEJ's annual conference in Madison, Wis. last October.

PHOTO: BY EMILY J. GERTZ



New jobs, projects and awards for SEJ members

BY JUDY FAHYS

Longtime SEJ member **Debbie Gilbert** tells a story of adapting to an unexpected change on the environment beat. She had been covering health and the environment for almost 10 years at *The Times* in Gainesville, Ga., when she was “downsized” in April. Four months later, the *White County News* in Cleveland, Ga., hired her as a reporter.

She now writes about anything that needs to be covered, “since it’s a small-town weekly.” And she’s often covering the environment again, because 40 percent of White County is public land — the Chattahoochee National Forest, the Blue Ridge Mountains, two state parks, and the headwaters of the Chattahoochee River, the source of drinking water for 3 million people in metro Atlanta.

“My new job has also reduced my carbon footprint,” says Gilbert, who used to commute 50 miles roundtrip each day. “Now, my workplace is less than a mile from my house! My monthly gasoline consumption is about 10 gallons.”

Other SEJ members report changes, too.

Mark Neuzil, journalism professor at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., has been named one of the faculty advisers to *TommieMedia*, the school’s all-on-line news portal.

St. Thomas is the first Associated Press member in the nation to fold its television news shows, radio station and newspaper into one Web site and end publication of the printed paper. www.tommiedia.com

Freelancer **Jennifer Weeks** is contributing stories to Book of Odds (www.bookofodds.com), a new website about the odds of everyday life.

Dick Russell is completing a second book with former Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura. This one is on “American Conspiracies.”

SEJ board member **Cheryl Hogue** is enjoying a promotion at *Chemical & Engineering News*. Her reporting duties remain the same, but she’s moved up from senior editor to senior correspondent.

John Moir was the Grand Prize Winner in the *Writer’s Digest* annual writing competition for 2009. His winning article, published at Smithsonian.com, tells of the discovery linking lead bullets to the risk of sub-lethal lead poisoning in humans who eat hunter-shot game. The honor includes a \$3,000 cash prize, a trip to New York City to meet with agents and editors and a profile of the writer and his work in the November/December issue of *Writer’s Digest* magazine. See the interview at: www.writersdigest.com/article/wdannual09/#

Sharon Friedman, a professor of journalism, was awarded the International Green Pen Award from the Asia-Pacific Forum for Environmental Journalists this month, for her work in advancing international environmental reporting.

The award is given to those who have helped encourage others to pursue journalism that focuses on the environment, according to Sri Lanka Environmental Journalists Forum, a social organization that uses the media to make change.

Judy Fahys is environment reporter at The Salt Lake Tribune. Contact her with your news of your latest arrival, book projects or job change at fahys@sltrib.com.

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Letter to the Editor:

Border coverage lacked impact of immigration

13 December 2009

Dear Editor:

“Disorder at the Borders” presents a one-sided view of the border fence, ignoring the environmental damage of illegal mass immigration that far outweighs the impact of the wall. In Arizona, illegal entry created 1,200 miles of roads and trails in the Cabeza Prieta NWR where only a single track had crossed this swath of the Sonoran Desert before (*Time*, 5/28/07). The impacts are huge, but many articles on immigration largely ignore it. And *SEJournal*, by publishing the RAVE photos, is doing the same.

This one-sidedness is a microcosm of how mainstream media and environmental groups like the Sierra Club ignore immigration’s environmental impact to promote an open-borders agenda. According to the Pew Research Center (2008), US population, now 307 million, will grow to 438 million by 2050, 82 percent due to immigration. And after arrival in the nation with the greatest per capita resource use and GHG discharge, the average immigrant’s greenhouse-gas emissions will rise four-fold (CIS, 2008).

When I suggested at a town hall meeting that population growth would preclude reduction of GHG 80 percent by 2050, as per Waxman-Markey, Rep. Markey called me a “pessimist.” “I’m an optimist,” he said, to loud applause. He is like people living on credit, hoping their incomes will rise to cover the debt. Like many Democrats, his immigration policies undermine his environmental policies. It’s a lose-lose for the planet.

