

An aerial photograph of a dense forest with a variety of green and yellow trees. Several birds, possibly terns, are captured in flight, their wings spread wide, flying across the upper half of the image. The birds have white bodies and dark wings with a distinctive dark band near the tip. The forest below is a mix of green and yellow, suggesting an autumn setting. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor environment.

# SEJ Journal

Winter 2008, Vol. 17 No. 4

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Covering coal country

Three decades on the beat

Photography for reporters

Network news going green

Undersea reporting

A quarterly publication of the

**Society of Environmental Journalists**

# SEJ watchdog swiftly responds for more press freedom

By TIM WHEELER

A journalist's job is to follow the facts and call them as they appear, no matter which side of a debate they may favor. In the past year, as president of the Society of Environmental Journalists, I've often found myself explaining to various people and groups that the only cause for which SEJ advocates is more and better coverage of the environment.

But I have to confess that's not quite true. There's another cause we unabashedly embrace, and openly espouse: the necessity, in a democratic society, for journalists and the public to get complete and accurate information about how their government is working – or not.

Five years ago, SEJ's board of directors set up a First Amendment Task Force "to address freedom-of-information, right-to-know, and other news gathering issues of concern to the pursuit of environmental journalism." The task force, made up of working reporters, journalism professors and other SEJ members, works to maintain the access of journalists and the public to records and other information about the environment. And it isn't shy about speaking out on behalf of SEJ when it spies threats.

Two recent episodes show the task force at its best – and demonstrate the need for advocacy.

In October, SEJ member Kinna Ohman, a freelance reporter working on an assignment for the Great Lakes Radio Consortium's "Environment Report," contacted Yellowstone National Park to arrange an interview with a wolf biologist on staff. A public affairs staffer at the park sent her an application for a permit to do the interview, requiring that she pay a \$200 fee up front, with the possibility of additional per-day fees while in the park.

Kinna did what many SEJ members do when stunned or stumped. She posted her experience on SEJ-Talk, where a gaggle of members quickly urged her to challenge the permit and fee requirement. She did, and the park service public affairs staff promptly backed down, saying it had all been a misunderstanding, that it hadn't been made clear up front that Kinna was doing a story for public radio.

But her plea for help alerted Joe Davis, the hard-working member of SEJ's staff who serves on the First Amendment Task Force. Joe's many contributions to SEJ include editing *WatchDog TipSheet*, a biweekly online



One cause we unabashedly embrace: the necessity for journalists and the public to get complete and accurate information about how their government is working – or not.

newsletter devoted to chronicling freedom-of-information and First Amendment developments as they pertain to coverage of the environment.

It was not a new issue for Joe and SEJ. Complaints and concerns had cropped up before, mainly with photographers who'd been told they'd need to pay for a permit to take pictures in national parks. The Department of Interior had even begun drafting regulations codifying what had previously been guidelines, but those had seemed stalled a year ago.

Kinna's plight prompted Joe to check. He learned that Interior had, in fact, revived and formally proposed binding regulations. And though federal officials had previously said journalists were exempt from such permit and fee requirements, he found that wasn't always the case, and the language of the proposed regulation only muddied the issue further. Even more worrying, the opportunity for the public to comment on the rule before it became final was nearly up.

He reported his findings to the Task Force, setting in motion a whirlwind effort to comment before it was too late. Working with task force members, Joe drafted comments expressing "strong concern" over the proposed rule.

Believing that many voices were better than one in making an outcry, we circulated our comments among other journalism groups to alert them to the issue and invite them to join with us in protesting. Eighteen groups did – a veritable who's who of the journalism spectrum. What's more, with so many journalists involved, word of the looming regulation crept into the news, in newspaper stories and editorials and online in blogs.

A few weeks later, another threat emerged – again brought to SEJ's attention by one of its vigilant members. Associate member Mary Zanoni, a lawyer and freelance writer, reported that the farm bill being debated in the Senate carried a little-noticed provision that would restrict access to information about sick farm animals. More troubling still, the measure also would make it a crime for any-

**COVER PHOTO: Mountaintop removal mine near Clintwood, Va. See "Covering coal country," p. 17.**

**PHOTO BY KENT KESSINGER [www.kentkessinger.com](http://www.kentkessinger.com), via [SouthWings/www.southwings.org](http://SouthWings/www.southwings.org) & [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com).**



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Spring 2008 .....February 1, 2008  
 Summer 2008.....May 1, 2008  
 Fall 2008.....August 1, 2008  
 Winter 2009.....November 1, 2008

# Pitfalls and challenges await those who cover climate future

By BUD WARD

“Generational.”

The term comes to mind in the context of the global climate change challenges and opportunities we all face.

But I digress. Or rather, that is, allow me please now to further digress.

As a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President in 1976 and again in 1980, then-California Governor Jerry Brown showed that he was not above raising perplexing and often mind-bending issues and questions. So much so that the “Governor Moonbeam” moniker applied to him in 1978 by *Chicago Tribune* columnist Mike Royko hit home, for many, and stuck hard.

Garry Trudeau, in his *Doonesbury* column, was perhaps slightly more tactful and eloquent – but no less memorable – in saying that the quixotic Brown was “raising some of the foremost rhetorical questions of our day.”

Zinger!

Why do these anecdotes come to mind now, in anticipating the job facing environmental reporters as we enter the new year?

Go figure.

The new year brings with it extraordinary opportunities for journalists to do exceptional work in upholding the values and traditions of the independent media, in serving the long-term best interests of American democracy, and in turning to an advantage the clear risks posed by the [also-generational] transformation of the media from “dead trees” to the world of Ethernet, gigabytes and mouse clicks. (Note that the estimable “gray lady,” *The New York Times*, in its digital incarnation, edits its own signature logo to read “All the news that’s fit to click.”)

In covering emerging climate change science issues over the past decade and more, savvy reporters will have learned some valuable lessons applicable to the increasingly policy-, politics- and economics-focused issues they’ll be covering in the new year. A few thoughts:

- The scientific debate on climate change is *not* over, but rather rages, and healthily, in some critically important ways. Those pointing to claims that others say it is “over” are deliberately overstating, with intent and for effect. Don’t fall into the trap they’re setting. What’s indeed “over” for many serious climate scientists – better to say it’s at least for now in the “settled” science category – is that 1) the earth is warming; and 2) human activities have played and are playing a significant role in that warming. Don’t be misled by those grouching about the broader debate’s being “over.” They’re the precise ones with partisan axes to grind.



The scientific debate on climate change is *not* over, but rather rages, and healthily, in some critically important ways.

