

SEJ Journal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Vol. 11 No. 4

How to sell your story

Getting the story isn't always enough. The real challenge is making editors and the audience care. Our cover package looks at what works for one editor-reporter team at The Oregonian and shares tips from SEJournal editor Mike Mansur.

One team's "Black Box" sharpens the story

By LEN REED

The pesky hazard of environment journalism is lingo: The insider's vocabulary, mastered over years of reading studies and interviewing specialists and deployed in such a way as to win credibility not only from readers but also the scientists and policymakers who bemoan the slightest slippage in terminology. To be taken seriously on the beat is to sometimes strut the stuff conversationally, peppering hallway chat with "4d rules"

or the latest "TMDL."

But readers don't think in ESU's (my personal favorite, from "evolutionarily significant unit," as mystifyingly vacant as the acronym). Neither do readers grasp that the federal government's latest very real position on an important policy-setting question is expressed as Draft BiOp, or draft biological opinion (how an opinion can be biological is another subject).

Happily, though, readers shouldn't understand these things, which represent corruptions of English and expression
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Keep your headline handy

By JONATHAN BRINCKMAN

Some reporters—well, me—like to rush into newsrooms and tell our editors what we have just learned, often starting with the smallest detail.

The result? Often, a blank look. The editor knows you have a good story. He or she also knows you are a good reporter and wouldn't be excited if the story were not good. But the editor has no idea what the story is.

The next steps can be a difficult discussion, described by Len Reed in the accompanying story. It takes a lot of
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Inside Story

Exploring the cost of mining the West

By MIKE DUNNE

Designed to help settle the West, the General Mining Law of 1872 gives huge, modern corporate mines the same deal as pick-and-axe prospectors got more than 100 years ago.

"Under terms of the antiquated law, miners cart away everything from gold to kitty litter from public lands—minerals worth about \$11 billion in the last eight years alone," reported the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in June, 2001. "Not only does the U.S. Treasury get nothing, Congress has granted miners a tax break worth an estimated \$823 million in the coming decade."

Miners can pay \$5 an acre or less to mine public lands. If the market collapses, and so does the company, the taxpayers will be left to foot the cleanup bill.

The newspaper's four-part series, "Mining the West: Profits and Pollution on Public Land," looked at the modern-day consequences of that 1872 law. The series recently won the John Oakes Award administered by the Natural Resources Defense Fund.

P-I environmental reporter Robert McClure and former national correspondent Andrew Schneider looked at the issues surrounding mining on public land, especially the use of cyanide heap-leach mining.

The *SEJournal* interviewed McClure to get the "inside story" about the series:

Q. How did the story get started?

A. Actually, the story got started before I got involved in it. We had a new

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Photo by DALE WILMAN



SEJ's Boston-to-Baltimore regional conference took reporters on a tour of Ground Zero. Read member Todd Bates' story, reprinted by permission of The Poynter Institute.....page 4

New Web site and conferences display SEJ's strength

By **JIM BRUGGERS**

I'm writing this column the week President George W. Bush delivered his state of the union speech. All I can say is that I'm glad I don't have to report on any "axis of evil" to SEJ members (I'll spare you any complaints about media company bean counters here).

But, like Bush did with the U.S., I can report that the state of SEJ is strong.

SEJ, like most non-profit groups with no large endowment, has to struggle year-to-year to raise the money for its budget. But SEJ is blessed with a vital and talented volunteer base of members, a board that puts SEJ first before personal politics, a proven staff, and a cause that I'm convinced will be needed as much in 2052 as it is in 2002.

That cause is articulated in our vision and mission.

SEJ's vision: An informed society through excellence in environmental journalism.

SEJ's mission: To advance public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting.

As evidence of SEJ's strength right now to carry out this vision and mission, I'll offer just two examples: our improving Web site, and an exciting future line-up of annual conferences.

First, the Web site.

Its birth was in 1994, and the attending physician was former SEJ board member Russ Clemings, the computer whiz at the *Fresno Bee*.

"My recollection is that I talked to Adam Berliant, then of the *Tacoma News Tribune*, at the 1994 NICAR conference in San Jose," Russ says. "He said they were setting up a library of Web links and asked would I like to contribute? I told him I'd take environment. I threw some stuff together, tested it on my browser at home, and sent it to his Web guy by e-mail, and that became <http://www.tribnet.com/enviro> and gradually morphed into what we have now."

It may be hard for many of us to recall life before the Internet, but 1994 was "downright prehistoric times," Russ recalls.

He was unable to view the fledgling SEJ site he had created from Fresno because no one provided that kind of

graphical Internet service there. He remembers going to a job interview in a big city around Thanksgiving and checking it out—the first time he saw the site live.

Sometime after that, Investigative Reporters and Editors started Reporter.Org, and IRE Executive Director Brant Houston persuaded Russ to move the environmental journalism site there.

With this change, SEJ was able to get its own domain name (www.sej.org <<http://www.sej.org>>), and it turned out that there were all kinds of technological bells and whistles that Russ was able to exploit—all for the benefit of journalists who cover environmental topics, and SEJ.

Report from the Society's President

By
**James
Bruggers**



A watershed event came in 1999 at the SEJ leadership retreat hosted by the University of Montana Environmental Studies Program. SEJ members who attended suggested that it was time to take the site to the next level. That led to a redesign, a members' only section and a recommitment by the board and staff to put significant resources into improving our Internet home.

We're getting there, day by day.

Improving the Web site—making it valuable to members and non-members alike—has been one of my top priorities the past year and a half. It's also one shared by the board, and now eloquently articulated by Dan Fagin, SEJ vice president and programs committee chair.

"Our Web page should be the spot, the Grand Central Station of environmental journalism—the place where we're all connected," Dan says. "It's already so rich in content that it's the equivalent of a virtual annual conference running

24/7/365. Members and non-members can go to see the news of the day, research a story in the 1,500-link 'links library' or in the searchable archives of *Tip Sheet*, *SEJournal* or *EJToday*."

With a few mouse clicks, Dan observes, SEJ members can register for a conference, learn about dozens of journalism contests (including SEJ's), look at a list of graduate schools and fellowships, read some of the best environmental journalism of recent years in the Gallery, find a member's phone number or e-mail address (but only if you're an SEJ member), see what's coming up on the Calendar, track down an old listserv posting in our searchable archive, learn everything there is to know about SEJ (our rules, our values, our financial policies, our governance) and a lot more.

We hope all this is only the beginning.

"In not too long, the Web page will also feature a state-by-state list of key government, activist and industry sources," he says, "a 'matchmaking service' to pair up beginning journalists and mentors and eventually who knows what else—perhaps a searchable photo gallery, guides for how to use FOIA and computer databases in environmental reporting, tutorials on key environmental issues. Or virtually anything, depending on what our members want and whether they're willing to help make it happen."

At the same time, both Russ and Dan make one essential point that I echo: The success of www.sej.org—the central nervous system of Ejournalism—depends entirely on members' willingness to use it and help develop it.

Send an interesting story to *EJToday*. It's easy.

Suggest links for the links library that you've found useful in your work.

Dan is also looking for volunteers to take on specific projects to enhance the Web page. Last year Dave Poulson, with the help of many members, began compiling a state-by-state list of officials with state agencies. SEJ's Web team is preparing to post it soon.

SEJ Executive Director Beth Parke has been seeking and acquiring funding to make improvements to the Web site. SEJ's strategic position at the center of the North American environmental jour-

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SEJournal

SEJournal (ISSN: 1053-7082) is published quarterly by the **Society of Environmental Journalists**, P.O. Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046. Membership \$40 per year (Canadian and Mexican journalists and students, \$30). Subscription fee \$50; \$30 library rate. © 2002 by the Society of Environmental Journalists.

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The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)3 organization. The mission of the organization is to advance public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting. We envision an informed society through excellence in environmental journalism. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,100 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's national conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly SEJournal.

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SEJournal is printed on recycled paper

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SEJournal submission deadlines

Summer '02May 1, 2002

Fall '02August 1, 2002

Winter '02November 1, 2002

Spring '03February 1, 2003

Environmental journalism will not go away

SEJ regional conference explores the post-Sept. 11 state of the beat

By PETER LORD

The Sept. 11 terrorism attacks caused news editors across the country to reassign many environmental reporters to cover terrorism or military events. But environmental journalism will not go away, according to a members of a plenary panel who spoke Jan. 18 at SEJ's 2002 Boston-to-Baltimore Regional Briefing.

Paul Brodeur, a *New Yorker* writer who pioneered stories on asbestos, depletion of the ozone layer and shipyard health issues, said environmental reporting has always been a casualty to some other, larger issue.

But he said the need for good environmental reporting never goes away. Be skeptical, he told an audience of more than 100. Follow the money. And never accept at face value environmental assessments by governmental officials.

He said one issue that needs more examination right now is asbestos in the World Trade Center. He held up stories quoting a government official saying there were no asbestos problems. Brodeur said that's just wrong. Forty floors of steel in one tower were treated with asbestos, he said, and that was blown all over southern Manhattan when the building came down.

Tim Wheeler, assistant state editor at the Baltimore *Sun*, said changes in government disclosure policies have made it more difficult to get information. And concerns about terrorism have made everyone rethink what information is safe to publish and what might help the enemy.

"Things are starting to creep back to normal," Wheeler said. "But it's a changed normal. We're all on pins and needles. Will there be another attack?"

On a positive note, Mark Dowie, a veteran writer, editor and author, said terrorism has caused the suspension of frivolous journalism and left the environment beat as important as ever.

"Environment stories may seem irrelevant to your editors. But they will not go away," Dowie said. "And we must keep doing them, even if they run inside and are short."

Important stories are still to be done on arsenic, energy, nonpoint pollution, endangered species and water, Dowie said.

"Don't give in to leaders who say questioning our consumption values is unpatriotic," Dowie added. "This consumption train needs to slow down."

"I really, truly believe we will be back on the front page again," Dowie said. "But not until we convince our producers and editors that post-9/11 environmentalism is more important than ever."

A total of 207 journalists, scientists and public officials attended the two-day conference at Rutgers University that was organized by SEJ member Michael Rivlin. It was one of the largest regional conferences ever sponsored by SEJ.

The Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute at Rutgers was host and co-sponsor.

In opening remarks, Rivlin noted that he canceled a planned visit to a National Marine Fisheries Laboratory because the government would only admit American citizens.

"I don't think the danger we need to be concerned about is

imminent terrorist attack," Rivlin said. "It's from creeping super-patriotism. As journalists, this is not the time to put down our pens and pads, to succumb to political correctness and to pick up the flag. We need to continue to insist on having access to places and people of importance. These are dangerous times. Let's hope they pass quickly."

Stephen R. Kellert, a Yale ecologist, opened the conference Friday morning by discussing "the big disconnect in our society—the presumption that while the environment may have an amenity value, there's little recognition of its importance to our health and well-being."

During the next two days, panel members discussed Lyme Disease and West Nile virus, the looming garbage crisis and our troubled commercial fisheries. Regional Environmental Protection Agency officials appeared before one group. Other panels looked at disease clusters, global warming, new trends in environmental law and new chemical contaminants that are causing concerns.

In a lunchtime talk, Robert H. Boyle, a *Sports Illustrated* columnist and founder of the national riverkeeper movement who broke the story on PCB contamination of the Hudson River, lamented the fact that *SI* has become "pretty much a jock magazine" and doesn't cover outdoors issues anymore.

He complained of a general dumbing down of a great many news organizations. It comes from editors and bean counters, he said, who are trying to appeal to "people 28 to 36 with big incomes who basically want to see nude people on TV. There is very little serious journalism anymore."

Late Saturday morning, conference-goers boarded buses for trips to Ground Zero (see story below), a tour of fishing issues on the Jersey shore or visits to new "green" buildings in Manhattan.

Peter Lord is a reporter at the Providence Journal in Rhode Island and serves on the SEJ board of directors.



The air down there

Workers continue cleanup at WTC Ground Zero

By TODD BATES

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www.poynter.org

Near Ground Zero, where the World Trade Center collapsed into a horrific heap on Sept. 11, as many as 6,000 cleanup workers a day enter a huge white tent that, from the outside, resembles an indoor tennis or soccer center.

The tent, which contains a 31,000-square-foot indoor wash station, has areas for workers to wash their boots and respirators. High-efficiency vacuums are on hand to suck dust from





workers' clothing, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Outside the wash station, an asbestos air monitor is attached to a pole. An EPA mobile lab for analyzing air samples is nearby. Other EPA monitors in New York City record the air quality, and the trend has "consistently improved over time," said Bonnie Bellow, communications director for the EPA's Region 2 office in New York City.

Environmental journalists and others took an EPA-hosted tour of the wash station area on Jan. 19 and caught a street-level glimpse of Ground Zero. They also discussed health and environmental issues with a panel of EPA officials and others and met another panel that focused on proposals for rebuilding the area on a more human scale, incorporating elements of the natural world.

The tour was part of a Society of Environmental Journalists' regional conference on Jan. 18-19 in Piscataway, N.J.

As in many environmental issues, the debate over the health and environmental risks linked to the WTC site and the enormous cloud of asbestos-tainted dust and pollutants created when the towers collapsed could last for years, even decades.

It takes about 15 to 40 years to see some health effects tied to asbestos, including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma, a deadly cancer of the lining of the chest or abdomen, according to experts.

More than 4,000 WTC rescue workers have suffered from "World Trade Center cough,"—a persistent cough—and respiratory problems, according to news reports.

Dan Fagin, environment writer for *Newsday* in Melville, N.Y., said it was difficult to get information from public officials shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks.

The EPA's situation was understandably "chaotic," said

AIR QUALITY DATA

Environmental monitoring data collected after the World Trade Center disaster are available at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 2 library at 290 Broadway in lower Manhattan, according to an EPA statement.

The agency says it began its monitoring efforts on Sept. 11, shortly after the terrorist attacks happened.

Since then, the EPA has done extensive sampling and analysis of air quality and dust throughout lower Manhattan and other potentially affected areas, including Brooklyn, Staten Island and northern New Jersey, according to the EPA. The EPA has also collected data on drinking water, river water and sediments.

Data are updated Monday through Friday and are available in the library, which is on the 16th Floor at 290 Broadway. The library is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Fridays.

Air monitors (in plastic bags) have been set up by EPA to track hazardous substances in the air.



Photo by DALE WILMAN

A specially-constructed wash tent at Ground Zero has cleaning stations to remove any possible contamination.

Fagin, who has written a handful of stories about air quality, odors and environmental problems associated with the WTC site.

EPA Region 2 staffers had to evacuate their 290 Broadway offices in lower Manhattan.

At first, EPA officials could be reached only by cell phone most of the time, said Fagin, first vice president and program chair of the Society of Environmental Journalists.

The EPA was also "frankly too slow to put up information" on its Web site, he said during an interview at the environmental journalists' conference.

"They certainly could have handled it better," Fagin said. "There's no doubt about it. The degree to which they're culpable for getting out information" is debatable.

Since then, according to Fagin, "the real so-called controversy about air quality in the region has really come from non-governmental sources doing their own air monitoring, and it's become very difficult to sort out how legitimate some of these claims are.... It's just been very hard to assess the credibility of various sources."

Bellow, the EPA spokeswoman, said the agency posted asbestos data on its Web site on Sept. 26, followed by a press release and fact sheet that summarized much of the data to date. On Oct. 3, the agency began posting daily summaries of data dating back to Oct. 1, she said.

"I was on the phone with reporters starting at 8:30 (a.m.) Sept. 12, myself and my staff, and ... in September we issued a series of press releases," she said in an interview several days after the journalists' tour.