David C. Holzman

David C. Holzman writes about energy, environment, economics, science and medicine from Lexington, Mass.



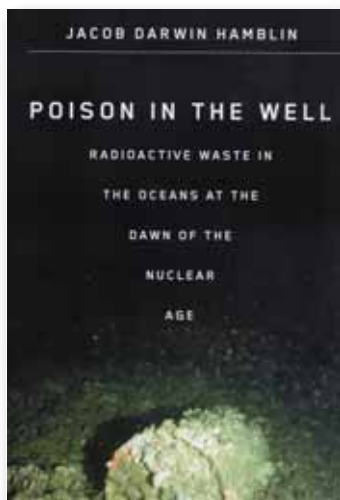
PHOTO: COURTESY WILDCOAST - WWW.WILDCOAST.NET

While the Smuggler’s Gulch barrier has diminished human traffic significantly in the area, it hasn’t slowed the tons of trash and debris that flow down the Tijuana River out of Mexico, seen here after an early December storm, that constitute one of the greatest single point sources of pollution along the entire Pacific coast of North America.



PHOTO BY APRIL REESE

Looking south toward Tijuana, Mexico across the old boundary fence, a Border Patrol agent describes the new 180-foot tall earthen berm that now stretches half a mile across the Tijuana River in the Smuggler’s Gulch area to prevent illegal entry into the U.S.



Diving into ocean dumping of rad wastes and its “uncertain effects”

Poison in the Well: Radioactive Waste in the Oceans at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age

by Jacob Darwin Hamblin
Rutgers University Press
\$49.95 (hardcover)

Reviewed by VALERIE BROWN

Nuclear power and nuclear weapons advocates routinely stress the scientific foundations of their positions, yet there are so many contradictions and complexities in nuclear policy that rational thought rarely seems to enter the decision-making process. Thus, like all books about anything nuclear, *Poison in the Well* leaves the reader with a sort of funhouse-mirror disorientation as it documents the twisted logic that policymakers have used — sometimes with assistance from marine scientists — to regulate ocean dumping of nuclear waste from the beginning of the nuclear age to the present.

The book might be of historical interest only if it weren't for the ongoing pumping of large amounts of liquid power-plant-reprocessing waste into the Atlantic, the Irish Sea and elsewhere, and the Mafia's recently-exposed habit of scuttling hot-waste-laden ships near the Italian coast. In a 1972 treaty called the London Convention, nuclear powers agreed to stop dumping packaged, high-level waste into oceans; however, due to porous definitions in the treaty, they can still pump liquid waste into them. These issues make Oregon State University history professor Jacob Darwin Hamblin's tale of the uneasy romance between nuclear delusions and oceanographers' lust for knowledge very timely.

In the early 1950s, ocean disposal seemed more attractive than some of the other ideas under consideration by the Atomic Energy Commission, such as shooting nuclear waste into space or scattering it on enemy territory during the Korean War. Partly out of fears that dumped containers might resurface and cause both embarrassment and risk to civilians, the U.S. decided to end ocean dumping in 1970. Meanwhile the Soviets, while castigating the Western nations for abusing the seas, were tossing submarine reactors into Arctic waters. Hamblin reports that between 1946 and 1993, 14 countries dumped radioactive waste in 80 marine locations. Worldwide, the former Soviet republics and United Kingdom account for almost 90 percent of the material — but the U.S. is responsible for nearly 40 percent of the waste in the Pacific.

Three major forms of ocean-dumped nuclear material emerged: packaged solids like reactor cores and equipment,

packaged liquids, and sludge and bulk liquids. The first two kinds, it was hoped, would sink to the bottom and only slowly release their radioactivity. The third kind brings us to what I think is the major case of cognitive dissonance with respect to radiation in the ocean: Tons of liquid waste are allowed to pour directly into shallow coastal waters via pipelines out of spent-fuel reprocessing works at Britain's Sellafield complex and France's Cap de la Hague facility.