- The “skeptics,” “contrarians,” “doubters,” or whatever you choose to call them, will not simply slink away and concede they’ve lost the battle. Indeed, just the opposite, notwithstanding their depleted and demoralized ranks. Think down, perhaps, but by no means out. They’ll protest process, claim exclusion from decision making, and certainly bemoan media neglect when it comes to reporting on real climate science. But they won’t avoid the shrinking science battlefield as they too move increasingly toward matters of impacts, adaptation and mitigation, economics, and priority setting. If you think those opposing the so-called, but colossally misnamed, “consensus science” will now move to opposing the potential “solutions,” you’re likely to be right. The same, of course, applies for those who have championed the prevailing scientific view – they’re likely to line up in favor of this or that remedy, often notwithstanding the iron curtain scientists like to maintain between science and policy.

- There’s no IPCC counterpart in the climate change community when it comes to just what to do about the grand mess presented by excessive CO2 concentrations. Reporters and editors will be more on their own in trying to authoritatively vet claims and counter-claims. They’ll need to identify and cultivate their own trusted mentors and “reliable sources” with nothing like the unprecedented IPCC model to help them. Do I hear the words “good old-fashioned gumshoe reporting” in my ears? Yes. Do you in yours?

- Just as there’s no single silver-bullet scientific “breakthrough” that makes or un-makes the scientific community’s established understanding of climate change, there’s no one-size-fits-all, short-term or “easy” way out of the greenhouse gas conundrum. It’ll take time, money and unprecedented cooperative global community effort. There inevitably will be lots of setbacks and even false starts along the way. That’s part of why the “generational” terminology and the “Apollo

*Continued on p. 27*

# Planning revs up for Roanoke

By **BILL KOVARIK** and **KEN WARD JR.**

A young Virginia Tech scientist is standing up in a canoe, gesturing at the river around him. "Imagine this," he says. "It's 300 million years ago. There are no trees – just giant ferns. There are no birds or flowering plants. There are no dinosaurs – they won't show up for many millions of years. Everything about the landscape is utterly different. But in the river – the fish – are the same then as they are today."

A hundred miles away, a short man with a determined gleam in his gimlet eyes stands in front of a landscape devastated by mountaintop-removal mining. "Is there anything in life that you hold so precious that money could never buy?" he asks. "For me, it's the mountains, it's Appalachia, it's a whole way of life they are destroying here."

These are just two of the scenes that we have witnessed as reporters, and hope to share with you at SEJ's next annual conference, hosted by Virginia Tech Oct. 15-19, 2008. The conference is set for Roanoke, Va., amid the Appalachian mountains at the height of their fall leaf season.

Expect stunning vistas, top science briefings, incisive political discussion and supportive craft sessions tailored to your needs. Even with SEJ's extraordinary history of annual conferences, we think SEJ 2008 is shaping up to be one you just can't miss. One reason is the location – and its significance.

The Appalachian mountains are, geologists say, among the oldest on earth, and they are beautifully carved by ceaseless water and wind. Botanists and biologists marvel at their diversity. Historians see the Appalachians as America's first and last frontier. Writers have explored their gothic social tragedies. We intend to introduce you to the best of these.

When you arrive, you will find the mountains ablaze with orange, red and yellow colors of fall foliage. You will also find that the region has become the epicenter of a fiery global debate over climate change and the future of our planet.

Roanoke is located at the transition point between the coal fields and the coastal plains. It is the railroad town for the coal fields, and the endless stream of gondolas rumbling down the mountains pass only a few yards away from the conference center. They continue on to the rail yards and ports of the Piedmont and the Chesapeake Bay. Nearly all of this coal is burned for electricity.

Energy and climate will be a major focus for the SEJ2008 conference with a special emphasis on coal. The opening plenary will focus on it, one of the tours will

explore a mountaintop-removal site, and coal field flyovers are in the works. Later, you'll hear some of the top writers, scientists, industry speakers and environmentalists speaking on mountaintop removal, water contamination, sludge pond hazards, air pollution and carbon sequestration.

The region has also been the focus of controversy over alternatives to coal. One tour will explore the science and environmental issues behind mining an enormous uranium deposit located close to the conference site. Another tour will explore the construction of a wind power facility and a pumped hydro storage unit. Expect strong debate over bio-fuels and nuclear power as well.

The Appalachians are also the headwaters for much of the nation's water supply, and tours of the New River and the James by canoe and kayak will get SEJ members outdoors in the most spectacular way. A hike to McAfee's Knob – one of the most photographed spots on the Appalachian trail – is also featured in the tour lineup.

Sustainable forestry and land care, organic farming, and Blue Ridge Parkway eco-tourism complete the tour lineups, ensuring that we'll have something for every interest.

We also felt a special responsibility to focus on poverty, justice and the environment, and have a morning plenary that will bring in experts in this area.

The role of environmental issues in the presidential election is very significant, and we are inviting candidates and their environmental advisers to speak at the conference.

You'll also find that book authors will be celebrated this year with a Sunday morning authors' breakfast and readings by many SEJ members. Appalachian authors and environmental history will be special points of focus. We want to make it easy for you to experience the rapidly expanding field of environmental publishing.

Another feature of this year's conference is a full computer lab with concurrent craft sessions on GIS, multimedia production and web design. We hope this will be especially helpful for freelancers or others making transitions in the changing media world.

The conference center is within easy walking distance of the computer lab, the beat dinner restaurants and the Saturday reception at the Virginia Museum of Transportation. This means that it will be easy to meet up and socialize with other SEJ members.

For regular updates on the conference, please check the SEJ website beginning in March. We'll look forward to seeing you there.





# Los Angeles Times reporters bring home \$75,000 Grantham Prize

Kenneth R. Weiss and Usha Lee McFarling of the *Los Angeles Times* are the 2007 winners of the \$75,000 Grantham Prize for Excellence in Reporting on the Environment for their five-part series "Altered Oceans."

Grantham Prize jurors said the July 30-Aug. 3, 2006, series "gives life to all those generalities about the decline of the oceans in a way that should grab the imaginations not only of politicians responsible for taking corrective steps but also of ordinary readers."

The public response to the series (available: [www.latimes.com/oceans](http://www.latimes.com/oceans)) has been overwhelmingly positive. Leaders of the bipartisan House Oceans Caucus, for instance, distributed copies to every member of the House, cautioning that the ocean conditions described in the series constitute a threat to national security, the

economy and the environment. The *Los Angeles Times* produced a reprint and DVD of the series for educational use.