EPA officials also went to a "whole series of public meetings" attended by thousands of people, she said.

(Continued on page 12)



Urban environmental issues a focus of 12th annual conference

By **TIM WHEELER**

Psst! Want the real scoop? Get yourself to Baltimore this fall for the inside skinny on how environmental issues could tilt the balance of power in Washington.

Get the lowdown, too, on whether there's any justice left in the push for "environmental justice." Visit the front-lines of the struggle to save America's largest estuary. And take a searing look at the taboos of environmental reporting—why some really important stories get so little ink and air-time.

Those are just some of the many topics you can't afford to miss out on when the Society of Environmental Journalists holds its 12th annual conference in Baltimore Oct. 9 to 13. Sponsored by the 13-campus University System of Maryland, the meeting will be based at the Wyndham Hotel downtown, just a five-minute walk from the city's glitzy Inner Harbor.

Urban environmental issues and their impacts on minority communities will be a focus of the four-day meeting. Tours and panels will examine the scourge of childhood lead poisoning, the promise and problems of brown-fields redevelopment and the future of "environmental justice" in the wake of unfavorable court rulings.

A first for Baltimore—and something destined to become an annual tradition—will be the announcement of the SEJ's first annual environmental journalism award winners. Come find out who's the toast of the profession (and who's buying drinks for the rest of the week!)

The tours on Thursday and on Saturday will offer conference-goers a variety of destinations as rich as the mid-Atlantic region. With the Chesapeake Bay practically at the meeting's doorstep, there will be multiple opportunities to get out on, alongside, or in the water.

Board boats to see watermen harvesting oysters by hand, as they've done for centuries, and hear how imported Asian shellfish have ravaged—and may yet revive—the bay's seafood industry.

Or, cruise Baltimore's harbor and witness efforts to reclaim the once heavily industrialized waterfront, then trawl for fish and crabs within sight of skyscrapers and learn about environmental threats lurking in the hulls of cargo ships that routinely call there.

The conference also will take advantage of Baltimore's proximity to Washington, D.C. A tour will track efforts to restore the Anacostia, a tributary of the nation's river, the Potomac, as it flows from the sprawling suburbs through some of the capital's poorest inner-city neighborhoods.

Yet another tour will provide a close-up look at the environmental impacts of the Bush administration's emphasis on energy production, visiting power plants that hug the bay's shores.

With a heavy military presence in the region, a tour is planned to visit Aberdeen Proving Ground, at once one of the nation's most contaminated military bases and one of the region's largest wildlife refuges, increasingly hemmed in by suburban sprawl. Attendees can witness the Army's destruction of its aging chemical-weapons stockpile there and novel attempts to clean up a bayshore Superfund site littered with unexploded ordnance.

Another destination will be the federal government's leading agricultural research laboratory, where scientists will report

on innovative farm runoff controls and the potential impacts to humans and wildlife of the widespread use of hormones and antibiotics in livestock.

Finally, members can make a pilgrimage to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center where Rachel Carson worked and get an update on how captive breeding there is helping to restore depleted flights of migratory whooping cranes.

There'll also be mini-tours galore, from the serious to the scenic. Visit the University of Maryland's marine biotechnology lab, where scientists are working to unlock the mysteries of blue crab spawning to help restore one of the bay's most cherished fisheries. Find out why lead poisoning continues to plague inner-city neighborhoods. Hike or bike a rail trail along a heavily wooded stream through suburbia. Or kayak the Inner Harbor.

The conference will feature two plenary sessions. The first will probe the "taboos" of environmental journalism—why there isn't more press coverage of the role that population growth and consumption play, for example, in generating pollution and destroying wildlife habitat.

The second plenary will examine the Bush Administration's environmental record and how it will affect—and be affected by—crucial mid-term congressional elections in November. Top administration officials and key lawmakers have been invited for what promises to be a spirited debate.

As in past SEJ conferences, panel discussions and workshops will be scheduled in "theme rooms," making it easier for attendees to track related topics.

"The Coast" will tackle fisheries disputes and the prospects for restoring bays like the Chesapeake, among other things. "The City" will examine environmental health issues like asthma and cancer clusters. "The Feds" will focus on energy and security, on recent landmark court cases and on the big ten environmental groups since 9/11. "The Land" will ask if "Smart Growth" is really curbing sprawl and explore the promise of ethnobotany among other topics.

"The Globe" will take a look at "dust storms" and long-range transport of particles, then analyze the environmental side-effects of our international trade agreements. Finally, "The Craft" will feature soul-searching on journalistic ethics, plus workshops on writing and more.

Tour-goers and late arrivals can knock the dust off at a welcome reception Thursday night, and on Friday night, SEJ members will get to eat and drink with the fishes at the National Aquarium, courtesy of the University System of Maryland.

On Sunday morning, conference-goers will get a chance to stroll in the woods, have brunch at the National Wildlife Visitor's Center and hear noted writers and scholars discuss Rachel Carson's legacy 40 years after "Silent Spring."

Watch your mailbox for more information and check out SEJ's Web site at www.sej.org for updates on the conference. Register early—it's cheaper and those tour seats go fast.

Tim Wheeler is environment editor at the Baltimore Sun and conference chair for SEJ's 12th annual conference.



About 'a plague of rats' and other journalism triumphs

By **GEORGE HOMSY**

After 13 years as an environment and science writer with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, **William Allen** has joined the staff of the Institutes for Journalism & Natural Resources. (IJNR's mission is to bolster environmental reporting through expedition style workshops.) Based in St. Louis, Allen expects to do a lot of traveling as IJNR's newsroom mentor, working on the ground to increase standards of environmental coverage. "I'll miss the satisfaction of reporting on the environment for a daily metro newspaper, but I see how I can reap the great satisfaction inherent in IJNR's mission."

Allen will also start freelancing and working on another book. His first, "Green Phoenix: Restoring the Tropical Forests of Guanacaste, Costa Rica" was published last spring by Oxford University Press. It focuses on the Guanacaste National Park Project, which Allen calls "a fascinating and important story from the front lines of the tropical conservation wars." He spent four months in the jungle reporting the story, including an eyeball-to-eyeball encounter with a jaguar and a near-fatal forest fire fight.

Allen Again. **Monica Allen**, unrelated to the aforementioned William, has undertaken a new kind of writing at *The Standard Times* in New Bedford, Mass. Allen now edits the editorial page. She says she will miss the environmental stories that took her into the field, into the woods and onto the water, but "I believe this will give me a chance to raise the profile of some environmental stories as well as other issues I care about such as education, race relations and economic growth." Interestingly, finding her new writing voice has not been the hardest part of the transition. Allen not only writes opinion, she has to lay it out—the whole editorial page! "I have learned Quark and pagination. I've avoided that for nearly two decades."

In naming **Dina Cappiello** New York State's Young Journalist of the Year, one judge commented that "she tells stories instead of preaching them." Cappiello's writing stood out from a field of 27 young reporters in the New York State Associated Press Association competition. Evidently, she has told a lot of good environmental stories since she joined the *Albany Times Union* in 1999. Her series on the Hudson River dredging controversy also won second place in the continuing coverage category of the NY AP Awards.

For the second year in a row, radio producer **Nancy Cohen** has won the Gracie Award from the Foundation of American Women In Radio and Television. At an awards dinner in May, Cohen will be recognized for a month-long Connecticut Public Radio series called "Day In, Day Out" about elders and chronic illness. In recognizing Cohen and her editor, John Dankosky, the foundation's executive director wrote, "Your entry displays superior quality and stellar portrayal of the changing roles and concerns of women." Through the stories of several people, Cohen tackled several complex senior issues including Alzheimer's, diabetes, the nursing shortage and health insurance.

While reporting the story, Cohen says she learned a lot

about growing old. "I met a lot of elders who, despite the frailty of old age, still embrace life in a joyful way." The series also won the first place "Excellence in Journalism" award for "radio in-depth" from the Society of Professional Journalists, Connecticut Chapter and a Media Award for Excellence in Communicating Issues Which Affect the Aging by the Connecticut Association of Not-for-profit Providers for the Aging. In addition to award-winning journalism, Cohen keeps busy passing her craft onto others. She teaches a broadcast writing class in the journalism department at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. And she instructs sonic artists, videographers and film students at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts about field recording, interviewing people and writing for the ear.

There's a new voice on public radio in Vermont. **John Dillon**, formerly the Sunday feature writer for the state's *Times Argus* and *Rutland Herald*, can now be heard as a reporter for Vermont Public Radio. "I've always been captivated by radio's ability to connect directly and immediately with the audience." Dillon will be focusing on business and environmental issues. So far, he has covered energy and public lands. The biggest change from the newspaper, he says, has been the need "to write very tight." Welcome to the airwaves.

After ten months of reporting, **David Wiwchar** uncovered some bad blood created by Canadian researchers. Wiwchar, managing editor and southern region reporter of Canada's oldest First Nations newspaper, *Ha-Shilth-Sa*, teamed up with CBC reporter **Michael Tymchuk** and discovered that blood, supposedly taken for an arthritis study of native people, was used without authorization for research in genetic anthropology. For his work, Wiwchar won Canadian Nurses Association 2001 Media Award for Excellence in Health Care Reporting, Canadian Ethnic Journalists' and Writers' Club 2001 Award for Investigative Newspaper Reporting. "The awards and accolades have been great," he says, "but the best part is that Canadian, American and United Nations leaders have been using the story as a case study as they work to protect Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from unethical genetic research practices."

Balancing profits and preservation, **Bryan Foster** writes about landowners who harvest timber profitably while maintaining the ecological integrity of their forests. In April, his book "Wild Logging: A Guide to Ecologically and Economically Sustainable Forestry" will be published by Mountain Press. It combines stories about Foster's visits with the landowners and technical information about managing forests sustainably. "I was astonished at how passionate many of these landowners are about their land. I have a photo of one landowner, gray-haired and flannel-shirted, putting his hands on the hips of his favorite maple and kissing it."

Also coming out of the forests with a book is associate member **Roger Stone**. He co-authored "Tropical Forests and the Human Spirit" for the University of California Press. The book highlights an important solution for protecting rainforests—

(Continued on next page)

Media on the Move



empowering local people. It includes case studies from the Philippines, Indonesia, India and Africa, as well as Central and South America. Stone is director of the Sustainable Development Institute in Washington, D.C.

In case anyone doubted it, journalism is not just about words on paper. **Libby Bassett** can attest to that. For her latest book, "Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action" Bassett was not only editor, but also the designer. In the book, contributors wrote about the interconnectedness of religion and the environment from the perspective of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, the Koran, Atharva and Reg Vedas, Lotus and Acaranga Sutra, Confucius, Mencius and Tao Te Ching. On her trusty MacIntosh computer, Bassett designed the book to look like a cross between a magazine and an art book. She reports that the book, published by the UNEP in September 2000, has sold almost 43,000 copies and she's hoping for a reprint.

A new book by **Yvonne Baskin** warns of alien invaders, but don't worry. In "A Plague of Rats and Rubbervines," Baskin's invaders are very terrestrial. Baskin examines how some plants and animals threaten human health, biodiversity and the international economy. Research took the dedicated freelancer on an island-hopping surveillance mission between Australia and Papua New Guinea; to an invasive tree clearing work in South Africa; and to an old zoo in Paris where explorers first brought yaks and other exotic animals in the 1860s. "After the travel, of course, I had to sit down at the computer for nine months and write!" The book will be published this May from Island Press/Shearwater Books.

After three years at TomPaine.com, executive editor **David Case** has accepted a Ford Fellowship from the International Center for Journalists. He will be traveling to Indonesia for three months to investigate deforestation and its impact on forest-dependent villagers and on endangered species like the orangutan and Asian tiger. He will work closely with local journalists to improve the quality of environmental reporting.

If you missed **Jacques Leslie's** article about freshwater scarcity in *Harper's*, don't panic. You can read it again in a compilation, *The Best American Science Writing 2001*. In writing the article "Running dry: what happens when the world no longer has enough freshwater," Leslie examines how water shortages impact people and in some places cause military tensions. He says that the world's first water war could spring up along the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates. "What surprised me most was the lack of attention this issue is receiving by people who ought to know better." The story appeared with 22 other works, including a John Updike poem, in the compilation that was released last fall. Leslie is expanding the work into a narrative non-fiction book for publishers Farrar, Straus & Giroux. It should be on bookshelves in the spring of 2004.

Every month, the *Washington Monthly* presents its Journalism Award to a reporter for a story that demonstrates a commitment to the public interest. One month last summer, it went to an environmental journalist, **Michael Hawthorne** of *The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch*, who wrote "Scotts: Beneath the Surface." In the two-part series, Hawthorne described how company practices cost five workers their lives and how negligence caused toxic chemicals to leak into a stream endangering public

health. (The company blamed the chemical leak on groundhogs burrowing into their unlined landfill.)

Editors, heed these words spoken by **Karl Blankenship**. "There is an audience for articles that deal with technically and scientifically complex subjects." As evidence, he holds up his monthly newspaper, the *Bay Journal*, which won the 2001 Excellence in Journalism Award from the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation. The monthly publication, from Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, circulates to 50,000 people with a goal of getting people interested in detailed information about Bay restoration efforts. The foundation cited the paper's "commitment to informing the public through accurate and scientifically based reporting on issues surrounding the Chesapeake Bay" and said it has been "extremely successful in covering technical and often complex issues in a very readable and understandable way."

Diane Jukofsky has been named an honorary member of Sigma Xi, The Scientific Research Society. Jukofsky edits *Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema* for the Rainforest Alliance. She is the first honoree chosen from a conservation organization and joins a select group that includes former Vice President Al Gore and television broadcaster Bill Kurtis.

Another associate member, **Barbara Tufty**, has picked up an award for her writing. The West Virginia Watershed Network has recognized the conservation editor of the Audubon Naturalist Society's *Naturalist News* for the "Homeowners' Packet: A Guide for Families Living Along a Waterway." The story provides brief and practical information on protecting and preserving waterways from deterioration.

For SEJournalists addicted to country music, **Janet Byron** did pen the 1996 book "The Country Music Lover's Guide to the U.S.A." The rest of us are cheering her new gig as managing editor of *California Agriculture* magazine published by the University of California. Byron orchestrates the peers, for the peer reviewed journal. She also oversees all science-based articles for the publication. Although she finds the subject "endlessly fascinating," Byron is especially excited to work on the magazine's redesign. That ain't gonna be no song.

Len Ackland's book is back. This May, the University of New Mexico Press will release an updated, paperback edition of "Making a Real Killing: Rocky Flats and the Nuclear West." First released in 1999, the book is a case study of nuclear-era issues, using the Rocky Flats facility as a case study. Ironically, Ackland, who directs the Center for Environmental Journalism at the University of Colorado at Boulder, says the end of the Cold War made his research even harder. "With the end of that bizarre conflict, and the mountains of secret records released under former Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary and others, the challenge was in locating and then going through records."

The 2002 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards for outstanding television and radio news include a number of environmental reports. KIRO-TV in Seattle won for an hour-long documentary titled "Why the Orcas of Puget Sound Are Dying." The judges commented that this one-hour documentary takes a well-known subject that is especially critical to the Seattle region and turns it into a splendid piece of journalism that is at once informative, affecting, urgent and thoughtful. "Also win-



ning was a team from KCBS-TV, Los Angeles, fronted by reporter **Randy Paige**, for reexamining children's health and lead paint in "Poison Paint," a five-part series that shows how kids get poisoned in schools and playgrounds. It led to school inspections and repairs, lead testing and state legislation. The judges ruled that "this series proves the value of reporting on new aspects of the leading environmental health threat to children." Two public television powerhouses, "Frontline" and "Nova," teamed up with producer **Jon Palfreman** to provide "a stunning, comprehensive look at genetically modified agriculture and its global consequences," according to duPont judges.