Early in the nuclear era, little was known about the fate of nuclear waste in the oceans, so policymakers turned to oceanographers for help. The great currents were yet unmapped and the Russians especially hoped to find zones where they could sink waste into deep, still water. Oceanographers led by the renowned Roger Revelle (who also figured out how the oceans might absorb excess atmospheric CO₂) worked closely with the U.S. Navy and the Atomic Energy Commission, tapping into research money and data that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. British waste streaming into the Irish and North Seas revealed much to eager scientists about circulation of the North Atlantic and Arctic currents, even as it raised levels of iodine-129 in parts of the Arctic Ocean to more than 4,000 times their pre-nuclear-era levels.

Even today, nobody can say exactly how anthropogenic radiation is affecting marine biota. The field of health physics, nurtured by pro-nuclear interests, has long held that “dilution is the solution to pollution” along with the incorrect notion that there is some threshold level of exposure below which ionizing radiation is harmless. Despite evidence of human cancer clusters near nuclear facilities, the nuclear establishment continues to downplay the risks of exposure to low-level and low-activity radiation. Until better methods of settling the question of its health effects on all life forms have been devised — and these must address epigenetic factors, genomic instability, and non-cancer outcomes — the field's health experts will continue to assert low risk.

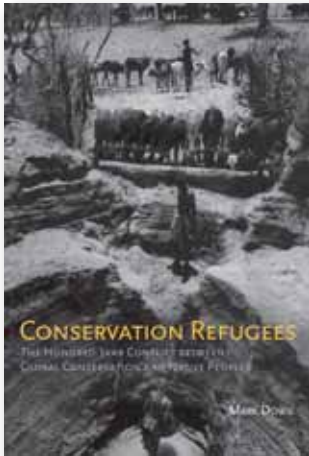
Eventually, Hamblin explains, oceanographers parted ways with the nuclear enterprise. Finding deep, still water in the ocean was too elusive. As the environmental movement expanded, ocean scientists became more concerned about the potential health effects of radiation. Oceanographers, Hamblin concludes, had “given up pointing out the importance of the oceans to the future of nuclear energy,” emphasizing instead “the uncertain effects of past actions and the continued threats posed by the artifacts of the atomic age lying on the ocean floor.”

Valerie Brown, a freelance writer based in Oregon's Willamette Valley, has covered environmental health for 15 years. As a native of southeastern Idaho, she was exposed to nuclear fallout from the Nevada Test Site and has maintained both a professional and personal interest in radiation issues as a result.

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Provocative look at how ecological preservation reaps human harm

Conservation Refugees:

The Hundred-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples

by Mark Dowie
MIT Press \$27.95

Reviewed by TERRI HANSEN

What is wilderness?

The 1964 Wilderness Act describes it as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Indigenous cultures isolated from Judeo-Christian influence have no word for wilderness; it is simply ‘what is,’ their home, not some area beyond their community.

There lies the conflict.

In *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples*, investigative historian and journalist Mark Dowie follows the history of ecological preservation since the early 1900s that has seen the establishment of more than 108,000 officially protected conservation areas worldwide, and the expulsion of millions of indigenous people from their homelands.

Dowie doesn’t point to conservationists as the bad guys. Indeed, as he says at the beginning of this provocative and sometimes haunting book, “What you are about to read is a good guy versus good guy story.”

Both movements — of conservationists and indigenous peoples — care deeply about the planet, he writes. Together they are capable of preserving more biological diversity than any other two institutions. Yet they have been at odds, sometimes violently, due to conflicting views of nature, radically different definitions of wilderness, and profound misunderstandings of each other’s perspectives on science and culture.

His story begins with the creation of Yosemite National Park. Its mystique was created by photographers like Ansel Adams who knowingly left out its inhabitants or any signs of them in their images. Adams and his friends sought to preserve an idealized version of nature called ‘wilderness,’ a place humans had explored but never touched. “It was the beginning of a myth,” writes Dowie, “a fiction that would gradually spread around the world, and for a century or more drive the conservation agenda of mankind.”