Jurors also selected three Award of Special Merit recipients, each receiving a \$5,000 award:

- Eugene Linden for his book *The Winds of Change*, published by Simon & Schuster;
- the NOVA Television program "Dimming the Sun," a DOX Production for NOVA/WGBH and the BBC, produced by Senior Executive Producer Paula S. Apsell, written and produced by David Sington and directed by Duncan Copp;
- and a team of writers from the East Oregonian Publishing Co. for their series, "Our Climate Is Changing ... Ready or Not."

The prize jurors said Linden's book "manages the remarkable feat of bringing a new light to the most writ-

ten-about environmental challenge of the era, climate change."

Jurors praised the NOVA production for presenting "a different, but critical, take on global warming ... Exceptional production values, great storytelling, and important subject matter make this a fascinating and disturbing report."

According to jurors, the East Oregonian Publishing Co. series "represented an extraordinary effort on the part of a group of small newspapers in the Pacific Northwest. The result is sophisticated, compelling journalism, extraordinary for publications of this size and scope."

The Grantham Prize and the three Awards of Special Merit was presented at a Sept. 24, 2007, ceremony and seminar at the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting, the prize administrator, in Narragansett, R.I.

*Society of Environmental Journalists  
Awards for Reporting on the Environment*

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\$250 Student prize with up to \$750 travel assistance  
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*New Category!*

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*for the book judged as the best  
environment journalism in 2007*



# Books, accolades, new jobs and wiki winners

By JACKLEEN de LA HARPE

**Bart Anderson**, editor of *Energy Bulletin*, an online publication covering peak oil and sustainability, co-authored "Peak Phosphorus" (<http://energybulletin.net/33164.html>), an article raising the possibility that phosphorus production has peaked globally and suggesting that supplies will become scarcer and more expensive, with momentous consequences for agriculture since food production depends on phosphorus inputs. *Energy Bulletin* is a volunteer effort that publishes original articles and collections of related news items, with no connection to any political or business organization. Current readership is about 31,000 article-reads per week-day (14,000 visitors/weekday).

*Outside* magazine Contributing Editor **Bruce Barcott's** new book, "The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw: One Woman's Fight to Save the World's Most Beautiful Bird," will be published in February by Random House. The book follows the battle to stop a hydroelectric dam from drowning the nesting ground of the last wild macaws in the Central American nation of Belize. The cast includes a one-eyed ex-pat journalist, corrupt government ministers, Newfoundland dam raisers, and a woman who sings to wild jaguars. Extinction, dams, and money also play heavy roles.

**Valerie Brown** wrote several articles including "A Climate Change Solution? Beneath the Columbia River Basin" for *High Country News*, a real-life trial of the uncertain science of carbon sequestration ([www.hcn.org/servlets/hcn.Article?article\\_id=17188](http://www.hcn.org/servlets/hcn.Article?article_id=17188)); a story in the November *Environmental Health Perspectives* called "Of Two Minds: Groups Square Off on Carbon Mitigation," ([www.ehponline.org/members/2007/115-11/EHP115pa546.PDF](http://www.ehponline.org/members/2007/115-11/EHP115pa546.PDF)), describing carbon sequestration and environmental justice in California, a contentious topic; and a long article in the Summer 2007 *Oregon*

*Historical Quarterly* called "Music on the Cusp: From Folk to Acid Rock in Portland Coffeehouses, 1967-1970," ([www.historycooperative.org/journals/ohq/108.2/brown.html](http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ohq/108.2/brown.html)), a three-year project supported with a small arts grant and inspired by her first career as a musician in Portland.

**Merritt Clifton** led workshops about animal care and control trends, dog attacks, and risk assessment at the annual conference of the Ohio Dog Wardens Association in Columbus, Ohio, in December. Then he traveled to Cairo, Egypt, to do a multi-day ecological assessment of the Cairo street dog and feral cat populations for discussion at the Middle East Network for Animal Welfare conference, also in December.

The Public Radio Partnership in Louisville, Ky. has hired its first environmental reporter, **Kristin Espeland**. Espeland comes to the organization's NPR news station, WFPL, from Wyoming Public Radio, where she covered both environmental and general assignment stories. She'll also be responsible for developing a related website and forging relationships with regional reporters to acquire more environmental pieces.

Freelancer **Peter Friederici** wrote an extensive overview of water-recycling programs in the West and why they're going forward or being stopped by citizen opposition for the September 17 issue of *High Country News*. His story touched on the ubiquity of endocrine-disrupting chemicals in the water supply, psychological perspectives on how people view water, and the economics of wastewater reuse.

**William Freudenburg** is co-author of the lead article for *Sociological Inquiry* (V. 78 #1, Jan. 2008), "Scientific Certainty Argumentation Methods (SCAMs): Science and the Politics of Doubt," that argues that science can provide only three kinds of answers – yes, no, and maybe – and that the majority of scientific findings fall into the "maybe" category. If

organized industrial interests can stop action until answers are definitive, and if answers are almost never definitive, those interests can sometimes block regulatory or legislative actions, often for many decades. The article explores this argument through examples such as the health risks of cigarette smoking, asbestos and lead, and the reality of global warming.

Minnesota Public Radio has appointed **Stephanie Hemphill** as full-time environmental reporter. She was previously a general assignment reporter based in Duluth where she reported on regional environmental issues.

MPR had shared the environment beat with health. Hemphill expects to cover energy extensively, as Minnesota has recently established ambitious renewable-energy and carbon-reduction goals.

**Christine Heinrichs** was selected as a fellow in environmental journalism at the National Tropical Botanical Garden in Kauai ([www.ntbg.org](http://www.ntbg.org)) May 2007. The week-long fellowship focused on invasive species, ethnobotany and other environmental issues. The group's report is posted online at [www.flickr.com/photos/ntbg](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ntbg). Heinrichs has relocated from Madison, Wisc., to Cambria, Calif.

**Tom Henry** of the *Toledo Blade* is writing a how-to chapter for journalists covering nuclear power issues for a publication called "A Handbook for Reporters on Nuclear Materials, Energy and Waste Management." The "handbook" is expected to be at least 250 to 300 pages long, similar to a textbook. It is a nonpartisan project funded by CRESP, the Consortium for Risk Evaluation with Stakeholder Participation, and includes faculty members from universities and medical schools.

**Ayana Meade** (Metcalf Fellow '05-'06) is an environmental reporter for *The Alewife Newspaper* and *The*  
*Continued on p. 22*



# GOOGLE: An essential tool in a reporter's bag of tricks

By DAVID POULSON

A private detective once told me how she used Google to nab a crook for workers' compensation fraud.

She plugged the guy's full name into the search engine. Nothing too interesting came up. But then she entered it with the last name before the first name.

Bingo! Up popped a link to a list of competitors in a local karate tournament – one that her suspect competed in on a date when he missed work ostensibly for a back injury.