"Mind boggling" is how **Sara Thurin Rollin** describes her jump from journalism to public relations. The long time SEJ member, volunteer, board member, and—for a short time—SEJ programs manager, is now the director of media relations for Cargill, Inc, the Minneapolis-based grain and food company. Unfortunately, as well as leaving behind the warmth of Washington weather (where she reported for the Bureau of National Affairs), Rollin will have to trade her active SEJ membership for honorary, joining a small group of only six.

If you are an award winning reporter—bask in your glory. If you just finished a book—relish its release. If you've got a great new job—gloat about it. Send all professional news to George Homsy at ghomsy@rochester.rr.com or fax to him at (253) 322-5176.

From the president...(from page 2)

nalism community positions us well to secure funds to carry out our collective vision.

"It's like anything else," Russ says. "It's a tool and it's what people do with it. There are things we could do in streaming media—online conference broadcasts and so forth—if funding is available."

As for those annual conferences, I am pleased to report that the board has lined up three new and terrific locations through the year 2005.

Each will be in truly great American cities with unique stories all their own—places that will provide attendees with plenty of evening entertainment, and at the same time, offer outstanding opportunities for professional training and gaining deeper knowledge of critical environmental issues.

Everyone already should know that we will be in Baltimore this October, hosted by the University of Maryland System. The board made that decision some time ago.

What's new is where conferences will be in 2003, 2004 and 2005.

We're headed to the Big Easy—New Orleans—in 2003 thanks to a generous bid from host Loyola University. The dates: Sept. 11-14. Board member and *Times-Picayune* environment writer Mark Schleifstein was appointed conference co-chair along with SEJ member Bob Thomas of Loyola.

Bourbon Street and journalists. Now there's something scary.

We've also lined up 2005—the University of Texas at

"Least we forget" our English...

One of the announcers for the Sunday, Feb. 24, afternoon hockey game between Canada and the United States began a sentence with "Least we forget." Whatever he wanted us to remember lies buried under my surprise at this new bastardization of the language. That's one I've never heard.

I added it to my list of favorite bloopers:

Wrecking havoc: Actually, to wreck havoc is to wreak peace. Wrecking havoc is a double negative and means that the wrecker will put a stop to the havoc.

We don't wreak much in the 21st century: havoc, vengeance and iron, if you have the right equipment.

A few birds carry misnomers, namely *ruffed grouse* and *Canadian geese*. Please: ruffed grouse and Canada geese.

While you can put relish *on* something, you can't relish *in* something. You just relish it.

If you say you're going to go lay down, you've successfully broken the time continuum by finishing something that hasn't yet happened. You can *lie* down tonight. If you mention it tomorrow, say you *lay* down last night. If you feel guilty about always getting this wrong, you can *lay* your guilt down anytime—because that's a different word. It means *to place*. So you lay down last night, and will lie down tonight, but chickens can lay whenever they have the urge, and that's no lie.

And by the way, if there is only one R in familiar, why do I hear newcasters often say "fermiliar"? —Chris Rigel

Austin. UT also submitted a very generous bid for 2003, but agreed to host us two years later. We're working out the final details, including dates and hotel arrangements.

All I can say is that SEJ is finally messing with Texas. And I hope that Nanci Griffith is playing in town when we're there.

It appears SEJ, based in Pennsylvania since the beginning in 1990, will be coming home in 2004.

The board in January unanimously passed a resolution of support and encouragement to complete an agreement between Carnegie Mellon University and SEJ and instructed Beth Parke to work with CMU staff and SEJ member Don Hopey at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*—SEJ's prospective conference chair—to iron out the details.

I expect a decision in April, following a site visit.

So there you have it. The state of SEJ is strong. It's strong because of who we are, what we do, our mission and vision.

It's strong because as journalists we know what tools we need to help us do our jobs, such as the SEJ Web page, and we work to develop them.

And it's strong because we have many friends and partners, including those universities who understand our mission and vision and genuinely seek to help us carry it out by hosting our annual conferences.

James Bruggers covers environmental topics for the Louisville Courier-Journal. Contact him at (502) 582-4645.

Checking federal OMB pays story dividends

By **SETH BORENSTEIN**

The journalism edict “follow the money” goes only halfway. Reporters who cover environment during the Bush administration should follow the people who follow the money.

This is the time of year in Washington—budget time—when many eyes are turned toward the government’s all-powerful accountant: the Office of Management and Budget (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/>), because OMB reigns over agencies’ requests for funding.

But the power of OMB goes beyond the federal checkbook. Inside OMB is the often-overlooked Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/regpol.html>). It has the power to stop, alter or—now in the Bush administration—request changes in any federal regulation.

“They almost have their own form of pocket veto,” said Jeremy Symons, a former EPA climate policy adviser in both the Clinton and the second Bush administrations.

“With any environmental regulation you know you’re going to have to feed the beast of OMB,” Symons said. “In general, they’re not a big fan of aggressive regulation. Even in the Clinton White House, it was a difficult hurdle for any regulatory process that I participated in.”

But that’s nothing compared to the Bush administration, according to environmental groups and conservative anti-regulation advocates.

“Everybody within the administration and without pays attention to who’s in OMB and what their thinking is on an issue,” Symons said.

The boss of OIRA is John Graham (<http://www.hcra.harvard.edu/nomination/bio.html>), the controversial former director of the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis (<http://www.hcra.harvard.edu/>). With industry funding, Graham attacked many environmental and labor regulations using cost-benefit analyses.



ty and environmental policy. He is smart, he has depth, and he is rigorous in his thinking.” Reilly said Graham would ensure that “our nation’s health and environmental laws are as effective and as efficient as they can be.”

Risk analyses are central to Graham’s thinking. In a January speech to European regulators (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/eu_speech.html), he said:

“If precaution is taken to an extreme, it can be very harmful to technological innovation. Consider the following thought experiment: Imagine it is 1850 and a decision is made that any technological innovation cannot be adopted unless and until it is proven to be completely safe by the proponents of the innovation.

Under this scenario, what would have happened to electricity, the internal combustion engine, plastics, pharmaceuticals, the computer, the Internet, the cellular phone and so forth?”

As this is being written, OIRA is reviewing four EPA regulations about effluent from meatpacking operations, cooling

towers at power plants, cathode ray tubes and, most crucially, sulfur dioxide and the regional haze rule.

“OIRA is a branch of the government that relatively few people know about,” said Clean Air Trust Executive Director Frank O’Donnell, a former television and magazine journalist. “It has enormous influence in shaping health and safety regulations.”

O’Donnell decries OIRA’s “unfortunate power of converting rules that ought to be about health and environment into rules that are primarily about how much has to be spent to achieve them.”

And Frank Maisano, a public relations representative with Potomac Communications who has represented coal companies, the nuclear industry, and the Business Roundtable, agrees.

“They will drive many of the policies—and the justification for the policies—that will involve not only food, safety, environment, stuff like that, but also the money spent on that,” Maisano said. “It’s easy to ignore. It’s the workings of government.”

Ignore it at your peril, though. Under Graham, OIRA has grabbed more power than ever. Instead of waiting for federal agencies to submit new regulations for review, OIRA has also been singling out existing regulations for overhaul. (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/prompt_letter.html)

Late last year, Graham sent EPA Administrator Christie Todd Whitman a so-called “prompt letter” asking her to review the \$69 million EPA spends researching particulates in air pollution, a hot issue. He suggested EPA dovetail with a study by Electric Power Research Institute, a utility-funded group, to determine which particulates are more toxic than others, instead of saying they are all equally toxic. (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/epa_pm_research_prompt120401.html)

Another sign of aggressive regulatory reform comes from a December document Graham sent to Congress essentially listing regulations that need to be ditched or changed (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/costbenefitreport.pdf>).

(Continued on page 12)

“With any environmental regulation you know you’re going to have to feed the beast of OMB.”

—Jeremy Symons

Former EPA climate policy advisor

Graham’s 61-37 confirmation by the Senate last summer prompted Public Citizen to charge that the administration’s “anti-regulatory agenda gives corporations a blank check to delay, block and gut health and safety standards.”

But former EPA Administrator William Reilly hailed Graham in a letter supporting the nomination: “John has been a consistent champion for a risk-based approach to health, safe-

Libraries offer handy, new reference help

By DEBRA A. SCHWARTZ

Researching a story that seems as complicated as an M.C. Escher drawing? Reach out and touch a new library service that's available whenever you have a question.

To compete with online "ask it" services like Ask Jeeves, public and academic libraries throughout the country are beginning to offer instant message librarians 24-hours a day, seven days a week. No library card needed, no citizenship required.

"This is a very big area of new technological advance in libraries. A lot of libraries and a lot of networks are actually working very hard on doing this now," said Eleanor Block, associate professor of university libraries and head of the journalism library at The Ohio State University in Columbus.

The University of Buffalo was among the first to offer library assistance via instant messaging. But, last June, the Cleveland Public Library went one better and introduced non-stop online reference help. Whether it's the middle of the night or the middle of the day, you'll get a live person at the library to answer your questions as part of the library's "Know It Now" project, according to Larra Clark, press officer for the American Library Association.

The Education, Human Ecology and Social Work Library at The Ohio State University offers an instant message librarian between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. To tap that resource, go to www.lib.ohio-state.edu/ehsweb.

There's also the Virtual Reference Desk, where reporters—or anyone—can "chat privately with an experienced reference staff member regarding your information needs." This instant message reference desk is never unattended. Hosted by the Alliance Library System and staffed by librarians from eight Illinois colleges and universities, it is accessible at www.alliancelibrarysystem.com/Projects/ReadyRef/index.html.

A beginning list of libraries offering instant message librarians 24/7 is located at <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~CYBERSTACKS/LiveRef.htm>. The 15-page directory is categorized by type of library: academic and research (including Cornell, University of California-Davis, and some schools in Canada); government (including the U.S. Department of Energy); public (including libraries in Europe); special libraries; and a category for "other" reference sources, including the Collaborative Digital Reference Service (Library of Congress). The site also includes references for setting up a system for offering instant message librarians.

According to the Public Library Association's Tech Notes (www.pla.org/publications/technotes/technotes_ereference.html), "the mother of all online reference is the Internet Public Library," which is accessible at <http://www.ipl.org/ref/>. However, because the library is staffed by volunteers, it takes at least three days to get a response to an e-mail query.

Greg Langlois, reporting for *Federal Computer Week*, wrote in July that, "the idea for an around-the-clock reference service was hatched during a 1998 [Library of Congress] conference addressing the impact of digital information on the library profession. ... Librarians wanted to find a way to remain relevant in the world of Internet-based 'ask it' services, such as

Ask Jeeves. The goal behind 24/7 instant message librarians is to give people more accurate answers than they might get from online 'ask it' services," he reported.

Many libraries, both academic and public, made services available electronically via e-mail a while ago. Although the service was convenient, its slow response time prohibited reporters from tapping libraries on deadline. Libraries staffed only during business hours or "owl service" that is, extended hours for call-in or e-mail questions, usually available only until midnight offered no help to the night desk.

Instant message librarians break that convention. And some librarians offering reference e-mail service offer fast, if not immediate service.

"Ask a Librarian" services like the one Block responds to on The Ohio State University's journalism library site at <http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/jouweb/> is less than immediate, but still timely. Block monitors her e-mail constantly during business hours on deadline and also responds during off-hours.

"If somebody asks a question, the next time I turn on my e-mail, there it is," Block explained. That could be 4 a.m., she said. Block anticipates instant messaging is coming soon to the journalism library at The Ohio State University.

That journalism library is the best one to tap for the latest international research about communicating environmental topics, particularly in the academic realm. Although not a science library, it's the only library in the country that subscribes to every communication journal in the world, Block said.

Instant messaging is the kind of hot reference service especially useful for reporters with limited library resources, whether freelance or on staff, said SEJ member Dolores Jenkins, who is director of collection management for the University of Florida's journalism library. She explained, "The *Gainesville Sun* here is owned by *The New York Times*, but they

Libraries wanted to find a way to remain relevant in the world of Internet-based 'ask it' services such as Ask Jeeves. The goal behind 24/7 instant message librarians is to give people more accurate answers than they might get from online 'ask it' services.

(Continued on next page)

Ground Zero...from page 5)



Photo by DALE WILLMAN

Workers at Ground Zero must wash themselves and their equipment after leaving the site for the day.

Workers at Ground Zero must wash themselves and their equipment after leaving the site for the day, said Meyer, a former reporter for *The Jersey Journal*, Jersey City, who went on the Ground Zero tour.

But the information in the library is not as easy to understand, he said.

During a panel discussion at the environmental journalists'

"The Web site was not the only mechanism that we used for getting information out," Bellow said. "Right from the beginning, we were getting information out to reporters daily as well as to the other response agencies."

Greg Meyer, who is seeking a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, said he's working on a magazine-length piece that will focus mostly on the environmental politics of addressing the risks related to the World Trade Center collapse.

The EPA's library at 290 Broadway has more World Trade Center-related information than what's posted on the

agency's Web site, said Meyer, a former reporter for *The Jersey Journal*, Jersey City, who went on the Ground Zero tour.

But the information in the library is not as easy to understand, he said.

During a panel discussion at the environmental journalists'

conference titled "What Now? Environmental Journalism After the Attack," Kathrin Day Lassila, editor of *OnEarth* magazine, said, "The lung story at Ground Zero ... has been a sleeper, but it's getting bigger and bigger."

Paul Brodeur, a former staff writer for *The New Yorker*, said 300 to 400 tons of friable asbestos were in the World Trade Center's north tower.

Buildings in lower Manhattan with air intakes that were not shut down after the tower's collapse were contaminated with asbestos, which lodged between the ceiling and the next floor because that's where the air intakes are located, he said.

"Follow the money trail," said Brodeur, who has done ground-breaking environmental reporting on the human health effects of asbestos and other topics.

"This is a really big story and the government reaction to it is... bigger," he said. "It's either obfuscation or denial."

Dr. Philip J. Landrigan, chairman of the Department of Community and Preventive Medicine at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City, accompanied journalists on their tour.

"I think there's a general distrust of government since Watergate, but I think (EPA officials have) worked extremely hard to get the data out," said Landrigan, an internationally known scientist.

Todd Bates is a reporter at the Asbury Park Press.

Federal OMB...from page 10)

Included was the arsenic in drinking water limit of 10 parts per billion that the Bush administration had just finally conceded. When I called OMB about that, they explained the arsenic rule target was a leftover from earlier work and they were in agreement, now, with EPA's ultimate decision to keep the tighter Clinton standard.

One tool for watching OMB is a liberal group called OMB Watch (<http://www.ombwatch.org/>). They have an axe to grind, naturally, but they pay more attention to OMB than anyone else.

Graham's OIRA is quite open about posting its inner workings and documents on its Web site—more so than the Clinton-era OIRA. I personally made a New Year's resolution

to check in on the agency's extremely Web-accessible machinations twice a week.

"He's really making an effort at making the regulatory effort more transparent," OMB spokeswoman Jennifer Wood said. And she added that Graham is open to explaining his policies to reporters.

Seth Borenstein covers environment, homeland security, science, health, bioterrorism, disasters and aviation for Knight Ridder Newspapers and every day comes to work worried that something else will be added to his beat.