John Muir emerges as a complicated figure who lobbied to evict the Miwoks and other tribes that had lived in Yosemite’s valleys for 4,000 years. Revolted by the Indians, he asked that they be removed, and they were; it fueled California’s war of extermination.

Muir’s vision of wilderness — a pristine area cleared of all human inhabitants and set aside for recreation and fulfillment of the urbane human’s need for spiritual renewal — laid the foundation for the exclusionary model of wilderness preservation.

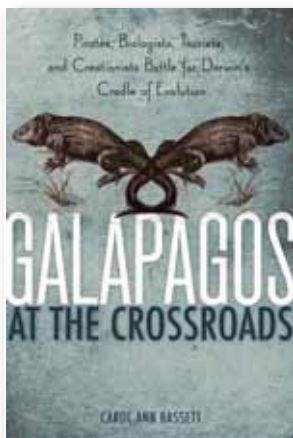
The Yosemite model spread to seven other national parks and beyond America to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, then Europe, which created remarkably similar parks — clearing out the natives so colonials could enjoy the aesthetics of wild nature, and in Africa, selectively hunt the game for trophies. This philosophy guided the big conservation BINGOs — Big International NGOs, such as the Worldwide Fund for Nature, Conservation International, and The Nature Conservancy. Dowie commends such groups for recent pledges to involve indigenous peoples in the establishment and management of protected areas in ways that respect their traditional knowledge and self-determination. But he cites conservationists’ complicity by silence as national governments violate the rights of indigenous peoples when creating new protected areas. He describes the experiences of other indigenous cultures; the Ogiek and Maasai hunters of the Serengeti, the Pygmies of Central Africa, the Adivasi people of India’s forests, and the Karen of Thailand, all evicted or severely limited from using their land once it was declared a park or a reserve. Whole societies who had lived on those lands for hundreds or thousands of years slid into poverty. Living in squalor or on the lowest rungs of the economy, some have turned to illegal poaching on their former homelands. Some face extinction.

Dowie doesn’t romanticize the lifestyles of indigenous peoples. Not all indigenous peoples are perfect land stewards, he writes. But he argues their “traditional ecological knowledge” or TEK— the collection of botanical, zoological, hydrological, cultural, and geographical know-how that is rooted in spirit, culture and language, and the fact that ancient societies have been found living in biodiverse habitats for millennia, are indicators that sound TEK principles work. He discusses the need for native peoples and Western science to integrate traditional knowledge with modern ecology, to acknowledge the interdependence of biodiversity conservation and cultural survival. He endorses a conservation model that allows indigenous people to stay inside conservation areas, and involves them in conserving resources — no commercial hunting or logging, for example.

True ecological conservation requires balancing both interests. Together, they can create a new and much more effective model for conservation. “If we really want people to live in harmony with nature, history is showing us that the dumbest thing we can do is kick them out of it,” writes Dowie.

Terri Hansen is a freelance journalist and longtime SEJ member. She is Indian Country Today’s environment and health correspondent.

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Islands that enchanted Darwin suffer in the modern world

Galapagos at the Crossroads: Pirates, Biologists, Tourists, and Creationists Battle for Darwin's Cradle of Evolution

by Carol Ann Bassett
National Geographic, \$26

Reviewed by ISABELLE GROC

When Charles Darwin visited the Galápagos Islands in 1835, he encountered species found nowhere else.

“The archipelago is a little world within itself,” he wrote in *The Voyage of the Beagle*. Since Darwin's visit, this “little world” has changed dramatically and is plagued by environmental, social and economic problems: explosive tourism, rapid population growth, invasive species, illegal harvesting of sea cucumbers and other species, shark finning, widespread corruption and political instability. All of these have led to the fragmentation of fragile ecosystems and the extinction or near extinction of some species. In 2007, UNESCO declared the islands endangered. Although the Galápagos National Park has established some protections, enforcement can be weak and subject to the manipulation of powerful interests such as fishermen.