That's the way it is with Google. You don't need to be too terribly sophisticated to get the most out of perhaps the greatest journalistic tool since the chisel and stone tablet. But there are a few handy tricks.

That name reversal thing is handy not only for lists, but for finding footnotes and other citations of documents written by your target. Put into Google your own last name before your first name. You may be surprised at how often your work is cited in academic and other publications.

Just make sure you put names in quotation marks to search for the exact word order. A search without the quotation marks produces documents with the target words scattered throughout it and in any order.

But you knew that.

Here are a few easy but powerful tips you may not know:

**Set your Google preferences to 100 results per page.**

The default is 10, but you're likely to check more search results the fewer times you have to click on the next page. That increases your chances of finding the perfect hit.

We're journalists. We're impatient. Use other search engines with Google if for no other reason than that the perfect link may rise to the top in one but not the other. **Try dogpile.org for one-stop shopping** of multiple search engines. (And while you're there, for a voyeuristic thrill, hit "search spy" to view what others are searching for that instant – even the dirty words.)

Did that big pollution settlement you're writing about depress the company's stock value? Readers with 401(k)s want to know. **Enter a stock abbreviation** – NYT, GCI, SSP, whatever – and get back the value of shares trading now and the high and low for the day. It should be the last check you run before hitting send on a story about any publicly traded company.

**Type "teaspoons in 1.79 gallons"** and you'll find there are 1,374.72. That's a handy feature for an environmental reporter in need of metric or other conversions. But for fun, try converting some of those obscure units from high school physics. How many joules are there in 1.27 ergs? How many grams in 3 stones?

**Type define: TCE** and Google will produce definitions of that volatile organic compound. The same technique produces links to definitions of any word.

**Enter link:sej.org** into the search box to produce links to sites that link to the SEJ site. Such a search hints at a site's credibility by giving you an idea of the company it keeps. If NASA links to [www.littlegreenmen.org](http://www.littlegreenmen.org), you might view that site with some astonishment.

**Narrow a search to a specific website.** A search for "Beth Parke" site:[www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org), confines the search to references to Beth Parke on the SEJ site. Beth Parke hits elsewhere are ignored.

Ever look at a phone message and wonder about the location of the caller? **Type into Google the area code to produce a map of the region it covers.**

Got an idea for the perfect lede based on lyrics you can't quite remember? **Type into Google, lyrics: and the words that you do recall.**

You're not looking for Web pages that ask your question. You want those with the answer. Don't type, "What is the average temperature in Death Valley?" Try instead, **"The average temperature in Death Valley is \*"** That asterisk is a wild card. Envision the words that appear on the page from a perfect search and enter as many as you can.

**Subtract unwanted results with the minus sign.** Search for bass –fish and you'll more likely get pages about low musical tones (or Bass Ale) than about fishing tournaments.

**Enter a name (use quote marks) and city and get a phone number;** enter a phone number and get a name and an address.

Enter airline flight numbers and you should get a link to a map of that flight's progress. Tail numbers produce the full registration form for that plane. A UPC bar code number gives a description of the item you found it on. A vehicle identification number produces a car's year, make and model. FedEx or UPS package numbers produce links to tracking information.

Don't be afraid of that advanced search button on Google. It walks you through many ways to get the most out of a search. One of my favorites limits returns by file format. Say you're looking for data to crunch. Put in your search term and limit the returns to files with a .xls format. You'll get links just to files produced by a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Want more? Check the applications under development at <http://labs.google.com>. You'll find links to some nifty Google experiments.

Give 'em a whirl. And if you think of a journalistic application for one, I wouldn't appreciate a heads-up at [poulson@msu.edu](mailto:poulson@msu.edu).



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

# Photography for reporters

By **MARCUS R. DONNER**

First the bad news: It's not the camera's fault the picture is bad. In the years I've spent looking at photos taken by reporters, the unfortunate truth as to why the photos weren't good was invariably operator error, not a problem with the camera. Today's point-and-shoots, and consumer digital SLRs, are very good at getting photos properly exposed and in focus.

Now the good news: There are a few simple things you can do to make your photos better.

## Composition – Frame like a pro The Rule of Thirds

If you only do one thing to make your photos better, do this. Artists have used it for hundreds of years and it's one of the most common compositional techniques of photographers. You can see it every day in professional photographs in your daily paper, website, blog or *National Geographic*.

Imagine that the viewfinder of your camera has lines that spilt the frame into thirds, both horizontally and vertically – as if you've drawn a tic-tac-toe board on the viewfinder. Those lines, the thirds, are where you want to place the subject of your photo. Photos that are centered, which is what most amateurs do, tend to feel static. Photos that place the subject on one of the thirds, either horizontally or vertically, are more compositionally active.

It can be as simple as putting the horizon on the top or bottom third. Best of all is to place the subject where those lines cross on the axis of the vertical and horizontal thirds, as in the photo above. The singer's face is on the crossed lines.

Start looking around and you'll see that professional photographers are using this simple technique every day. Why? Because it's so effective. Here are some examples to look at on the web:

- <http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/2007-11/tonga/teague-text.html>
- <http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/2007-11/hunters/poole-text.html>

## The Decisive Moment

"A velvet hand, a hawk's eye – these we should all

have. ... If the shutter was released at the decisive moment, you have instinctively fixed a geometric pattern without which the photograph would have been both formless and lifeless." – *Henri Cartier-Bresson*

Think of Bresson's Decisive Moment as that one moment when the whole story can be told in a single photo. Pros are always looking for these moments, because getting the moment trumps everything else. Here are some things I tell photographers starting out.

- **Shoot a "safety photo:"** This is the photo that gets the job done – a photo you know you could publish. It might not be the most exciting photo, but if you get nothing else, it will work. Why shoot this photo? Because once you have it you can try other things.

- **Shoot creatively:** Experiment, get creative, tilt the camera, shoot from a high angle, or a low one. Don't be afraid to try. Your experiment may turn out to be the best photo you shoot. And if it isn't, that's okay – you still have your "safety photo." Plus, you often learn from those failed



This photograph of Betsy Olson performing demonstrates the rule of thirds.

Photo courtesy of Marcus Donner

experiments and next time you'll make it work.

- **Shoot, shoot and shoot some more:** How do photographers get those great photos? Not just a good photo, not just an adequate photo, but a *great* photo. Well, they work the situation and they shoot lots of photos. They are looking for the best of the best. A professional photojournalist will shoot dozens if not hundreds of photos per assignment. It's the digital age; it doesn't cost anything to shoot more frames, to try more options. It's what the pros do. In the June 2000 edition of *National Geographic* the average story had 15 published photos. Editor Bill Allen wrote that the average number of frames shot per story was 29,000. You don't have to shoot 29,000 photos, but shoot more than two or three.