Libraries...from page 11)

don't give them much in the way of support.

"This paper is in a vacuum. *The New York Times* doesn't give it the resources that it would give another paper because it doesn't have advertising competition. So *The New York Times* gives more support to the *Ocala Star-Banner* than to *The Gainesville Sun*, and comparable situations around the state," Block said.

So Block encourages them to use the journalism library rather than other "ask it" services to get more focused and in-depth leads, details, and interviewees.

Both instant message librarians and e-mail librarians are limited to references only. Librarians stressed the need to continue coming into the library to use its resources, but empha-

sized they were happy to provide leads.

Creating timely electronic reference services may make libraries more relevant to students, who may still think of them only as repositories for dusty books, said Chris Sterling, professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University.

Libraries, then, may soon be thought of as more than a building, Sterling added.

Debra Schwartz covers the environment, science and writes features from the Washington, D.C., area, where she is a journalism doctoral student at the University of Maryland-College Park.

How to sell your story

The heart of things...(from page 1)

that, if unchecked, spell: o-b-f-u-s-c-a-t-i-o-n. Or at least a terrible tyranny.

The simple, brutal measure of journalistic authority is to master the vocabularies and then abandon them for clear expression. There's the rub. It's hard to do.

Mastering a vocabulary is to think in it as the scientist would. Telling the story, however, is to communicate powerfully about the scientist's world without mimicking it. It means standing back, disengaging, looking for context and perspective. It means asking, at every turn, "so what?"

I work with a team of authoritative journalists, all masters of their beat vocabularies and all willing to abandon the lingo for straightforward storytelling. But that doesn't mean we go without struggle or always succeed.

A story—its news value, its form, its style, its placement in the newspaper—can't find birth without editor and reporter having a purposeful conversation from the same lexicon. In this sense, the editor is more a reader than specialist, even though I have my own crib sheet to the lingo of forestry, fish recovery, epidemiology and other specialties. But plainly, as an editor, I am unable to judge news value if I do not understand the broader significance of the story. And that, unless I am specifically asked to help identify news value, is up to the reporter to announce and argue.

Jonathan Brinckman is a masterful journalist covering fish and rivers for *The Oregonian's* Environment & Science Team. His stories and projects have led the public and official conversation on, among other things, the Pacific Northwest's \$5 billion salmon recovery effort, the nation's largest wildlife stewardship. His training in biological science at Yale richly complements his consistent journalistic rigor.

Jonathan thinks and processes complexity at 85 mph (among my nicknames for him is "Cray"). But just as I am deficient at times in connecting the dots ahead-of-the-curve, Jonathan sometimes starts a story conversation in the middle:

THEY'VE PUT SOME LANGUAGE IN THE DRAFT BIOP THAT UPENDS THE SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS.

Whoa! I'm unable to rush

into the 3 o'clock news meeting and advocate for Page One play on this purported news break. Sorry: I don't get it.

The conversation quickly goes into reverse, with me leaping on words and Jonathan supplying the annotation. Of course, this makes for a lurching chat in which the bulked-up sentence must be restated, by me or by Jonathan, so as to reveal the subject. Meaning will come later.

Five minutes into this process, deadline approaching, we're parsing the opening declaration: THE NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S TOP SALMON AGENCY, DECLARES THAT COLUMBIA RIVER CHANNEL-DEEPENING CAN PROCEED EVEN THOUGH IT WOULD DAMAGE SALMON-REARING GROUNDS.

Five more minutes in, we're honing in on the story: THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WANTS TO PROCEED WITH CHANNEL-DEEPENING OVER THE OBJECTION OF SCIENTISTS WHO FEAR SALMON'S DECLINE.

But we still haven't found the broader context, which turns on—so what?

In five more minutes we're establishing the significance: THE REGION'S ECONOMY DEPENDS ON NAVIGABLE

(Continued next page)



Photo courtesy of The Oregonian

Len Reed (right) and Jonathan Brinckman collaborating at *The Oregonian*.

RIVERS AND A WORKING PORT, ASSURED BY CHAN-
NEL-DEEPENING EVEN IF SALMON TAKE A HIT.

Or, more simply yet, FISH TAKE SECOND.

I get it. Let's put it on Page One.

Jonathan and I now joke about our reverse conversations. That he's far brighter than the rest of us, however, does not exempt him from the burden of making a case: quickly, clearly, purposefully.

Three years ago, I designed for Jonathan, with his permission, the Black Box. It's a crude tool, really: a sequence of reporting steps designed to help Jonathan shape an unruly information load, bleach it of jargon, sort it by theme, and make decisions about significance—all before approaching me or another editor to pitch a story.

The goal was to help Jonathan clarify his best journalistic purposes while ensuring an effective discussion with me or any other editor—a key exchange that never would “hit the wall” of editor ennui (and the story with it). Without the right reporter-editor communication system in place, even the best environment stories are at risk of lousy play, house indifference or, worse, death.

My self-interest, of course, was plain. I wanted to simplify my life by limiting my many reporter discussions every day to those that were about something I could grasp and properly place within the larger news mix of *The Oregonian*. It would help me be a better advocate for environment and science stories of significance. Truth is, I hate underplayed environment and science stories more than their authors do.

Jonathan keeps the Black Box next to his computer for quick reference (see accompanying chart). He professes to use it.

I know this much: Our story conferences are clearer, more enjoyable—and always effective.

The discipline of the Black Box appears also to make Jonathan's writing task easier, as the story's component parts are named and discussed well before the typing begins.

And I am able to advo-

cate more effectively for Jonathan's stories because I know what they will be and represent—not just to the stakeholders within the story but to readers who may not give a rip about helping fish get by.

One odd and serendipitous consequence of employing the Black Box is its use now as a compound verb. It's become our team's best codespeak. If a story conversation should meander and persistently drift from center, all that's needed is the question: “Have you Black-Boxed this?”

Whether noun or verb, the Black Box is quite simple. Think of it as a way of formalizing or naming, a story-building process.

Since everyone has his or her own process, however, the Black Box is not generic but highly individualized. What works for Jonathan may be of little help to others; I know his Black Box (subtitled “Story Map: A Route to Clarity and Depth”) would be unsuitable for certain others on my team who join me in having quite different needs.

It's yours for the tailoring. If you draw one up, consider those editor-reporter engagements in which you have difficulty landing your story in the right place at the right volume at the right time.

Isolating those soft spots in your process—in our case, the opening chapter of story discussions, grasping about for a center—allows you to structure the engagements for the right result.

Len Reed is leader of The Oregonian's Environment & Science Team. Contact him at lenreed@news.oregonian.com or (503) 294-7667.

I. Reporting Phase

Gather

Search

Ask

Interview

Sort

II. Black Box Phase

What is this information?

What does it mean?

What does it signify?

What is the headline?

What is the lead?

What is its context—with what does it connect?

So what?

Who cares?

How can you quickly tell it to the clueless and make it count?

III. Editor Phase

Succinctly tell your editor what your story says.

Tell your editor the headline that captures your story.

Be prepared to defend your thinking.

IV. Writing Phase

You've got a lead; now order a sequence in the telling: organize.

Write quickly, staying on track—you can go back and tweak.

As you write, periodically ask yourself: Who cares?

As you write, periodically frighten yourself: the audience is leaving.

When you finish, go back and ruthlessly cut words and sentences.

Before last reading, say “no one cares”; let the story change your mind.

How to sell your story

Blank looks... (from page 1)

time, and at the end everyone may feel frustrated. The reporter can't believe the editor needs such an introductory lesson on the topic; the editor can't believe he or she had to cut through so much verbiage before getting to the heart of the story.

The bottom line is editors not only need to hear the news elements of a story but also the story's significance. Editors can help you find those things for the asking. But if you're actually pitching a story, that's different—the bar is higher. And if a science and environment reporter doesn't know what the form of the story really is before pitching it, that can mean trouble.

The list of black-box questions Len drafted has been useful. The best:

“So what?”

“Who cares?”

“How can you quickly tell it to the clueless and make it count?”

I always knew good reporters needed to answer those questions before they filed their stories. I've learned at *The Oregonian* that reporters need to have those questions answered before pitching stories in a competitive news environment.

I figure it this way: I owe it to my story, above everything, to do this.

But what to do when you know you've got a good story, but you haven't quite figured it out? Your editor may well have

time for a long and complex discussion about your findings, story possibilities and what it all means. But he or she may not; news and deadlines sometimes do not allow for it.

Always know the story well enough to estimate its headline, and carry that headline in your back pocket—you might be dead without it.

This is one of the hardest parts of being a journalist: In a tight spot, what works for me is trusting my instincts and winging it, right up till deadline. If you've been cogitating about the story for a bit, however, you'd be surprised how clearly its significance can come out when forced.

There's an adage: “There is nothing like the prospect of hanging to focus a man's mind.”

Another point: Science and environment journalists do need to know the arcane lingo of their specialties. But I've learned that it's a mistake to use that lingo when talking with sources. Our first job is to translate from the world of specialists to the world of intelligent generalists. Forcing specialists to talk in the language of generalists is a useful tool toward that end.

Jonathan Brinckman is The Oregonian's fish and rivers reporter and member of the newspaper's Environment & Science Team.

How to sell your story

Writing about home: Learning about place can make stories come alive

By MICHAEL MANSUR

On a fall day in 1996, I was driving around Kansas City, my home, during a most unusual event. It was snowing to beat the band.

Snow isn't unusual here. But a heavy snow in October, when trees generally still have their leaves, is quite rare. The result was beauty and devastation.

Trees were doubled over with the weight of the new fallen snow. Many pine looked a bit like Southern Belles dressed up for the ball, big white hoop skirts of snow touching the ground. But many trees buckled under the weight and limbs fell on rooftops, cars, power lines and lawns, often with some very harmful effects. Soon, most of the city would be out of power, a situation that would stretch for days and keep me busy covering the story.

But during those first few hours of the storm I marveled at the beauty and the unusual scene. I called in a feed. Among my words were these: Tree limbs littered some yards like clippings on a busy barbershop floor.

When I filed a great deal of description, the editor who took the dictation, said, “Wow, this is great. We don't have anything like this.”

I had been inspired by an SEJ conference session on writing by Jeff Klinkenberg, one of America's finest feature writers who works at *The St. Petersburg Times* in Florida. In fact, I had been listening to a tape of the session as I reported and collected thoughts in my car on the devastating storm.

I was jazzed about my filing. But the next morning—reading the newspaper by candlelight—none of my description was there. The more typical pushed it out—the utility reports, the cars crushed, the homes speared by toppled trees.

Soon I was in the office leading the effort to collect more of that. How many were out of power? Why was it taking so long to restore them? I did that for several days. And the description...well it just went to some spot in my brain.

I should tell you more about Klinkenberg and what about his words inspired me. To get an even clearer picture of what he means, you should check his book: “Dispatches from the Land of Flowers,” published by Down Home Press in Asheboro, N.C.

At SEJ's 1996 conference in St. Louis, Klinkenberg distributed a handout on “Writing About Place.” Today, when I talk about writing, I like to call it “Writing About Home,” but my thoughts are greatly influenced by Klinkenberg's points at the St. Louis conference.

Here's a few:

Of the so-called Five W's of journalism, the Who, What, When, Why get quite a bit of attention. But the Where is largely unexplored. (My filing after his talk certainly seemed to prove that point.)

What's more, Klinkenberg explained, the nation's best non-fiction writers—those who've elevated their work to literature, such as Twain, Annie Dillard, Peter Matthiessen, John McPhee

(Continued next page)

and William Least Heat-Moon—are masters of place. They know the place about which they're writing and they weave it brilliantly into their stories. Why don't newspaper or TV journalists attempt the same?

He has some suggestions:

- Be there.

Too often, we cover stories over the phone. But by actually going into the field, seeing what's there and talking to the people affected or moved by this place or the story often makes the typical into something compelling.

- Ask "What's that?"

Unfortunately, too few of us know our own environment, our home. Most Americans don't even know what kind of trees are in their own yard. So go out with someone knowledgeable and don't be afraid to ask: "What's that?" Naturally, many of those attracted to reading such detail will be people who know the flora and fauna of your place, so be sure to get it right.

- Learn your home, your community.

Explore the natural and human history. Read the books about your place. Go to the museums. Klinkenberg has made a career of revealing Florida to the *Times'* readers.

- Develop an eye and find telling details.

Go into a room or your own backyard and look around. Then close your eyes and think about what you saw. Then check how well you did. Most will find that they missed a lot. Your eyes have to be taught to check the room like a good copy editor goes over copy—nothing is missed.

And the details you use in your story must reveal something. If it's hot, don't tell us it's hot or that the

heat is oppressive. Show us how hot it is. Write that it's so hot that workers knelt under palm trees, shirts drenched in sweat, and sipped water from a garden hose.

- Go into the field with a good story subject.

When you do this you can often find a character who reveals the place. Often the place reveals that character, as well. When you find a great character don't be afraid to quote him or her extensively.

Klinkenberg recounted a story he had done on Totch Brown, then 73, who had grown up in the Everglades when it was a wild frontier. Brown took Klinkenberg to an island in a national park known as "The Watson Place," which Peter Matthiessen had written about in his novel "Killing Mister Watson."

Klinkenberg wrote:

"It happened in 1910," Totch says. "Three bodies come a-floatin' down the river. The people in Chokoloskee, they knew Watson done it. So one day they hear him comin'—you could hear his boat motor a long way off—and they get ready.

"They say, 'Watson, the killin' has got to stop. Give up your arms.' Watson says wait a minute—he didn't kill those people,

but he knows who done it. He says he'll bring the killer in.

"A while later, Watson comes back to Chokoloskee. The men in town are waitin' for him on the dock. Watson, he's got a hat with a hole in it in one hand, and his shotgun in the other, when he steps on the dock. Watson says, 'He wouldn't come. I had to kill him.' The men say, 'Watson, that ain't good enough. Give up your arms.'

"Well, he pretends like he's throwin' his shotgun down, but then swings it up on the people on the dock and pulls the triggers for both barrels. The gun pops—shells was made of paper back then and they had got all wet. So Watson reaches for his .38. A man shoots a hole in him. Then everybody else opens up. They say there was 38 bullets in him when it was over.

"My mother seen it from the beach that day. She was 17."

Who wouldn't want to read on with Totch Brown?

By the way, some may wonder about how you capture such long quotes. Most newspaper reporters aren't used to capturing so much from one person. I've commonly used a tape recorder on trips into the field. In such settings, I find that it doesn't inhibit most people and, often, it's the only way I can capture it all, especially if we're hiking or rowing and I can't scribble it all down.

Others, I've seen, have incredible memories and can quickly reconstruct entire conversations. I've seen it done and the subject says it perfectly captured the moment. But I rely on the recorder.

- Ask people about their "sacred" places. In his handout, Klinkenberg explained that finding these sacred spots could be as simple as asking someone to give you a tour of their home.

To illustrate, he cited an ending to a story by Chip Scanlan, a former *St. Petersburg Times* reporter, who had asked a woman to look around the house. Her husband had died from lung cancer.

Scanlan wrote:

"It feels like one big nightmare," she says. "Maybe I will wake up, and he will be in bed with me. But I know it's not going to be so. Would you believe it? I take his after shave lotion and spray it on his pillow just so I can smell him. Just the smell of it makes me feel like he's with me."

So you can see why I was inspired, listening to Klinkenberg in my car, while this unusual scene of an October snow just grew in vividness around me. But you must wonder why I now cite it in a story to encourage you to write more about place, the Where in your stories. My editors took it all out, didn't they?