Galapagos at the Crossroads, by Carol Ann Bassett, examines the problems faced by the islands, called Las Encantadas (the Enchanted islands), by early Spanish explorers. She writes, “The Galápagos Islands now stand at a critical crossroads: To heal and endure as one of the world's most intact natural museums, or to lose most of their biodiversity to human encroachment, just as the islands of Hawaii and Guam have.” She focuses on the clashing of human values on the islands and the difficulty of achieving consensus among competing activities: tourism, natural resource exploitation, research and conservation.

Bassett, who teaches environmental writing at the University of Oregon, describes the formation of the Galápagos, its first human settlers, Darwin's explorations and the early scientific inquiries in the first chapter. The following chapters focus on the people of the islands. Each is organized around one or more local characters that represent a problem, a feature or a species of the islands. The result is a refreshing ensemble made up of diverse voices that contribute to an understanding of the islands' complexities.

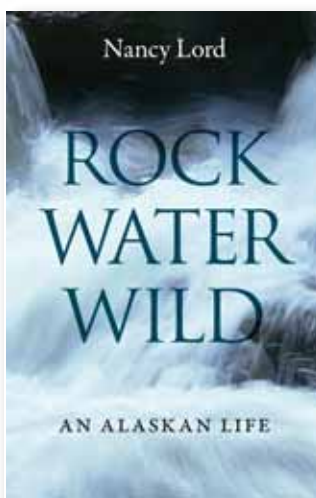
Through Bassett's interviews, we get to know local heroes protecting the islands. Mathias Espinosa, for example, is a dive master and long-time naturalist who teaches island fishermen — previously involved in the illegal practices of shark finning, sea cucumber harvesting and sea lion mutilation — how to become dive masters. In the highlands of Isabela Island, Jacinto Gordillo,

an 84-year old former priest turned botanist, raises plants threatened by invasive species.

In her best chapter, *Walking with Giants*, Bassett describes a gruelling hike up Volcan Alcedo on Isabela Island with wildlife photographer Tui de Roy. Alcedo is home to the largest population of giant land tortoises in the Galápagos. The tortoises became critically threatened after feral goats multiplied on the island, competing for the same grasses and shrubs the tortoises depend on. One of the world's largest island-restoration projects began on Isabela Island in 1998. Teams of sharpshooters and specially trained dogs were hired to eradicate 100,000 feral goats and return Alcedo to the tortoises. Bassett beautifully describes what it is like to be at the volcano's edge among the giant tortoises. The chapter is a ray of light in an otherwise dark account of all the challenges facing the Galápagos.

Despite being peopled with charismatic characters, Bassett's book is sometimes repetitive and disorganized. Often she lets her characters lead the story — choosing voice over structure and tight writing. But her key messages come through: the lack of local environmental education and the damage created by tourism and widespread corruption. By focusing on local people, she fills a gap in the Galápagos literature.

Isabelle Groc is a freelance writer and photographer based in Vancouver, B.C.



Cherishing a wild place, some rich stories of Alaska

Rock, Water, Wild: An Alaskan Life

by Nancy Lord
University of Nebraska Press,
\$24.95

Reviewed by STEFAN MILKOWSKI

In the preface to her new book, Nancy Lord writes that she never worried about what she would do in Alaska. “From the beginning, I understood that my life depended on place, as opposed to traditional concerns like job opportunities and family ties.” Lord's *Rock, Water, Wild* is an exploration of that place — the land, its people, and the interaction of the two — told by a careful and loving observer of it.

Lord moved to the small coastal town of Homer in 1973 and is currently Alaska's writer laureate. She has written several books, including three collections of short fiction and three non-fiction books.

Rock, Water, Wild is a collection of essays and short memoirs, many of them previously published. In “Words Honor Place,” Lord offers a thoughtful exploration of connections

between language and place that goes beyond the exaggerated Eskimo vocabulary for snow and likens the extinction of languages to the extinction of species. In "In the Giant's Hand," she artfully describes scenery prone to clichés. "Rumblings of rockfall attest to the work-in-progress nature of this nature; freeze and thaw, freeze and thaw, and gravity exerting its pull," she writes of the Brooks Range's Arrigetch peaks.