- **Fill the frame:** What you *exclude* from the frame is

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Photo courtesy of Marcus Donner



Great Blue Herons at Golden Gardens Park in Seattle, Wash. Can you see the thirds?

just as important as what you *include*. Remember, you are trying to tell a story clearly. As famed war photographer Robert Capa used to say “if your pictures aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough.”

• **No posing:** Don’t pose photos if you can help it. Instead, take photos of real people doing real things.

#### Look for good light

Photography is nothing without light. Pros are always looking for good light. Taking advantage of good light can go a long way in making your photos more visually appealing.

One of the best times is “magic hour” – that hour around sunrise and sunset is always some of the best light of the day. The next time you see a sunset, turn around and look at what the light is doing behind you. It’s great.

Indoors, the light through a north-facing window is almost always nice all day long. If you’re shooting a portrait, using light from a north-facing window is natural studio lighting. Sometimes this kind of light is called Rembrandt lighting. For it to work the subject has to be close to the window.

#### Avoid bad light

Outdoors during midday is some of the worst light of

the day. You’ll have the deepest and harshest shadows in the hours around noon. Avoid it if you can.

#### Flash – a little goes a long way

Most point-and-shoots, if left to their own devices, will blast your subjects with flash. Nobody looks good in the harsh glare of a flash. Turn it down. Most cameras, even many point-and-shoots, allow you to adjust the flash. Instead of overpowering the room with light, the flash will simply fill in the shadows and look much more natural. Take a minute to read the manual on your flash and learn how to turn it down. It might take a bit of experimenting to get it balanced right, but when you do you’ll have a nicer picture.



*Marcus Donner is a visual storyteller based in Seattle, Wash. As a director of photography, he coached staff and defined the look of a daily newspaper for eight years. Other experience includes photojournalism, cinematography and film stills, teaching workshops, and picture editing for print and multimedia. His work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, HBO, Investors Business Daily and The MacArthur Foundation. Clients include The Sundance Channel, Reuters and the Associated Press.*

# Biotech and hurricanes

## Media coverage spawns fear and myths

By JAN KNIGHT

*Katrina coverage driven by disaster myths, reinforces push to use military during domestic disasters, study suggests*

News reporting in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina presented New Orleans as a war zone filled with “opportunistic looters and violent criminals” and requiring military intervention, a recent study suggests.

Calling these frames “disaster myths,” University of Colorado researchers found that journalists used the frames to describe Katrina victims’ behavior and official responses to it in ways that matched post-9/11 political discourse, which called for a greater role for the military in times of domestic disaster. But, they noted, research shows that typical human responses to disaster – such as intense information-seeking and concerns about looting, versus actual looting – differ from popular images presented in all types of media, which tend to portray normal responses to disaster as sheer panic.

One problem with this portrayal is that “incorrect assumptions about the potential for looting and social breakdown can lead to misallocations of public safety resources that could be put to better use in providing direct assistance to victims,” they stated. “Concerns with public panic can also lead officials to avoid issuing timely warnings and to keep needed risk-related information from the public.”

In the case of Katrina coverage, they argued, this portrayal also served “to justify stances adopted by law enforcement entities and other institutions concerned with social control.”

They noted a distinction between looting during times of civil unrest versus times of disaster. In the case of the former, looting tends to be open and relatively accepted, while in the latter case, large-scale looting is “van-

ishingly rare” and socially condemned. But the fear of looting, whether it is occurring or not, prompts residents to take preventive measures, such as tacking strong warning signs on their property, the researchers wrote. They noted that at the time of their study, no empirical data indicat-

*U.S., U.K. focus on agrifood risks, frame international biotech events differently, research suggests*

News coverage in two countries over 12 years emphasized the “dreaded aspects” of agricultural biotechnology while focusing on the benefits of its medical counterpart, recent

Research shows that typical human responses to disaster differ from popular images presented in all types of media, which tend to portray normal responses to disaster as sheer panic.

ed that large-scale looting had occurred in New Orleans and no studies of crime before and after the hurricane had been completed.

“Hurricane Katrina may well prove to be the focusing event that moves the nation to place more faith in military solutions for a wider range of social problems than ever before,” the researchers speculated. “If this does turn out to be the case, the media will have helped that process along.”

Their conclusions were based on a qualitative analysis of Katrina news reports from Aug. 29, 2005, to Sept. 11, 2005, in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.

For more information, see Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski, “Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Volume 604, Number 1 (March 2006), pp. 57-81.

research shows.

At the same time, the coverage tended to localize international biotech events, leading to the use of different frames for similar events, which drove each country’s continued coverage of the broader topics, according to the study.

The researchers, all from the University of Missouri-Columbia, focused on news biotech frames because, research shows, news can influence public opinion and policy. They examined 2,000 news articles on medical and agricultural biotechnology appearing in the *Washington Post* and *London Times* from 1990 through 2001 to determine how journalists presented the risks and benefits associated with each application.

Among other things, they found that the death of Jesse Gelsinger in 1999 after experimental gene therapy at the University of Pennsylvania steered U.S. news coverage toward focusing on an individual death and

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# Regulating trade could curtail invasive species

By RHITU CHATTERJEE

In 2003, more than 50 people in the Midwest became ill with the monkey pox virus. The source for the African pathogen – pet prairie dogs that were kept next to infected Gambian pouch rats in a pet store.

In the early 1970s, Arkansas aquaculturists imported the Asian Black carp to control fish parasites in aquaculture ponds. Now these mussel-eating fish are happily lurking deep in the waters of the Mississippi River Basin. Scientists fear that they may be driving precious endangered snails and mussels to extinction.

Meanwhile, released pet Burmese pythons are competing with native alligators in the Florida Everglades for food.

All these cases have one thing in common – the troublesome animals were imported into the United States for commercial purposes.

Few non-native species transported for trade – aquaculture, aquarium, pet, nursery or live bait trade – survive in their new environment, and fewer still become established and cause problems. But the damage done by those few is large enough to cost the United States billions of dollars every year.

Once a non-native organism is established and spreading in its new home, eradication efforts are pointless and often have widespread adverse environmental effects. That is why ecologists and environmentalists are stressing on the need for risk assessment and prevention.

Twenty years ago, this might have been impossible. Now, however the situation is different.