I never found out exactly what happened to my filing. An editor apologized for not using any of it. And I got too busy to worry much more about it.

But this month, an ice storm hit Kansas City. It wasn't quite as pretty, but its wallop was even more devastating. Tree limbs fell and power got knocked out for even longer than in 1996.

And on Page One, the day after the storm you could find these words:

Limbs littered yards like clippings on a busy barbershop floor.

So there's a lesson that Klinkenberg didn't detail, but most of us know: Being persistent pays.

And so does writing more about place, about home.

Michael Mansur is environment writer at The Kansas City Star and editor of the SEJournal. He can be reached at mmansur@kcstar.com or (816) 234-4433.

Go into your
backyard and look
around. Close your
eyes and think
about what you
saw, then check
how well you did.
Most will find that
they missed a lot.

Mining..(from page 1)

projects editor at the paper, named David McCumber, and Andrew Schneider, who was the senior national correspondent, and they kind of hatched his idea. My first week there, literally the third day there, David came and said he wanted to go to lunch with me and sat me down and said they were thinking about doing this project on the 1872 mining law and decided it would take about six months and would I like to get involved? I said “Absolutely not.”

I just started a new beat and I have to make the rounds, I have to do things.

But he and Andy prevailed on me, and about six or seven weeks later, I said, “Yes OK, OK, I’ll do this.” I can’t tell you exactly how they focused on this but this is what they started on say five or six weeks before I had started. I think it was a culmination of the fact that David had lived in Montana and has seen a lot of the harm that was going on there that was coming from heap-leach mining and there had been a big initiative there to ban the use of cyanide in mining. And not long after he got here, he found out about this long-running proposal that was gaining steam to open Washington State’s first cyanide heap-leach mine. It was a sort of natural thing to do, to sort of look into heap-leach mining. You can barely scratch the surface of that without figuring out there is a huge taxpayer giveaway.

Q. The focus seemed to be on the laws and primarily the mining act. Do you think it is important to make the story more of a public policy issue rather than an environmental story?

A. Well, I think it is both of those. The incredible thing we found out was in the last 20 years there had been this huge revolution in the mining methods. You could look back and see that we had this perverted public policy going on for more than 100 years before they got into this new method of mining. You could look at the damage these old-style mines had done—and that was pretty bad. And when you look at these huge holes they were digging and how they are blowing the sides off of mountains, and you don’t have to look too far down the road to see it is going to be an environmental catastrophe. It is the public policy that allows it to go on in the first place.

Q. The story has this paragraph pretty high up in the first piece: “But the issues boil down to three broad areas of disagreement: To what degree mining harms the environment, whether the jobs it produces are worth the damage, and whether the public interest is being subverted by the miners and their friends in Washington, D.C.” Did those questions get mapped out first or did they emerge from the reporting?

A. It definitely emerged from the reporting process. That paragraph got written very, very late in the editing process and it is the end paragraph of the first section on the first day. We arranged an overview the first day.

There was so much stuff to report that we had an overview so a reader could read that and, if they just read one day, they would get a little of everything that was the other three days of the story. What that basically does is it gives the reader a road map for what they are going to get the second, third and fourth day.

The second day dealt exclusively with the environmental

harm, the third day dealt with how this is not economically a very good proposition, either, and the fourth day dealt with the politics. We knew going in that you couldn’t look at this thing and not see there was widespread environmental damage. We knew going in. The economic thing was something that I didn’t expect going in. That really emerged from the reporting after I started asking some questions on the economic impact. You can look all over the West and there are ghost towns everywhere and 99 percent of those are because there was a mine, the mine played out, and everyone left.

The politics—that also emerged in the report. We knew something had gone on in D.C. to keep this law from being reformed. But what specifics and the way it worked out was something we found out along the way.

Q. I know you worked on the East Coast and now you’re working on the West Coast. This story has some of that economy versus environment debate. Did you see as much of that on the East Coast?

A. I don’t think it is economy versus the environment. It is a question of short-term economic benefit versus long-term economic ruin. When I worked on the East Coast, I dealt with The Everglades a lot and you definitely see it there. It is the same sort of thing there—short-term economic boom: either from development or growing sugar or any of the various things that are threatening The Everglades. But there again, the long-term economic interests of the region are in harmony with protecting the environment. This whole third day of this mining series is about that. A lot of places you look, there is a short-term economic interest versus the environment, but I am convinced that in a lot of places the long-term economic interest of most communities is in protecting the environment.

Q. The series is full of interesting stories about places threatened by old and current mines. How did you find the ones to use?

A. We started looking around trying to find where the mines were. We figured you could go out and do all the mines and look at the impact—environmentally, economically, all that. But there are so many of them that we were better off sticking to half a dozen or a few more that we played up or decided to go visit and do something with. Each mine we used makes a different point. On the other hand, there were similarities—a sort of pattern began to emerge. Companies were going out and starting mines and because of volatile metals prices, the company folds, the mine is left in this state that it is not supposed to be left in, and the taxpayers get stuck to fix that the best they can. To answer your question, we learned a little bit about a lot of mines and decided to go to maybe a half dozen or a dozen.

Q. What kinds of documents or reports did you use?

A. I had taken over this unused desk for my documents for this because there got to be so many of them. We called that little desk the “mining annex.” Security and Exchange Commission documents were really helpful. We spent lots and lots of time reading through these quarterly and annual filings of these companies. They really do tell the story of the companies.

(Continued on next page)

Cover Story

Q. Especially here's the kind of profit they made and here's the kind of money they paid the government to use the land.

A. Yeah, but you could read through these and see, "Oh, wow, they started running into trouble in 1992" because they had some sort of bizarre note. Of course, this stuff is going out to shareholders, so they try to make it sound like everything is OK. Reading in hindsight, you see here's where they ran into trouble. Others were U.S. Geological Survey (reports and studies), we got a lot of material from the Environmental Protection Agency. We obviously talked to the activists. There is a pretty good network of activists working on this issue. It is funny because they just work on mining, most of them. So they are sort of separate from some of the groups you encounter. But, they were pretty helpful right from the beginning saying this place is a really bad mine. You need to look at this. We worked up a list of two dozen or 30 of them. We did some searches on the Internet. We talked to the mining coordinators for EPA in Regions 8 and 10, in particular, and to a lesser degree some of the people down in Region 9. You start reading about one (study or report) and another one gets mentioned.

Q. I think the story did a great job of making volumes more understandable, which I think is important to do in environmental stories. We can kill people with numbers. How do you come up with some of those?

A. I always sit with a number and try to think how people in my readership can grasp it. I was trying to think about how to make someone here in Seattle realize how deep some of these holes are. And the holes are almost all at least 300 feet deep in a major open-pit mine. The Space Needle (a prominent Seattle building) is 300 feet. So we would say something like "holes deep enough to bury the Space Needle in." Some of them, truth be told, could hold two Space Needles. That gets across to people, "Hey these are really big holes." I think it is important to take any number and try to translate it in a concrete way. There are still a lot of numbers in that series. It is something I try to get around.

Q. You had a massive amount of facts, certainly more than 100 interviews, quotes from reports, etc. How did you manage all that information?

A. The "mining annex." Andy was pretty good at the beginning about starting files and labeling them pretty neatly. I discovered from doing other projects how important being organized is. Get organized early and stay organized.

We worked on this thing, on and off, for two years. Somewhere along the way, we learned about this place Libby in Montana, where workers and residents were getting sick from asbestosis. Andy decided he was going to run with that one as a project on his own. He went off for a while and I was working on this.

Then we had the World Trade Organization riots, we had a strike, the guy who was the projects editor became managing editor, so, we were left without an editor for a while. I had to go back on my beat at times. So it was pretty important early on that we got organized. So when we got a document, we put it in the appropriate file. That's all there on that one desk. It is still on that one desk. It was really good when we got down to the editing of this thing and when the editor would ask me, "How do we know this?" I could say it is in

such-and-such file and go grab the file. But having it organized in the files helps a lot.

Q. The final piece focuses on the power the mining industry wields in Washington and how it has been successful in beating back reforms. Why end with that piece?

A. We had an overview that touched on that and the thing that hits people in the face is there is a massive amount of environmental damage. The question that comes naturally is "If there is all this environmental damage, why do they do that?" Well, the third piece says there is this economic incentive, although I think we demonstrated that it is a false incentive, and then it becomes, "Well, OK, if it is doing all this damage, and it doesn't provide the economic boost you would want, then why is this happening?" The answer is that the senators that represent eight or 10 western states are after that temporary economic boost. They use the rules of the Senate, as they do other things, to hold back what (reform of the 1872 mining act) the democratically elected chamber wants to do.

Q. What has happened on the hard-rock mining issue?

A. The Clinton Administration adopted some fairly rigorous rules, pretty much everything they could do without going to legislation, to rein in some of the abuses. Those took effect just about 12 hours before George Bush was sworn in. He could not do what he did with a lot of things, and put this on hold because this was already in effect. In March, when we were getting pretty close to editing, Norton said we are going to reopen this to new rule making. We published in June and on the day we finished publishing, they announced they would keep an important part of the Clinton rules—the cleanup bonds. That was a pretty big thing.

They were expected to issue new regulations in July, but they didn't. Nothing happened until the fall. Then, they issued a bunch of new regulations that I would say made environmentalists unhappy and industry happy. They took away an important part of what Clinton wanted to do and that was the Department of Interior could say no to a mine.

Gayle Norton also wrote letters to key members of the (congressional) environment committees and said let's talk about reforming the 1872 mining law and here are some of the things I think we need to address. Their list was pretty much the same issues we raised in the series. Now, how the Bush Administration would come down on them I don't know.

In December, Norton's No. 2 guy, Stephen Griles, went and met with (U.S. Rep.) Nick Rahall, who is the ranking Democrat on the House Resources Committee and one of the most committed long-time reformers on this issue. And they had a talk and decided to keep talking. In January, they had their meetings.

They were still feeling out each other to see if this is the year.

As the year goes on, and we get closer to the elections, the less chance I think there is that they will deal with something. It is not strictly a partisan issue—as we pointed out. There are several very key Democrats in the Senate who are on the mining industry's side and you can find some reformers, particularly in the House, who are Republicans. So, it is not a strict Democrat-Republican thing. So we are waiting to see if they do anything.

The series can be found on the *Post-Intelligencer's* Web site: <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/specials/mining/> ❖



Application for Membership

Society of Environmental Journalists

P.O. Box 2492

Jenkintown, PA 19046

Phone: (215) 884-8174 Fax: (215) 884-8175 Email: sej@sej.org

<http://www.sej.org>

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Return completed application with special-offer payment of \$20 US funds to the SEJ office.

Please include a résumé. Attach a business card if available.

Categories of membership:

Active: Persons primarily engaged in the gathering, reporting, editing, photographing, producing or cartooning of news for dissemination by regularly published, general circulation newspapers, magazines, and newsletters, radio and television stations and networks, syndicated news services, and other media available to the general public.

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SEJ bylaws preclude from membership persons who engage in lobbying or public relations work relating to environmental issues and preclude from active membership persons whose employer engages in lobbying or public relations work relating to environmental issues.

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If yes, please go on to question 2.

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2. Are you presently engaged in lobbying or public relations work relating to environmental issues? (See definitions above.)

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If you answered yes, we regret that you are not eligible for membership in SEJ. You are, however, welcome to subscribe to our quarterly newsletter, SEJournal, and to attend national conferences at a special subscriber's discount rate. Please see the enclosed SEJournal subscription form to determine your subscription rate. If you answered no, please go on to the next question.

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8 Tell us about yourself. Please list any books, awards, special reports or other work you have done that you'd like us to be aware of.

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Notes

SEJournal Vol. 11 #4



The skeptical what?

A critique of Bjorn Lomborg's "The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World"

By KATHRYN SCHULZ

Bjorn Lomborg, author of the presumably eponymous book "The Skeptical Environmentalist," is undoubtedly a skeptic—but is he an environmentalist?

An associate professor of statistics at Denmark's University of Aarhus, Lomborg says he was, and as such set out to disprove the claims of notorious anti-environmentalist Julian Simon. Instead, he found he agreed with Simon, and wrote his book to show that virtually all of the environmental movement's sacred cows are, to put it bluntly, bull:

"We will not lose our forests; we will not run out of energy, raw materials, or water. We have reduced atmospheric pollution in the cities of the developed world and have good reason to believe that this will also be achieved in the developing world. Our oceans have not been defiled, our rivers have become cleaner and support more life. ... Nor is waste a particularly big problem. ... The problem of the ozone layer has been more or less solved. The current outlook on the development of global warming does not indicate a catastrophe. ... And, finally, our chemical worries and fear of pesticides are misplaced and counterproductive."

Lomborg claims that the entire "Litany" of environmental woes is a phantasm, created or inflated by the environmental movement for its own ends, with the result that time and money are diverted from other, needier causes.

This is a serious charge, and as such the book deserves to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, it is difficult to do so. Lomborg notes that he is not an expert on environmental problems. Climate scientist Stephen H. Schneider writes in a review in *Scientific American*, "Truer words are not found in the rest of the book."

Not being an expert should not disqualify Lomborg from contributing to the environmental debate—mathematicians can write meaningfully about music, historians can shed light on stem cell research, and presumably a decent statistician could say something intelligent about the environment. But not listening to the experts is a more serious problem. If there is one charge that has been consistently and correctly leveled at Lomborg, it is the sloppiness—or deliberate bias—of his research. The book contains a whopping 2,930 endnotes, but they are largely repetitive and often drawn from news and popular sources. Seldom does Lomborg cite peer-reviewed studies from respected international journals.

As a result, the sweeping claims in "The Skeptical Environmentalist" are sitting ducks for the real experts. In the pages of all those respected journals Lomborg didn't cite, many of the world's leading scientists have exposed his errors and distortions and skewered his conclusions. Cambridge University Press did not have the book peer reviewed; readers interested in knowing what Lomborg's peers think would do

well to check out the recent reviews in *Nature* and *Scientific American*. The Union of Concerned Scientists and *Grist Magazine* have compiled extensive critiques.

On the rare occasions when Lomborg is on the mark, it is generally because he is aiming at straw men. Lomborg argues that natural resources aren't running out (many environmentalists would agree); that there is an energy shortage (says who? Not many modern environmentalists); that human population will not outstrip food production (almost no one has disagreed since the 1970s). What he doesn't address are the consequences to our lives and quality of living, and to the earth and its ecosystems, of the untrammled extraction of resources.

Instead of looking hard at the complicated interplay between economic and ecological systems, Lomborg creates and then attacks a shallow caricature of an outdated environmentalism—one that bears little resemblance to the complex, multifaceted movement driven by the work of everyone from city council members to corporate advisors to grassroots activists.

Lomborg's failure to recognize the true environmental movement is consistent with his failure to recognize the true successes of the environmental movement. He believes, as the first chapter title informs us, that "Things are getting better," and in many cases, he is right. There have been measurable gains in many areas of human and environmental health, although there is still plenty of ground to cover. What is strange is that Lomborg goes to great length to detail the progress that has been made, largely thanks to the tremendous efforts of environmentalists, only to use that progress to argue that the environmental movement is not deserving of our political or financial support.

"The Skeptical Environmentalist" could have been both a tribute to and a provocative critique of the environmental movement, one that asked important and constructive questions. Why, if it has been so successful, has environmentalism failed to advertise those successes and build on their momentum? Why does the movement instead rely largely on a bleak (but real) litany of woes to bolster support? Does that tactic limit the range of problems we try to solve and the strategies we use to solve them? Does it contribute to an image of environmentalism that continues to alienate some people who should be allies and advocates?