A commitment to getting it right runs throughout Lord's wide-ranging essays. First-hand experience mixed with news-like reporting give authority to her voice. Even a story on baseball hints at Lord's desire to fit her experiences into a larger context.

Lord's approach works particularly well in essays about environmental issues, which seem to run on for decades here and carry epic stakes. For a story on road building in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, Lord counts geese from a blind with a refuge biologist. For a story on sea lions, she weaves together voices from scientists, a ferry captain, and a halibut long-liner. In all of her stories, Lord writes with the built-up wisdom of someone who's read widely and experienced Alaska as a fisherman, legislative aide and naturalist on adventure cruises.

Lord's essays span great distances in time and space. A few focus on places far from Alaska (the Mediterranean, southern Arizona, the Soviet Far East), and a few reach back a century and more to John Muir's experience of Alaska and John Burroughs' ability to make others appreciate the world around them.

In several essays, Lord smartly explores the seeming contradiction of respecting Alaska's wild lands and creatures while using them at the same time. (One of Lord's previous books,

Beluga Days: Tracking a White Whale's Truths, explored this question for belugas.) Preservation is based on a "no-take policy," she writes, while conservation allows for the use of resources on a sustainable basis.

In an essay about life at a remote fish camp, Lord explains how someone who loves nature can hack at brush and mourn the loss of a lifestyle that includes salmon and people. "Who will love this place when we're gone?" she writes. "Who will know to watch the fireweed blossoms to announce the arrival of the red salmon, or will care that the salmon follow the beach and the bears walk the tide line?"

Some essays are richer than others, and a few left me wishing Lord had traveled a little farther from the beaten path. A story on grizzlies at the remarkable but less-than-wild McNeil River State Game Sanctuary benefited from Lord's consistent study, but lacked the far-flung feel and insight of other stories.

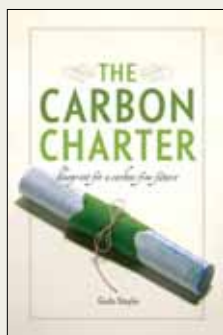
Rock, Water, Wild is a collection of essays, and Lord does offer direct pleas for science-based whale management and action on climate change. But Lord's essays are also stories — stories that together offer a sense of this giant place, where self-invention is still possible, and where the wild is never far away.

Stefan Milkowski is a freelance writer living in Fairbanks, Alaska

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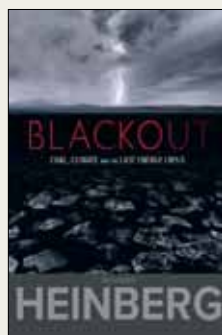


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Godo Stoyke
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- Roger Duncan, *Austin Energy*

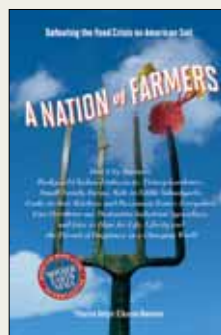


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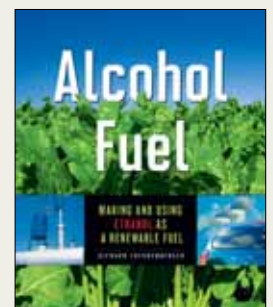
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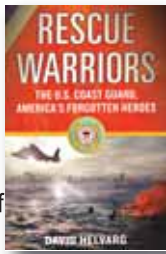
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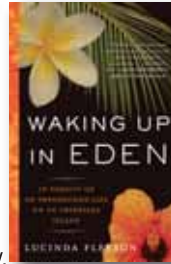
by David Helvarg
Brings you into the daily lives of "coasties" whose mix of altruism and adrenaline helps assure the safety of our waters. *St Martin's Press*



spr10

Waking Up In Eden: In Pursuit of an Impassioned Life On an Imperiled Island

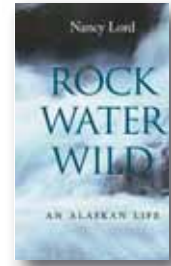
by Lucinda Fleeson
A journalist reports on Hawaii, the plant crisis, the National Tropical Botanical Garden's rescue efforts and its mysterious, hidden history. *Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill*