Scientists and environmentalists agree that targeted control of trade in live animals and plants would prevent a significant portion of the problem right at the roots. In 2006, the

Ecological Society of America announced that scientists have the tools for doing risk analysis on species being transported. A 2007 study by economist David Finnoff at the University of Wyoming and colleagues has shown that even without accounting for environmental costs, Australia's plant quarantine program – which identifies potentially risky plants and bans their import – saves the country billions of dollars in herbicide, pesticide and labor costs.

Currently, the United States reacts rather than takes a precautionary approach to non-native species. According to an investigative report released by the Defenders of Wildlife in August 2007, by the time federal agencies step in, damage is already done. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service address human health, agriculture, and wildlife implications, respectively.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the slowest to respond among the agencies and has the least regulatory authority to prevent potential invasions, followed by the CDC, says Peter Jenkins, main author of the Defenders of Wildlife report. The agriculture department is the “least guilty,” he adds.

The first step for risk assessment of alien species is screening of organisms being imported. International databases of species known to be harmful can help government officials in deciding whether or not to let a species in.

The Defenders of Wildlife report found that of the 2,241 identified non-native animal species imported into the United States between 2000 and 2004, as recorded by the Fish and Wildlife Service, 302 species were easily

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## David Lodge's research:

[www.nd.edu/~jmcnulty/index.html](http://www.nd.edu/~jmcnulty/index.html)

## Broken Screens, by Defenders of Wildlife:

[www.defenders.org/programs\\_and\\_policy/international\\_conservation/u.s.\\_imports\\_of\\_live\\_animals/broken\\_screens.php](http://www.defenders.org/programs_and_policy/international_conservation/u.s._imports_of_live_animals/broken_screens.php)

## Australia's Weed Risk Assessment System:

[www.daff.gov.au/ba/reviews/weeds/development](http://www.daff.gov.au/ba/reviews/weeds/development)

## What Australia does to keep out potentially harmful animals:

[www.daff.gov.au/ba/reviews/final-animal](http://www.daff.gov.au/ba/reviews/final-animal)

## Finnoff's paper on the economic benefits of risk assessment for invasive species:

[www.pnas.org/cgi/reprint/0605787104v1.pdf](http://www.pnas.org/cgi/reprint/0605787104v1.pdf)

## National Park Service photo of Burmese python from Everglades:

[www.nps.gov/ever/parknews/alien-species.htm](http://www.nps.gov/ever/parknews/alien-species.htm)

Inside story:

# Reporter's three decades on the beat bring awards, honors

By BILL DAWSON

Jane Kay is one of environmental journalism's most honored and respected reporters. The *San Francisco Chronicle's* environment writer, she is a two-time winner of the Scripps Howard Foundation's Edward J. Meeman Award.

Last September, for a diverse portfolio of articles, she received the first-place award in the "Outstanding Beat Reporting - Print" category in SEJ's 6th Annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment.

The judges said:

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

At the *Chronicle*, Kay focuses her reporting efforts on global warming, biological diversity and environmental health, including chemicals in people, wildlife and consumer products.

She taught environmental reporting at the University of California at Berkeley from 1991 to 1998, then directed the Graduate School of Journalism's Program in Environmental Journalism until 2003.

Other awards include the national Sigma Delta Chi Award for Public Service and the Don Bolles Memorial Award for Investigative Reporting in 1986 for uncovering decades of solvent pollution in Tucson's drinking water, as well as the National Press Club's Robert L. Kozik Award for environmental excellence in 1994 for her seven-part series, "Bay in Peril."

**Q: People have taken a lot of different paths into environmental journalism. When and how did you first get involved with the beat?**

**Kay:** In the late 1970s, I was working at the *Arizona Daily Star* in Tucson as a feature writer. I was doing a story



Photo courtesy of the SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/Jerry Teller

**A trickle of water flowed into Mono Lake over the dried lake bottom in 1982, prompting concerns about its fate. The lake is now rising and healthy.**

about child labor near Phoenix in Maricopa County. Children 8 years old were in the fields tying green onions alongside their parents. I'd go out in the morning to get photographs and interviews, and saw and smelled the crop dusters flying overhead with the drift landing on the people. I saw the barrels of chemicals leaking into the irrigation ditches where people bathed. I convinced my editor to let me trade with a reporter who was on news side and wanted to write feature stories.

I started the environmental beat at the paper in 1979. My first stories were on pesticides, including on the grants that University of Arizona faculty received from chemical companies for research on products that would probably never be approved for U.S. use. I got my feet wet in a hurry. That year I got a tip about tritium, radioactive hydrogen, escaping from a watch dial factory in the middle of the city. I found, somewhat laboriously, that the tritium had contaminated neighbors as well as the food in the kitchen supplying cafeterias in Tucson's largest school district. After months of stories, then-Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt ordered the National Guard to remove casks of tritium from

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American Atomics Corp. and store them in bunkers near Flagstaff.

**Q: Early recognition for your reporting came in the form of major national awards for uncovering decades-long contamination of Tucson's drinking water with solvents. Have you continued to follow the solvent issue closely over the years? In hindsight, are there things you would now do differently if you were approaching the same story for the first time today?**

Kay: The story of Tucson's contaminated aquifer, which the *Arizona Daily Star* broke in 1985, continues today as the city faces future shortages in good quality drinking water.

In hindsight, I can't believe that I conducted my own year-long health study on exposure to TCE, or trichloroethylene. The solvent had been in the drinking water for at least 20 years, delivered directly to much of the southside near the airport, mixed Latino and Anglo neighborhoods. I interviewed more than 500 people. On a specially designed computer program, I logged in all the data: name, age, year of diagnosis of illness, address, how long they lived there, where they attended school, and relatives. I compared cancers to what would be expected in the census tracts, and found some excess cases.

I felt that I had to do it because no one else would. I couldn't drum up interest from the Arizona Department of Health Services or the (U.S.) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Both agencies denied that TCE was harmful. Now it's categorized as a probable human carcinogen.

Since then, thousands of residents have shared in mil-

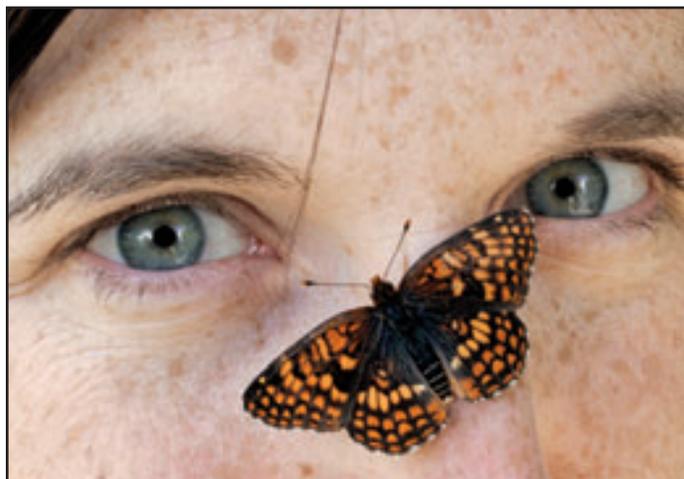


Photo courtesy of the SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/Kar Wade

**Jessica Hellmann, assistant professor at the University of Notre Dame, and her students conduct research on butterflies around Ashland, Ore. The butterfly on her face is a checkerspot.**

lions of dollars in settlements of lawsuits alleging that they have suffered health problems from unknowingly drinking water tainted with the TCE plume coming from the site of Hughes Aircraft Co., a former U.S. Air Force contractor, and other sources near the airport.