Any book attempting such a critique of the inner workings of the movement in the name of improving it should have been welcomed by environmentalists.

Sadly, "The Skeptical Environmentalist" is not that book. By attacking straw men and portraying environmentalists as devious puppeteers controlling the heartstrings of the hoi polloi and the purse strings of politicians, Lomborg is jousting at windmills. Meanwhile, the people he denounces are fighting real battles.

If the words of Lomborg's nemesis-turned-idol Julian Simon come true and "the material conditions of life continue to get better for most people, in most countries, most of the time"—it will be with the help of, not in spite of, the environmental movement.

Kathryn Schulz is an assistant editor at Grist Magazine.

'The Skeptical Environmentalist' challenges ideological environmentalism

By RONALD BAILEY

"The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World," by Bjorn Lomborg, Cambridge University Press, 496 pages, \$27.95

"The Skeptical Environmentalist" challenges "the Litany." As author, Bjorn Lomborg writes, "We are all familiar with the Litany.... Our resources are running out. The population is ever growing, leaving less and less to eat. The air and water are becoming ever more polluted. The planet's species are becoming extinct in vast numbers... The world's ecosystem is breaking down.... We all know the Litany and have heard it so often that yet another repetition is, well, almost reassuring." He's right, we have all heard the Litany.

"The Skeptical Environmentalist" challenges the assumptions of the Litany using current (and usually uncontroversial) demographic, economic, and ecological data and evidence derived from the scientific literature and from national and international environmental and development agencies. Essentially, "The Skeptical Environmentalist" is a response to popular environmentalist works like Worldwatch's annual State of the World reports.

So what does Lomborg find? Human life expectancy continues to rise, from 31 years to 65 years for people living in developing countries in the last century. Population growth rates are slowing and world population is likely never to exceed 10 billion if current trends continue. The average amount of food per person in the poor countries has increased by 38 percent since 1960 while real prices for food have fallen by more than two-thirds. The percentage of malnourished people has fallen globally from 35 percent to 18 percent and will likely fall to 12 percent in this decade. Lomborg points out that increasing food production trends show no sign of slackening in the future.

What about air pollution? Completely uncontroversial data show that concentrations of sulfur dioxide are down 80 percent in the U.S. since 1962, carbon monoxide levels are down 75 percent since 1970, nitrogen oxides are down 38 percent since 1975, and ground level ozone is down 30 percent since 1977. These trends are mirrored in all developed countries and will improve as poor countries develop.

Lomborg shows that claims of rapid deforestation are exaggerated. Since the dawn of agriculture, the world has lost 20 to 25 percent of its forests. Northern temperate forests in Europe, Russia and North America have been expanding for a generation or so. What about the Brazilian rainforests? Eighty-six percent remain uncut, according to the FAO. Lomborg also points out that widely circulated earlier claims that the world would lose between a fifth and half of all its species by 2000 turned out to be wildly exaggerated. He then cogently questions the way that future extinction rates have been estimated and makes the case that 0.7 percent of species might be lost in the next 50 years, not a fifth by 2030 as suggested recently by Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, if nothing is done. And of course, it is unlikely that nothing will be done.

Finally, Lomborg shows that the projections that global warming caused by burning fossil fuels is unlikely to be a catastrophe. Why? First, because actual temperatures of the bulk of

the atmosphere as measured by satellites and weather balloons aren't increasing nearly as fast as the computer climate models project they should be. If these trends continue, any increase in global average temperatures is likely to be at the low end of the model projections, and few analysts think that would be a disaster. Furthermore, Lomborg convincingly argues that improvements in energy technologies will cut back greenhouse gas emissions so that it is highly unlikely that greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere will ever grow to the levels associated in the climate models with large increases in temperature. Lomborg also points out that most econometric models (which are probably just about as accurate as the climate models) indicate that adaptation to greenhouse warming rather than trying to prevent it now by drastically reducing fossil fuel use will be much less costly for most of humanity.

Naturally, Lomborg's challenge to long cherished tenets of the Litany has provoked a firestorm of attacks from committed ideological environmentalists. One particularly nasty attack in *Nature* actually compared him to Holocaust deniers. If you can't beat a guy's data and argument, compare him to Hitler. Such abuse is not designed to encourage reasoned dialogue and suggests that his critics are desperate.

Another red herring deployed by activists frantic to discredit Lomborg is the absurdly irrelevant and hypocritical claim that Lomborg uses "secondary sources" and "articles that have not undergone scientific peer review." Irrelevant? The question is, are Lomborg's data accurate, not where they came from. It would be extraordinary if a book of this length and scope did not get some things wrong, but looking carefully at the reviews by activists, one will find that they are mostly hand-waving and nitpicking, and do not ultimately call Lomborg's significant claims or data into question. Typical secondary sources cited by Lomborg include reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Hypocritical? A look at Worldwatch's respected State of the World 2002 finds that the vast majority of its endnotes are from newspapers, magazines, non-peered reviewed books, government reports and activist pamphlets.

In what can only be regarded as a "hit," *Scientific American* chose Stanford University climatologist and long-time activist Stephen Schneider and former World Wildlife Fund activist Thomas Lovejoy as two of its four reviewers. This choice indicates malice aforethought since Lomborg extensively critiques their work. Whatever happened to the old-fashioned notion of neutral reviewers? Despite this, none of the four reviews succeeded in calling Lomborg's analyses significantly into question. In fact, John Bongaart's review essentially agreed that Lomborg is right about population issues and John Holdren agreed that the world is not running out of energy.

Even more extraordinarily, the World Wildlife Fund and the World Resources Institute jointly launched a campaign against "The Skeptical Environmentalist" by sending a letter and press release entitled "Nine Things that Journalists Should

Know About The Skeptical Environmentalist” to members of the SEJ. Their erroneous and misleading charges are too many to deal with in this space, but let’s take a brief look at one, the claim that Lomborg engages in “pseudo-scholarship.” Unfortunately, WWF/WRI, in their rush to discredit Lomborg, ended up perpetrating some “pseudo-scholarship” of their own. For example, WWF/WRI claimed that the work of MIT climatologist Richard Lindzen on the “iris effect,” a hypothesized climatological cooling feedback, cited by Lomborg was non-peered and had been rejected by a leading scientific journal. Neither claim is true. Lindzen’s paper was submitted only to the highly respected and peer-reviewed *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* where it was published. This false claim has now been pulled from the WWF/WRI anti-Lomborg Web site without acknowledgement.

In his *Science* review of Lomborg’s book, Michael Grubb, who doesn’t like Lomborg’s analysis of global warming, does acknowledge “through much of the first half of the book, [Lomborg] offers a detailed and well-developed antidote to environmental doom-mongering. He establishes a convincing case that, in general, humanity is better off today than it has ever been in terms of standard welfare measures and of many environmental indicators.” Grubb then sniffs, “To any modern professional it is no news at all that the 1972 Limits to Growth study was mostly wrong or that Paul Ehrlich and Lester Brown have perennially exaggerated the problems of food supply.”

Readers are invited to contribute to this discussion.
Email your comments to SEJournal editor Mike Mansur at mmansur@kcstar.com, or fax to SEJ at (215) 884-8177.
Visit www.lomborg.org to get the author’s take.

First, Grubb admits that there is a lot of doom-mongering and then he claims that modern professionals dismiss it. Evidently, the “modern professionals” do not include the *Nature* reviewers, nor the reviewers chosen by *Scientific American*. Of course, the whole point of Lomborg’s book is to get the information known to “modern professionals” to ordinary citizens who are being misinformed by the doom-mongering of ideological environmentalists.

It is not surprising that environmental lobbyists don’t like their views being called into question, but no interest group should be above scrutiny nor should they be allowed to set the terms of allowable debate. Read “The Skeptical Environmentalist” and decide for yourselves who is right.

Ronald Bailey, who is Reason magazine’s science correspondent and an SEJ member, can be reached at rbailey@reason.com.

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Every Drop For Sale: Our Desperate Battle Over Water In A World About To Run Out

By Jeffrey Rothfeder.

Tarcher/Putnam. 191 pages. \$24.95

Of all the forecasts for the 21st Century, consider this one issued in August of 1995 by former World Bank Vice President Ismail Serageldin: “The wars of the next century will be fought over water.” Water. Seventy percent of the Earth is covered by it, yet only a fraction of 1 percent is freshwater that humans can use to drink, raise crops, feed their livestock, and devote to industry.

The majority of freshwater is frozen in glaciers. The tiny fraction available to humans is constantly being whittled down, region by region, as pollution spreads, the population swells, the need for food increases and the Earth’s climate warms.

In a way, it is stunning how water—long taken for granted as an infinite resource—has become so elusive. Author Jeffrey Rothfeder offers a cutting-edge look at this global dilemma in “Every Drop For Sale: Our Desperate Battle Over Water in a World About to Run Out.” A former *BusinessWeek* editor, Rothfeder is perhaps best known as co-author of ‘The People Vs. Big Tobacco.’ Having written about water issues since 1979, he brings a fair amount of perspective on the subject to his latest book. He makes a case for why Americans—with regional battles intensifying in places such as California, Texas and Florida—should recognize that water shortages are not solely the problems of distant, Third World nations.

Although history shows that countries rarely go to war exclusively over water, regional tensions are on the rise and war is “an outcome we may no longer be able to avoid,” Rothfeder writes.

He’s not alone. The CIA has looked for potential pockets of water-related trouble around the world and tried to learn what, in the future, that could mean in terms of national security. In her April 2000 Earth Day speech in Washington, then-U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright said water “is certain to be among the principal global challenges of the 21st Century.”

Rothfeder does a marvelous job of revealing shortages in the Middle East, Asia, Europe, South America and other parts of the world, giving readers panoramic snapshots of the issue while not losing sight of what’s happening here in North America.

As disturbing as anything is his prediction that freshwater could be towed en masse in huge plastic bags to poor nations by the end of this decade. He calls the Great Lakes an “obvious target” for water exports, despite efforts the region’s governors and premiers took in Niagara Falls last June to close legal loopholes under NAFTA and other international trade laws.

Rothfeder touches upon the potential for more desalination and gives a fairly harsh indictment of America’s bad water management practices, evidenced in policies anywhere from the Florida Everglades to the Pacific Northwest. He argues that any lessons learned are soon forgotten. The combined growth of California, Arizona and Nevada—three desert states—is expected to be a whopping 62 percent by 2025.

Rothfeder points out that Canada—which he quite accurately describes as the “Saudi Arabia of water”—will face increas-

ing pressures to get into the business of exporting freshwater in bulk this century, something many Canadians fear.

Getting Americans to take water more seriously will be difficult, unless the laws of supply and demand are more accurately reflected in prices, Rothfeder writes. He notes how Dan Sullivan, Sierra Club committee chairman and 20-year veteran of California water conflicts, once told him that putting a price on water makes the difference “between how we treat a diamond and a rock we find in the woods.”

—Tom Henry, Toledo Blade

If that one left you thirsty try:

Tapped Out: The Coming World Crisis in Water and What We Can Do About it.

By Paul Simon, 180 pp.

Welcome Rain Publishers

This book—written by former United States Senator Paul Simon of Illinois—is another surprisingly clear and comprehensive overview of global water shortages. The 1988 presidential candidate sounds the alarm for one of the Earth’s emerging problems of the century, while offering a number of commonsense tips on what society could do to head off a crisis. Originally released in hardcover in 1998 by New York-based Welcome Rain (an ironic name for a publisher of such subject matter), this is more than just some retired politician’s ranting from behind a podium. It puts the issue into a proper historical and environmental context for the layman, being far more readable than what might be found in scientific literature

—Tom Henry, Toledo Blade

Now in Paperback:

Confessions of an Eco-Redneck

by Steve Chapple 264 pp.

Perseus Publishing \$16.50

For the sake of full disclosure I should mention Steve Chapple was once a roommate of mine. However any inclination to cut him favors as a result was mitigated the time he left his dead dog, an 85-pound malamute named Ed, in our refrigerator.

Certainly much of what makes Chapple a horrific roommate is also what makes him a great raconteur and story-teller. Chapple’s collection of 25 essays, some of which previously appeared in *Sports Afield* and other outdoor magazines, mix startling similes with a Darwinian appreciation of the complexities of the ecological food chain of which he counts the eco-redneck (genus—hook and bullet) a vital part.

One doesn’t have to agree with Chapple’s assertion that his works “speak to that genetic yearning for the spiritual through blood sport that lies deep within the hind brain of us all” to appreciate his literary effort to redefine in a more inclusive manner just what it is that makes for a committed environmentalist.

“Sportsmen and environmentalists are too often kept on opposite sides of the barbed wire: so they won’t see how close they really are to each other,” argues the author who long ago

jumped that particular fence with .30-.06 rifle and graphite fishing pole in hand.

Whether casting line for Tigerfish on the Zambezi, recording the depredations of domesticated cats on wild bird populations, (“Is Mittens with her kittens? Or is she outside, ripping the lungs from a lark?”), or recording an Elk hunt on Ted Turner’s ecologically-restored mega-ranch, Chapple crosses the sensibility of a native humorist with the descriptive prose of fellow naturalist authors John McPhee, and Daniel Duane (who wrote, ‘Caught Inside: A surfer’s year on the California Coast’).

While I’ve personally never been much for blood sport (war reporting and kenpo karate being two exceptions), I appreciate Chapple’s willingness to challenge the urban romanticization of nature that sometimes confuses animal rights with species protection, or pastoral landscapes with the genetic diversity found in bug and leech infested rainforests.

While decrying the slob hunter and game hog Chapple asks, “Who has done more for wetlands than duck hunters? More to stop nickel-and-dime trailer courts, subdivisions, and septic tanks at streamside than trout and bass organizations? More to convince farmers not to rainforest-torch the cover that runs alongside country roads than pheasant beaters? Those who enjoy tying into the bull trout, that tiger shark of the northern Rockies, are learning that acid mine waste must be stopped in the headwaters, because the bulls are like prize-fighters with bad lungs. They can’t stand even minimal pollution.”

Chapple argues, perhaps a bit too optimistically, that hunters and fishers (the people, not the weasels), are responding to where their true interests lie by defending wilderness and habitat. “The backlash to the backlash has begun,” he claims. Of course for every Trout Unlimited, there’s a Safari Club International or (God help us) Congressional Sportsman’s Caucus backed by big-oil and mining interests. But perhaps ‘Eco-Redneck’ works best not as polemic but inspiration for those who seek to put the pleasure-principle back into preservation. And while shooting a ten-point buck may not be everyone’s *raison-d’etre* Chapple is more than willing to support those who find their g-spot in hiking, kayaking, bodysurfing, or wildlife voyeurism, going so far as to propose reintroducing the Grizzly Bear to Central Park.

At his best, in writerly and reflective essays like “The Mother’s Day Caddis Hatch,” “The Lodge Where All Dance,” and “Last Fish,” Chapple manages to capture the subtle but sturdy connections between landscape, community and family history that widen our vision about what it means to live well and do good on lands often threatened by the avaricious and the short-sighted. In recalling a long gone day of fishing with his father, where they met and helped an old cowboy and his dying wheelchair-bound buddy catch a final trout, he also gently reminds us of our need to be good stewards of this earth, since we’ll all be returning to it, probably sooner than we might like.

—David Helvarg, SEJ Journal Bookshelf Editor

Next Hot Topic:

11 books on Climate Change to warm a winter’s night:

1. The Change in the Weather: People, Weather and the

Science of Climate by William Stephens (Delacorte Press, 1999). An excellent overview, based on Stevens’ reporting in *The New York Times*.