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Rock, Water, Wild: An Alaskan Life

by Nancy Lord
Alaska's writer laureate journeys among salmon, bears, glaciers and languages into fresh understandings of our connections to the natural world. *Univ. of Nebraska Press*



sum 10

The Crooked Mile

by Kevin Clemens

Award-winning journalist and author Clemens examines the past, present & future of the energy & infrastructure issues associated with automobiles & transportation. *Demontreville Press, Inc.*



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Paving Paradise

*by Craig Pittman
& Matthew Waite*

Pittman & Waite explain the illusions of "No Net Loss" wetland protection, exposing the unseen environmental consequences of rampant sprawl. *Univ. Press of Florida*



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Primitive by Mark Nykanen

A model and her estranged activist daughter get caught up in the "war on terror" and global warming. marknykanen.com *Bell Bridge Books*



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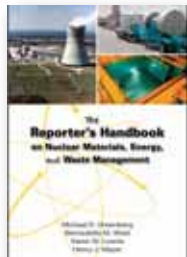
2045: A Story of our Future

by Peter Seidel
Carl awakens from a 35-year coma into a world where global warming, water shortages, overpopulation and mass starvation reign. *Prometheus Books*

The Reporter's Handbook on Nuclear Materials, Energy, and Waste Management

by Michael R. Greenberg
*Bernadette M West, Karen W. Lowrie,
Henry J. Mayer*

An essential reference book presenting scientifically accurate and accessible overviews of 24 of the most important issues of the nuclear era. *Vanderbilt Univ. Press*



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Gators, Gourdheads and Pufflings

by Susan D. Jewell
"In the great tradition of American nature writing" *Sun-Sentinel*. Jewell's witty tales as a wildlife biologist are engrossing. *Infinity Publishing*

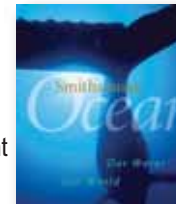


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Smithsonian Ocean

Our Water Our World by Deborah Cramer

This companion to the Smithsonian's new Sant Ocean Hall sheds new light on the meaning of the sea in our lives. *Smithsonian Books/Harper Collins*



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Green Your Work

by Kim Carlson
An accessible and compelling how-to guide for making any workplace environmentally friendly & socially responsible-centric. *Adams Media*



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Galapagos at the Crossroads:

Pirates, Biologists, Tourists & Creationists Battle for Darwin's Cradle of Evolution

by Carol Ann Bassett
An eloquent narrative that explores a collision of economics, politics and the environment in one of the world's last Edens. *National Geographic Books*

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Air Our Planet's Ailing Atmosphere

by Hans Tammemagi
This evocative book describes the complex & vital ocean of gases surrounding us and its steady degeneration. Solutions are proposed. *Oxford Univ. Press*

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Save Gas, Save the Planet



John Addison

Save Gas, Save the Planet

by John Addison
Millions of Americans are now reducing their transportation carbon footprint by riding clean, riding less and riding together. *Optimark Inc*