When I came to California in 1986, I wrote about the underground plumes of solvents in Silicon Valley as well as selenium from agricultural runoff tainting surface water. In northern California, the public doesn't rely so heavily on groundwater. Now I write many more stories about mercury from old mines leaking into San Francisco Bay and contaminating birds, marine mammals and the fish that people would very much like to eat.

**Q: What are the most significant changes you've witnessed in environmental reporting over the course of your career – changes for good or bad?**

Kay: The changes have been mostly for the good, I'd say. Now environmental stories aren't segregated but are integrated throughout the paper. It's not just me writing about the environment.

We have business reporters covering the economics and technology of clean energy and how the environment plays into a successful season at a ski resort. Home and garden sections emphasize eliminating chemicals in backyards and in consumer products. Food sections include stories on organic, slow food and sustainability trends. Feature writers take on Hollywood celebrities, kids, students and religious groups supporting a green movement and how the new commitment has pervaded the culture. Political writers report on fights over environmental laws in the state legislatures and Congress among auto, power, chemical and other industries and consumer and conservation groups.

The Bush administration's stance figures heavily into the stories on a national level, particularly regarding global



Photo courtesy of the SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/Laura Morton

**The plastic on a baby's teething ring is cut into small pieces before being tested for illegal levels of regulated chemicals.**

warming, endangered species and states' rights over stricter regulation.

On the news side, transit and transportation writers link the commute to air quality and fuel use. Architectural writers cover green buildings. The environment has come into its own, and the front pages reflect it.

**Q: Has the way that you carry out your duties at the *San Francisco Chronicle* been affected by all the major changes going on in the newspaper industry and the news media in general? In a related vein, what are the biggest challenges – now and in the future – that you see these changes creating for journalists covering the environment?**

Kay: Yes, definitely. We are all struggling to do what The Associated Press has always done – get something that isn't wrong up on the wire immediately. Here's the challenge: Do we lift off a press release? No, we can't do that. So we have to make a few calls on a breaking story just to make sure we've covered our bases before we put the story online.

Is that taking away from the quality of reporting for the finished daily story? Environmental stories have many sides, much context and a need for clarity. The challenge is to do it all, to get a teaser story online and produce a whole, balanced piece for the morning.

**Q: Now, I'd like to ask a few questions about the portfolio of your articles from 2006 and 2007 that won first place for outstanding beat reporting by a print journalist in the 2007 SEJ awards. Please pick one story from that group that especially stands out in your mind – because it's the one you're proudest of, or drew the biggest reader response, or was the toughest to report and write, or for some other reason. How did that story come about? What were the particular challenges and satisfactions in doing it?**

Kay: Hands down, that would be the toxic toy story. It was the toughest to write and certainly drew the most response.

Environmentalists had been pushing the state legislature to pass a law limiting two little-known chemicals in children's toys, phthalates, a plastics softener, and bisphenol A, a plastics hardener. While the legislature demurred, San Francisco supervisors went ahead and passed it. I suggested to my editors that we pay for tests on common toys at labs with the capability to look for the chemicals. They agreed, and we did it. The lab found some high levels, including a rubber ducky and Random House bath books.

I found it immensely interesting to research the health effects of the two types of chemicals, and present the findings of the scientists who had concerns and the manufacturers who argued that they were okay. We could also delve into how the city would carry out such a law and what the retailers would do.

In October, the California Legislature banned phthalates in toddlers' toys and the governor signed it into law, making California the only state to prohibit the chemicals in child-care products outside of the European Union.

**Q: Two of the seven articles in the portfolio were "success stories." One was about a 30-year reunion of scientists whose research as college students was instrumental in saving California's Mono Lake from environmental**



Photo courtesy of the SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/Laura Morton

Jeremiah Favero opens a box of toys sent by *The San Francisco Chronicle* to STAT Analysis Corp. in Chicago for testing in preparation for a new ordinance banning toys with bisphenol A and some levels of phthalates.

degradation. The other was a profile of a San Francisco environmentalist, on the occasion of his 100th birthday, who is credited with preserving more than 100 million acres in a natural state. Do you think it's important, generally speaking, for environmental journalists to highlight such successes as well as problems?

Kay: Readers definitely like success stories. And one does begin to feel like Debbie Downer with all the bad news that we deliver. But I don't write good-news stories just to provide a lift or even a mix.

The San Francisco environmentalist who has saved 100 million acres in Alaska and the West as a Sierra Club leader turning 100 years old and the original Mono Lake scientists reuniting for the first time after 30 years were news stories with honest angles. I grab them when I see them.

**Q: A couple of your portfolio articles involved requests by you and your newspaper for experts to produce technical information that you then based stories on – the tests of toys and maps to show which areas around San Francisco Bay would be submerged if global warming boosts tides by three feet. Do you make such requests regularly? Do you expect to do it more in the future? Any pointers or cautions for other journalists and news organizations contemplating taking this route to augment their reporting?**

A: Yes, we do seek help. We cannot test toys ourselves. We do not have access to all the data points and technology

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## Read more on sej.org...

Find more award-winning stories at [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) by clicking the SEJ Contest link at the top of the home page. There you'll find links to all winners of SEJ's Awards for Reporting on the Environment dating back to the first contest in 2002.

Did you know about SEJ's archive of the very best investigative series and special projects on environmental topics, including many prize-winners? It's called **The Gallery**, and you'll find it by clicking on the "EJToday daily news headlines" link at the top of [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org).

While you're there, scan the archive of EJToday, SEJ's annotated selection of new and outstanding stories on environmental topics in print and on the air, updated every weekday. Circulated daily in an email message called SEJ-Beat, this daily round-up of environmental news from around the nation and beyond goes out to nearly 2000 journalists and academics.

**Publish your story links on EJToday!** It takes about three minutes to input information about your environmental stories. SEJ-Beat editor just might pick them up for SEJ-Beat, too. And if you've got something you're really proud of, nominate your story to be included in The Gallery.