2. The Coming Storm: Extreme Weather and Our Terrifying Future by Bob Reiss (Hyperion, September 2001). Focuses on evolution of the scientific consensus on global warming as seen through the increasing frequency of severe storms, by a former *Chicago Tribune* reporter.

3. The Heat is On: The Climate Crisis, The Cover-Up, The Prescription by Ross Gelbspan, (hardcover 1995; Perseus Books paperback, 1998). Both an authoritative overview and a call to action.

4. Greenhouse: The 200-Year Story of Global Warming by Gale E. Christianson (Walker Publishing, 1999). Christianson is very strong on the fascinating early history of global warming science.

5. Stormy Weather: 101 Solutions to Global Climate Change by Guy Dauncey with Patrick Mazza (New Society, July 2001). The authors advance specific global warming solutions, for countries, municipalities and individuals.

6. Turning Off the Heat: Why America Must Double Energy Efficiency to Save Money and Reduce Global Warming (Prometheus Books, 1998). A prescription for responding to climate change.

7. Is the Temperature Rising? The Uncertain Science of Global Warming by S. George Philander (Princeton University Press, 1998). A fairly dense discussion of global warming science, with charts and graphs, written by a Princeton geosciences professor.

8. The Satanic Gases: Clearing the Air About Global Warming by Patrick J. Michaels and Robert C. Balling, Jr. (Cato Institute, 2000). A treatise by the leading conservative debunkers of global warming science. (A similar book is “Climate of Fear” by Thomas Gale Moore (Cato Institute, 2001). Moore often appears in the media denying that global warming is real.

9. Climate Change: A Multidisciplinary Approach by William James Burroughs (Cambridge University Press, 2001). An undergraduate textbook.

10. The Collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the Struggle to Slow Global Warming by David G. Victor (Council on Foreign Relations, 2001). Very technical, focuses on the nuances of the treaty and the diplomatic maneuvering.

11. Climate Change 2001 (Cambridge University Press, 2001). The actual report on global warming prepared by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, under United Nations auspices.

—Jim Motavalli, Editor, E—The Environmental Magazine

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ARIZONA

► **Desert museum's future:** The *Arizona Daily Star's* Mitch Tobin wrote about the 50th anniversary of the world-renowned Arizona Sonora Desert Museum and its future. Over the next 50 years, the museum, now surrounded by natural desert, will become an island in a sea of suburbia as development speeds down most of the major road corridors leading west from the city and running north-south through the Avra Valley not far from the museum.

Tobin also broke a story that the state's farmers have quietly negotiated a deal with state water officials to roll back state water conservation rules for farmers

who grow crops that wouldn't be profitable without power and crop subsidies. Farmers say they simply can't afford to use techniques such as drip irrigation to tighten conservation further. Contact Tobin at (520) 573-4185 or at mtobin@azstarnet.com.

► **Critical habitat land costs:** The *Tucson Citizen's* Blake Morlock wrote a story about how land prices for lots of three to five acres have jumped up to 30 percent over two years in areas designated as federal critical habitat for the endangered cactus ferruginous pygmy owl. Morlock also reported many Arizona environmental groups were having trouble raising money in the wake of Sept. 11. Contact Morlock through the Citizen city desk, (520) 573-4560.

► **Crying Whale:** The *Phoenix New Times's* executive editor Michael Lacey and Jill Stewart, a reporter for the *L.A. New Times*, penned "Crying Whale," an attack on the Natural Resources Defense Council and the International Fund for Animal Welfare for what the writers said was an inaccurate, \$15-million campaign to convince the world that a proposed joint Mexican government-Mitsubishi Corp. plan to evaporate salt from sea water was a threat to the endangered gray whale. The article called the action "a triumph of public relations over public policy," and said the paper could find no scientific evidence to suggest the salt plant proposed at Laguna San Ignacio off Baja California's Pacific Coast posed even a mild threat to the whales that migrate through the area each January. Contact *New Times* at (602) 271-0040.

► **Desert conservation plan:** The *Star's* Tony Davis reported on Pima County's successful effort to pass a new comprehensive land use plan that relied on the scientific information from the county's proposed Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan to determine which areas should be developed at high and low densities. Developers objected to this concept of "linkage," but the County Board of Supervisors adopted the plan 4-0 in mid-December. Contact Davis at

verdin@azstarnet.com or (520) 807-7790.

► **New Tempe each year:** The *Arizona Republic's* Jon Kamman reported that after 50 years of breakneck growth, the state continues to add a Tempe-sized city of 155,000 people each year, and that population projections and census data show no sign that this growth will slow in the foreseeable future. The state grows three times faster than the entire United States and has ranked among the top five population-gaining states annually for 15 years. Contact Kamman at (602) 444-4816 or at jon.kamman@arizonarepublic.com.

CANADA

► **Grizzly politics:** The Canadian government is defending the controversial British Columbia grizzly bear hunt against European countries attempting to fight the hunt by banning the import of bear parts. The hunt isn't driving the bears to extinction, the government says in a Jan. 24 story by reporter Kate Jaimet in the *Ottawa Citizen*. The British Columbia Liberal government elected last fall lifted a moratorium on the hunt. The provincial government estimates there are 14,000 to 19,000 grizzly bears in B.C. Others say there may be half that number. British Columbia allows 250 grizzly bears to be shot a year, mostly by Americans. Meanwhile, Alberta is trying to protect its dwindling population of 850 grizzlies against poachers by tearing up old logging and mining roads that give hunters access, according to a Dec. 10 story in *The Calgary Herald*. Contact Jaimet at the *The Citizen* at email kjaimet@thecitizen.southam.ca or (613) 751-3313

► **Sea bird in court:** An environmental group is trying to save the threatened marbled murrelet in British Columbia through the court system. The B.C.-based Western Canada Wilderness Committee wants to stop logging that destroys the forest habitat of the sea bird, according to the Jan. 21 story of *Globe and Mail* reporter Jane Armstrong. Since Canada has no federal legislation for endangered species and B.C. is one of the provinces without provincial legisla-

tion for endangered species, the group is trying to use B.C. Forest Practices Code in court. Armstrong can be reached at jarmstrong@globeandmail.ca.

► **Forestry cuts:** The new Liberal government of British Columbia announced Jan. 24 it will cut 1,433 workers in the ministry of forests between now and 2005 as part of cutbacks in the civil service and the provincial budget to reduce government spending by \$1.9 billion. The forest ministry's staff is being cut by 35 percent. The compliance and enforcement branch is being cut by 14 percent, according to an unsigned Canadian Press story. Ninety-four percent of the forests in the province are on Crown land.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

► **Norton dumps FWS comments:** Interior Secretary Gale Norton failed to transmit scathing comments from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service aimed at a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposal to weaken regulations protection wetlands. *The Washington Post's* Michael Grunwald broke that story Jan. 14. An Interior spokesman said Norton just ran out of time and blamed the Senate, which is controlled by Democrats, for stalling on confirming high-ranking Interior officials. "This is just nuts," former FWS director Jamie Rappaport Clark told Grunwald. Grunwald can be reached at grunwaldmr@washpost.com or 202-334-7440. The coverage can be found at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A40646-2002Jan13.html> and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45595-2002Jan14.html>

FLORIDA

► **Tree protection ordinance:** On Dec. 6, the *Florida Times-Union* reported Jacksonville's city attorney claims the state is breaking the law by not following the city's tree protection ordinance. The state Department of Transportation had refused to pay into the city's tree mitigation fund to compensate for tree destruction during interstate construction. The department contends it's on "solid legal ground," according to spokesman Mike Goldman. The city is not ruling out a court

showdown to resolve these differences. Contact reporter Matt Galnor at (904) 359-4550 or mgalnor@jacksonville.com.

► **Dam debate:** In a Jan. 10 story, the *Florida Times-Union* warned of the escalation of the decades-long environmental issue of the Rodman Dam on the Ocklawaha River in Putnam County. The river was dammed up in 1968 as part of the uncompleted Cross Florida Barge Canal plan that would have linked the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. For years, state lawmakers have fought efforts to demolish the dam, which has protected a premier bass and fishing spot for the Southeast. They intend to block a recent U.S. Forest Service order to tear down the dam and restore the natural run of the Ocklawaha. Jurisdiction, timelines and environmental debates abound. Florida Defenders of the Environment side with the Forest Service. Save the Rodman Reservoir, which vows to tie the matter up in court for years, supports the state Cabinet in opposition. Contact staff writer Thomas Pfankuck at (904) 249-4747 or e-mail at tfutal@FLpress.com.

► **Wetlands losses:** On Jan. 28, the *Florida Times-Union* reported environmentalists are fretting the Army Corps of Engineers' shift in emphasis away from "zero loss" of wetlands. On January 15, the Corps announced they would abandon acre-to-acre replacement requirement in favor of greater regulatory flexibility. This move parallels Florida regulators' similar decision last year, which also signals a nationwide shift affecting mitigation banks. The rules change stirs Florida environmentalists' mistrust of the Corps' ability to make ecologically sound decisions. Contact staff writer Binyamin Appelbaum at (904) 359-4390 or e-mail at bappelbaum@jacksonville.com.

GEORGIA

► **Erosion fees proposed:** The Georgia Board of Natural Resources wants a new state law that would charge developers a fee to pay for enforcing erosion rules. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division is supposed to enforce both the state erosion law and the stormwater provision of the federal Clean Water Act, but a September audit showed

the EPD isn't doing its job. EPD employees say they're reluctant to take away a local government's authority to issue development permits, because then the EPD would have to step in and do it, and there's no manpower available. Employees also say they hate to assess fines against violators because they don't have time to handle the paperwork involved. The EPD hopes to hire at least 54 more erosion-control inspectors by charging developers fees. Debbie Gilbert reported this story in Gainesville's *The Times* Nov. 8. She can be reached at (770) 532-1234, ext. 254, or dgilbert@gainesvilletimes.com.

► **Green electricity:** Thirteen of Georgia's electrical membership corporations have joined to form Green Power EMC, patterned after TVA's successful Green Switch program. The utilities have contracted to buy 13 megawatts of methane-derived power from three landfills. Customers who opt in to the program will pay an extra \$3-\$5 a month to buy a 150-kilowatt-hour block of "green" electricity. Those fees will be used to help develop new sources of alternative energy in Georgia. For now, the EMC is looking at purchasing some wind power from TVA. Debbie Gilbert reported this story Jan. 25. (770) 532-1234, ext. 254, dgilbert@gainesvilletimes.com.

► **Wetlands threatened:** Environmentalists worry a mining permit by a Macon, Ga., brick maker will destroy hundreds of acres of wetlands along the Ocmulgee River. Cherokee Brick and Tile Co. has requested a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit to disturb almost 300 acres of wetlands during the next 50 years. The company says it is the last land holding it has and more than likely will close shop when finished. But environmentalists say the mining will ruin culturally and ecologically sensitive lands. Now the corps will decide how many, if any acres, will be mined. Christopher Schwarzen reported this story in *The Macon Telegraph* on Jan. 28. Contact him at (478) 744-4213 or cschwarzen@macontel.com.

HAWAII

► **Watershed program ques-**

tioned: Despite expenditures totaling more than \$1 billion over the last 10 years, the Emergency Watershed Protection program of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has escaped any serious challenge over its failure to prepare an environmental impact statement, as required by National Environmental Policy Act. In 1997, the NRCS issued a draft programmatic EIS, but to date there has been no final EIS prepared. Disclosure of the omission was made in the January issue of *Environment Hawai'i*, a monthly publication. The EWP program was paying for millions of dollars in so-called "stream repair" projects in the wake of a devastating flood that hit Hilo in November 2000. Many of the projects were of questionable justification and their only purpose appears to be to protect a handful of single-family residences. The full article is available at <http://www.environment-hawaii.org>. Copies may be obtained by calling *Environment Hawai'i's* toll-free number, (877) 934-0130.

► **Replanting draws birds:** The planting of nearly a quarter million trees high on the slopes of Mauna Kea has paid off with the first signs that native forest birds were occupying the replanted forest. The plantings at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge have been a vital part of restoring habitat for endangered Hawaiian forest birds. Recently, biologists heard an `akiapola`au chick calling from the replanted area. They also heard adult birds answering the chick's call. The Hakalau forest was acquired for refuge use in 1985. The land included forest habitat totaling some 28,000 acres and another 4,000 acres of once-forested land that had been cleared by cattle grazing. The full article is available at <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2002/Jan/21/ln/ln26a.html>.

MONTANA

► **To log or not to log?:** On Jan. 29, *The New York Times'* Jim Robbins took a thorough look at the controversy over whether to log a huge swath of the Bitterroot National Forest in southwestern Montana. The story introduces the little-explored idea that forest fires actually

are good for endangered salmon and other fish if the burned logs are left in place. A federal judge ruled that the Forest Service had broken the law in authorizing a timber sale in the burned-over portions of the forest, but the government appealed the decision. The story is available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/29/science/earth/29LOGG.html>.

NEVADA

► **Yucca Mountain announcement:** Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham notified Gov. Kenny Guinn of Nevada on Jan. 10 that he would recommend Yucca Mountain, 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, as the world's first high-level nuclear waste repository for 77,000 tons of radioactive wastes from commercial reactors and defense contractors. It was the major story in Nevada's newspapers and television stations through the weekend. The *Las Vegas Sun* first reported the story on-line with reporters Benjamin Grove in Washington, D.C., and Mary Manning in Las Vegas. Grove can be reached at (202) 628-3100, ext. 1269 or at grove@lasvegassun.com; Manning can be reached at (702) 259-4065 or manning@lasvegassun.com. The Web site is www.lasvegassun.com. The *Las Vegas Review Journal* reporters Tony Batt in Washington, D.C., Keith Rogers and Jane Ann Morrison in Las Vegas, and Sean Whaley in Carson City also did an on-line version and reported the story on Jan. 11. They can be reached at (702) 383-0264. The *Review Journal* Web site is <http://www.lasvegas.com>.

NEW MEXICO

► **Gray wolf woes:** Federal government efforts to reintroduce endangered Mexican gray wolves to the wilds of southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona suffered setbacks in 2001. Two wolves were shot and killed and two others died under suspicious circumstances, according to Tania Soussan of the *Albuquerque Journal*. In all, eight wolves died in the wild last year. Investigations are continuing. Soussan can be reached at (505) 823-3833 or tsoussan@abqjournal.com.

► **Interstate water fight:** The stage

is being set for a heated U.S. Supreme Court battle over water between Texas and New Mexico. Texas last year set aside \$6.2 million for water rights disputes with its northern neighbor. Now, New Mexico's attorney general and state engineer are asking legislators to give them more than \$13 million over three years to protect the state's water rights, reports Ben Neary of the Santa Fe *New Mexican*. Contact Neary at bneary@sfnewmexican.com or (505) 986-3036. Read the story online at http://www.sfnewmexican.com:80/site/news.cfm?newsid=3063362&BRD=2144&PAG=461&dept_id=367954&rffi=8.

► **Fighting chronic wasting:** Soussan also reported on a chronic wasting disease scare in New Mexico. The disease, which is similar to mad cow disease, has devastated elk ranches across Colorado and spread to wild herds in that state. A New Mexico elk rancher was put under quarantine and his 15 animals killed after state game officials discovered he had bought animals from a Colorado ranch infected with chronic wasting disease. The animals turned out to be free of the disease, but the state is increasing efforts to keep chronic wasting disease out of New Mexico. Contact Neary at bneary@sfnewmexican.com or (505) 986-3036.