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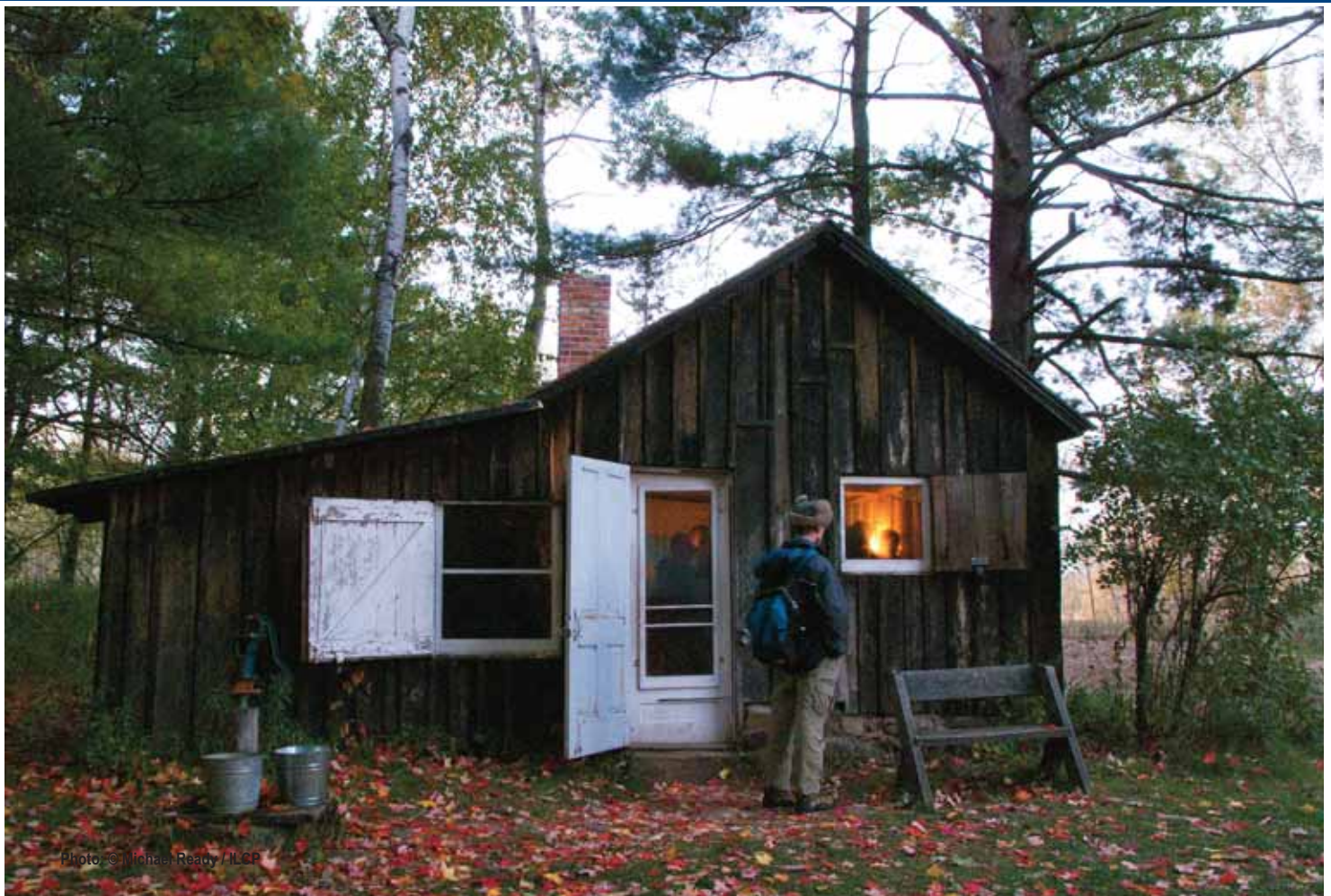


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Located in the heart of the country that inspired Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, this former chicken coop perched just above the floodplain of the Wisconsin River near Baraboo, Wis. has served the Leopold family as a get-away for over 70 years. Known simply as "The Shack," it is now preserved by the nearby Aldo Leopold Legacy Center, which invited SEJ members attending the annual conference in Madison to visit in October. With the sun setting, and kerosene lamps and fireplace glowing from within, *National Geographic* executive editor Dennis Dimick captured the scene in a half-second exposure with a hand-held point-and-shoot camera. For a historical perspective on The Shack, visit Then and Now — The Shack Landscape (<http://www.jillmetcoff.com/folio/leopold/1.html>), a collaboration of photographs from the 1930's by Leopold's son Carl (who died in November at 89 after attending the SEJ conference) and contemporary images by Chicago photographer Jill Metcoff.