► **Operation Bear Den:** Last summer, bears searching for food broke into kitchens, strolled across highways and ransacked orchards across New Mexico. Jennifer McKee of the *Albuquerque Journal's* northern bureau reported on Operation Bear Den, a state Game and Fish Department experiment in hibernation and survival. Twenty motherless cubs, rescued and fed to portly proportions at a wildlife center, were placed in disguised plastic igloos in two national forests. Biologists hope they will go into hibernation and emerge next spring. McKee can be reached at (505) 988-8881 or jmckee@abqjournal.com.

► **Mine reclamation fight:** Writing in *High Country News*, freelancer Ernest Atencio profiled the efforts of New Mexico activists to push mine reclamation into the 21st century. The required plan for Phelps Dodge to clean up its

massive copper mine near Silver City in the southeastern part of the state is a key battleground in the fight. The activists have been urging state regulators to force Phelps Dodge to post a \$759 million financial assurance bond to guarantee the site is reclaimed. The company proposed a \$99 million bond. Contact Atencio through *High Country News* at (970) 527-4898. Read the story online at http://www.hcn.org/servlets/hcn.Article?article_id=10885.

NEW YORK

► **Human testing:** Pesticides are designed to kill pests, and so by their nature are toxic substances. They wouldn't work otherwise. While that poisonous nature is useful for certain jobs, most people would probably hesitate before knowingly taking the chemicals into their bodies. But the Environmental Protection Agency is now looking at the issue of testing pesticides on humans. As bad as that may sound, the Great Lakes Radio Consortium's Greg Dahlmann reported Jan. 28 that there are some people saying it's what we need. Contact him at gdahlmann@wamc.org

► **Pouring rights:** The next time you set out on a trail in state-owned wilderness in New York, the experience may be brought to you partly by Coca-Cola or some other beverage retailer. New York wants to expand a controversial program that offers beverage companies the rights to sell and market their product exclusively in the state's 164-park system, Dina Cappiello of *The Albany Times Union* reported Jan 21. The so-called "pouring rights" first came to the parks system in 1996 when a four-year deal with Coca-Cola made it the first official soft drink of a state parks system. This time the parks are being offered up to multiple companies. Contact Cappiello at dCappiello@timesunion.com.

► **Dumping computers:** As older computers become obsolete, we're faced with a dilemma: what to do with the out-of-date equipment? The problem only will grow as personal computers become a stock item in more and more households. But so far, the manufacturers, the recycling industry and the government

don't have a plan in place to deal with the old equipment, The Great Lakes Radio Consortium's Lester Graham reported Jan. 28. That's a problem because some of that equipment contains lead, mercury and other toxic materials that can cause damage to the environment and people's health. Contact Lester Graham at graham@glrc.org

► **Natural zoo displays?:** Zoos across the nation are putting their animals in more natural settings instead of cages. For some zoos, it's done to make the animals' lives a little more comfortable. But for others, it's simply done to draw more people rather than to give the animals a better place to live. The Great Lakes Radio Consortium's Lester Graham has the details in the first of a two-part series: Contact him at graham@glrc.org.

► **Green dry cleaning:** Consumers may not realize it, but the simple act of dropping off clothes at the cleaners could end up harming the environment. For decades, dry cleaners have used a toxic solvent to clean clothes. Now there are many contaminated former dry cleaning sites across the country. But a solution to the dry cleaning problem may now be available. A new chain of cleaners is touting a "greener" system that uses a non-toxic everyday substance. Contact the Great Lakes Radio Consortium's Patty Murray at murray@uwgb.edu.

NORTH CAROLINA

► **Stream restoration fund dribbles:** *The News & Observer* of Raleigh reported Jan. 20 that a North Carolina program to restore streams and wetlands has done little in its five years of existence, despite \$58 million it has taken in from the N.C. Department of Transportation, private developers, state appropriations and other revenue. The leaders of the N.C. Wetlands Restoration Program blame troubles with acquiring real estate and hiring construction contractors for its record so far: 10 acres of wetlands and less than five miles of stream restored.

In the meantime, highway and real estate developers destroyed at least 100 acres of wetlands and 16 miles of streams and satisfied their mitigation responsibilities by writing checks to the wetlands

program. Similar "in-lieu-fee mitigation" programs in other states have also struggled to show results, according to a General Accounting Office report last year. Contact James Eli Shiffer at the *N&O*, jshiffer@newsobserver.com or (919) 836-5701.

OREGON

► **Sound Science:** Using the issue of a controversy over DNA testing of lynx hair as a backdrop, Michael Milstein of *The Oregonian* explained to readers how science and politics are not just strange bedfellows, but very often quite uncomfortable ones. "Don't let someone tell you, 'Science made me do something,'" a U.S. Forest Service research leader told Milstein. "... People make decisions, and that's the bottom line." Contact Milstein at (503) 294-7689 or michaelmilstein@news.oregonian.com. The Jan. 23 story is available at http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/oregonian/index.ssf?/xml/story.ssf/html_standard.xml?/base/news/101179057731218361.xml.

► **ESA in the city:** *The Oregonian's* Jonathan Brinckman reports that city folk in Portland are beginning to sound like beleaguered loggers during the spotted-owl crisis. The reason: Now the Endangered Species Act is limiting their land uses as Portland makes changes to save salmon listed as threatened under the act. At issue is a new city law expanding the acreage affected by salmon-friendly building restrictions by one quarter. It would affect about 13,000 owners, or one-tenth of all the landowners in Portland, according to the Jan. 28 story. Contact Brinckman at (503) 221-8190 or jbrinckman@news.oregonian.com. The story is at http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/oregonian/index.ssf?/xml/story.ssf/html_standard.xml?/base/news/10122225122390639.xml

TENNESSEE

► **Sewage discharge endangers cave?:** Anne Paine of Nashville's *The Tennessean* has written numerous stories in the past few months about a battle to protect one of the most ecologically significant caves in the eastern U.S. The

town of Spencer, Tenn., has completed a much-needed \$6.5 million sewage-treatment plant, but environmentalists are trying to block it from going online. Without asking for an environmental impact statement, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation issued a permit in 2000 for the plant to discharge into Dry Fork Creek. But the creek flows through Rumble Room Cave, which has a ceiling 20 stories tall—the second-highest in the United States.

A biological survey commissioned by environmental groups found rare and endangered cave species, including several that are new to science. TDEC says the effluent will be too diluted to harm cave life and there's no chance of a spill. Environmentalists want the plant to switch to land application of the sewage. Gov. Don Sundquist said he'll include money for this in his upcoming budget, but since Tennessee is in a fiscal crisis, funds are likely unavailable. Paine wrote the initial story Nov. 21 with several lengthy follow-ups in January. She can be reached at (615) 259-8071.

► **Whistleblower fired:** Colleen Powers, an inspector for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, was fired in October for being too critical of Pollution Control Industries, a hazardous-waste recycler in Memphis. In January, 2001, more than two dozen workers became ill with a mysterious liver disease after a fire at the plant. In the following months, PCI was cited for a number of environmental and worker-safety violations. But plant officials complained that Powers made excessive document requests and placed an "unnecessary burden" on the plant.

Tennessee Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility said Powers was fired just for trying to do her job properly. She has filed a complaint under laws protecting regulatory whistleblowers. In an interview with Tom Charlier of *The Commercial Appeal* in September, Powers said "it's just a matter of time" before a potentially deadly accident or release occurs. On Dec. 18, it happened: a worker was killed in a fire at the plant. Charlier has been covering this story for several months. He can be reached at (901) 529-2572 or

charlier@gomemphis.com.

► **Windpower in Tennessee:** Tennessee Valley Authority's Green Power Switch program, in which utility customers pay a little extra to receive electricity from environmentally friendly sources, is so successful that it's being expanded. TVA wants to build a 20-megawatt "wind farm" near Mountain City in East Tennessee. Its first wind-power operation produces five megawatts, at a surprisingly competitive price. Officials say dire predictions about the turbines—that they would be too noisy or would kill too many birds—have not come true. Charlier reported this story Dec. 27. Contact him at (901) 529-2572 or charlier@gomemphis.com.

VIRGINIA

► **Killing anthrax spores:** Personal effects and "critical items" from three buildings on Capitol Hill were decontaminated at a facility in suburban Richmond, A.J. Hostetler of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported Dec. 12. Sterilization Services of Virginia used fumigation chambers to kill anthrax spores on 14 pallets of material. For more information, contact Hostetler at ahostetler@timesdispatch.com or (804) 649-6572.

In addition, 70 truckloads of wastes from anthrax cleanup projects in New York, New Jersey and Washington will be burned at a Norfolk incinerator, Scott Harper of *The Virginian-Pilot* reported Jan. 12. The material includes equipment and furniture from congressional offices, postal facilities and NBC News' headquarters. For more information, contact Harper at (757) 446-2340 or sharper@pilotonline.com.

► **James River study:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is planning a year-long study of the James River, seeking ways to reduce pollution and put more water into the river during dry spells, Rex Springston of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported Nov. 21. The corps is seeking congressional approval and \$200,000 for the study, which would begin next fall. The James River drains about 11,000 square miles or a quarter of Virginia. For more information, contact

Springston at (804) 649-6453 or rspringston@timesdispatch.com.

► **Cooling water:** A power company might use water from an abandoned mine instead of a nearby river to cool an electricity-generating plant it hopes to build in southwest Virginia, Paul Dellinger of *The Roanoke Times* reported Dec. 27. Duke Energy North America is considering taking water from an abandoned zinc mine in Wythe County, where it wants to build a 620-megawatt, gas-fired power plant. That would be an alternative to taking 7 million gallons of water a day from the New River—a prospect that has alarmed environmentalists. For more information, contact Dellinger at (276) 228-4752 or paulde@roanoke.com.

► **Power plant problems:** A state panel split on whether dozens of power plants proposed for Virginia would endanger people and forests, Rex Springston of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported Nov. 8. A panel that studied the issue for the State Air Pollution Control Board broke into two groups and issued dueling reports. One group, made up of environmentalists, said the new plants would create smog and acid rain. The other group, made up of industry representatives, said the new plants would be clean and would help replace old, dirty plants. For more information, contact Springston at (804) 649-6453 or rspringston@timesdispatch.com.

The dispute is the latest fallout from the continuing deregulation of the electric power industry in Virginia, according to a Nov. 8 article by Scott Harper of *The Virginian-Pilot*. Since 1998, when the state declared its intention to open up energy markets, utilities have requested state approval to build 30 plants. That would double the number of power generators in Virginia. For more information, contact Harper at (757) 446-2340 or sharper@pilotonline.com.

WEST VIRGINIA

► **Endangered squirrel debate:** The death of an endangered species of squirrel during a scientific study has become a hot topic in the debate over industry efforts to rewrite the

Endangered Species Act. West Virginia Public Radio reporter Jeff Young did a story in December about the use of the death by industry lobbyists and the *Washington Times* to discredit conservation activists. Young can be reached at jyoung@wvpubcast.org.

► **Mountaintop mining:** News that the U.S. Supreme Court declined to wade into the debate over mountaintop removal coal mining made headlines in West Virginia in late January. The court declined to review an appeals court decision that threw out an October 1999, ruling to strictly limit the coal industry practice of burying streams with mountaintop removal waste. In April 2001, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., ruled the case didn't belong in federal court. That ruling, which limits citizen suits under the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, could again be up for Supreme Court review after a similar case before the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals in Pennsylvania is decided. Find the story at <http://wvgazette.com/mining>. Contact Ken Ward Jr., *The Charleston Gazette*, (304) 348-1702 or kward@wvgazette.com.

► **Chemical dump found:** In December, Scott Finn of *The Charleston Gazette* uncovered the story of a decades-old toxic waste dump in the Putnam County, W.Va., community of Scary Creek. Chemical Leahman Tank Lines created the mess when it operated a chemical tanker cleaning facility on the property. State regulators have repeatedly told the company to clean up the site, but nothing has yet been done. Now, Chemical Leahman wants to handle the cleanup through a voluntary state remediation program that residents fear will allow a lesser level of decontamination. Finn can be reached at (304) 357-4323 or sfynn@wvgazette.com.

► **Mining threatens water:** In November, Jenni Vincent of the Morgantown *Dominion Post* wrote a package of articles about the threat to drinking water supplies and trout streams from underground coal mining. Vincent detailed several incidents where underground long-wall mining machines have

caused the subsidence of drinking water wells and streams, and she described a proposal by one coal company in western Maryland to mine under the north Branch of the Potomac River, a native trout stream in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. Vincent can be reached (304) 291-9425.

WASHINGTON

► **Clean Green in Northwest:** Echoing less-extensive reports in regional papers, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported Jan. 25 that the Pacific Northwest is poised to become a leader in the development of climate-neutral "green" energy sources. In addition to a wind farm being built near the Oregon-Washington border, the region is home to the first major municipally owned utility to commit to a 100 percent climate-friendly energy mix, Seattle City Light.

Brad Knickerbocker's story points out an interesting twist—this is not a sacrifice, but rather is viewed by government and business officials as an important source of new jobs in the future. Contact Knickerbocker at bradknick@aol.com or (541) 488-5546. The story is at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0125/p03s01-usgn.html>.

► **Salmon overfished:** Although the National Marine Fisheries Service and others who control fishing rates claim it is OK to catch some salmon protected under the Endangered Species Act, an independent panel of scientists appointed by NMFS says it ain't so. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer's* thorough treatment of the ticklish issue on Dec. 12 quotes the scientific panel as reporting after hours of briefings by NMFS officials that, "We remain somewhat mystified concerning the scientific justification for current allowable harvests." Flawed computer models are part of the problem, critics say. Reporter Robert McClure can be reached at robertmcclure@seattlepi.com or (206) 448-8092. The story is at http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/50279_fish12.shtml.

► **Pesticide taints compost:** A pesticide thought to be fairly benign actually backfired and caused widespread contamination of compost, the *Seattle Times'*

Lynda Mapes reported Jan. 22. Contamination of compost by the herbicide clopyralid can kill sensitive plants, including those in home gardens and those in commercial operations, at concentrations as low as 3 parts per billion. Its discovery in compost around the country threatens recent innovations aimed at recycling yard wastes, Mapes reports. She is reachable at (206) 464-2736 or lmapes@seattletimes.com. The story is at <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=compost22m0&date=20020122&query=lynda+mapes>.

► **Cut trees, stop sprawl:** A \$185 million land deal that puts a chunk of land twice the size of the city of Seattle off-limits to suburban sprawl was announced in January. The deal, in which a non-profit land trust buys some 104,000 acres from timber giant Weyerhaeuser, is the most expensive of its kind proposed in the country, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported Jan 17. The catch is that the IRS will have to approve the pact, which is dependent on a conservation easement, or Congress will have to intervene.

Also, retiring the \$185 million purchase price relies on continuing to cut timber on the land. However, the land trust says that's better than leaving the land to Weyerhaeuser's land-development arm. Contact reporter Robert McClure at robertmcclure@seattlepi.com or (206) 448-8092. See the story at http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/54795_weyer17.shtml.

WISCONSIN

► **Run-off rulemaking:** A major push to reduce non-point pollution is making its way through Wisconsin's environmental rulemaking process. Sponsors of the measure call it the most comprehensive run-off rules in the nation. The package would require farmers, homebuilders, street sweepers and others to cut the amount of pesticides, soils, animal waste and other material that run off into lakes, streams and nearby groundwater. *Wisconsin State Journal* reporter Ron Seely wrote about the plan in the paper's Jan. 23 issue. visit <http://www.madison.com> or call (608) 252-6131. ❖

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