It doesn't have to be your own story. If you come across a story that SEJ members should see, take three minutes and post it to EJToday.

[www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org)

to be able to produce maps showing the effects of sea level rise. But we can work with the agencies or other experts to try to gain answers to important questions that we pose as journalists.

People with data are often only too glad to try to use their information in ways that will further public education. Needless to say, you have to select capable scientists or you're in a heap of trouble.

**Q: Do you have any advice for young journalists who are starting to cover environmental issues today – or who want to cover them?**

A: Yes, don't be deterred by your ignorance. Keep asking questions, and find scientists who are respected in their fields, honest and quotable. You can't possibly be an expert in geology, toxicology, oceanography, biology and atmospheric physics – so it's all right if you majored in English.

I learned on the job about tritium, TCE, uranium, cyanide, mercury, phthalates and dozens of other chemicals that I couldn't pronounce. Tackle the tough stuff, and try to write stories that answer the obvious questions: Does it hurt us? Is it illegal? How can we do it better?



*Bill Dawson, SEJournal's assistant editor, is a Houston-based freelancer who also teaches at Rice University. He formerly wrote about environmental issues for the Houston Chronicle and other news organizations.*

## Jane Kay's award-winning stories

Click links for full stories. (Requires opening in Adobe Reader. Mac Preview users, copy the url and paste into your browser address bar.)

### A Move to Ease Pesticide Laws

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/03/02/MNG0JHH6NH1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=101&sc=555](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/03/02/MNG0JHH6NH1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=101&sc=555)

### Where Have All the Butterflies Gone?

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/05/09/MNGSVIO7NM1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=012&sc=865](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/05/09/MNGSVIO7NM1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=012&sc=865)

### Mono Lake: It's Rising and Healthy

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/07/29/MNGD5K7V581.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=070&sc=675](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/07/29/MNGD5K7V581.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=070&sc=675)

### 100 Years, 100 Million Acres of Land Saved

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/09/16/MNGN6L72O71.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=059&sc=757](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/09/16/MNGN6L72O71.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=059&sc=757)

### Toxic Toys

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/11/19/MNG2LMG0J1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=013&sc=513](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/11/19/MNG2LMG0J1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=013&sc=513)

### Spring Gets Out of Sync

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/12/14/MNGDIMVHFE1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=071&sc=671](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/12/14/MNGDIMVHFE1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=071&sc=671)

### Consequences of a Rising Bay

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/02/18/MNG6SO72DJ1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=067&sc=727](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/02/18/MNG6SO72DJ1.DTL&hw=jane+kay&sn=067&sc=727)

# Covering coal country

## Overcoming the obstacles to reporting in rural America



By **AL CROSS**

Many if not most environmental stories have their roots in rural places. Those are the places where extractive industries do almost all their extracting, where America ultimately puts much of its solid waste, where farm fields get the fertilizers that create dead zones in the sea.

They are also places where local journalists struggle to cover these and other environmental topics. That can leave most of their readers, viewers and listeners uninformed, ill-informed or misinformed, because rural coverage and circulation by major metropolitan newspapers continues to dwindle.

Journalists in rural America who want to cover environmental subjects face many obstacles. They include isolation; lack of skills, resources and support systems; and outside interference in the newsroom.

By definition, rural journalists are isolated – from cities where environmental actors are based, from state capitals and other regulatory centers, and from each other. The telephone, fax machine and e-mail are no substitute for personal contact when it comes to developing and evaluating sources, and the isolation that defines these remote areas means that professional networks among rural journalists are weak or nonexistent.

Most rural news outlets lack the resources to attract talented reporters and editors. In a random-sample survey of rural U.S. newspapers this year by the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, the average starting salary for a reporter with a college degree and one intern-

ship was \$20,029. At papers with more than 6,000 circulation, it was not much better, only \$21,580.

The generally small audiences of rural news outlets mean that they have small news staffs, on which there are few beats. Rarely do they have few reporters who specialize in covering the environment – even if broadly defined, to include such subjects as energy and coal-mine safety.

While these news outlets may have small audiences, many of them have large owners – corporate chains that typically squeeze staff costs to increase profits. About 60 percent of weekly U.S. newspapers (defined as those publishing three or fewer times a week) are chain-owned. The figure for dailies is about 80 percent.

Not all chains are alike, and some do a good job of staffing their newsrooms and supporting their staffs with decent pay, training and other support. But examples abound to the contrary, especially when it comes to environmental coverage.

In Eastern Kentucky, where mountaintop-removal strip mining of coal is a controversial subject and has caused widespread environmental damage, the subject is rarely covered in weekly or daily newspapers. Last year, University of Kentucky student Clay McGuffin surveyed the region's daily newspapers, all chain-owned, and found that only one of the four had any staff coverage of the subject from September 2003 to 2006.

The survey, part of a research project for my Community Journalism course, also found evidence that a weekly newspaper that crusaded against abuses by the coal industry in general and one major company in particular lost advertising as a result. It was forced to sell to a competitor that treated the industry more kindly.

This is an old story of intimidation in Central Appalachia, where the coal industry is the leading employer in many counties, and exercises considerable economic

**PHOTO:** Sam Gilbert of Eolia, Ky., fought to keep a mountaintop-removal strip mine from destroying his property. He was successful, but the landscape around him changed. Mountaintop removal gets little coverage from local media in central Appalachia. (Photo by Mary JoShafer)

*Continued on p. 18*

Photo courtesy of Mary Jo Shafer



The Urias family, whose eastern Kentucky home is almost surrounded by mountaintop-removal mines.

and political sway through its employees and vendors, officials who receive its campaign contributions, and other local interests that depend on the industry for support.

"In many instances, the coal companies support their communities with charitable donations," notes Kyle Lovern, a reporter who has covered the industry in southern West Virginia.

So many people rely on the industry, Lovern says, "It is sometimes tough to write about topics such as mountaintop removal, and the effect this type of mining has on the environment, because you will receive a lot of negative comments from the industry officials. You must have thick skin."

My own experience at covering coal, for both weekly and metropolitan daily papers, tells me that negative comments are pretty much guaranteed when a reporter makes even a minor mistake, which is easy to do when covering a complicated and controversial subject. It's no wonder that many reporters and editors shy away from it.

Sometimes all reporters need to cover touchy subjects is confidence, born of information and inspiration. That's what we try to do at the Institute for Rural Journalism, through conferences, our [www.RuralJournalism.org](http://www.RuralJournalism.org) website, The Rural Blog and other writings, and Kyle Lovern knows about that. He attended "Covering Coal," a one-day conference we held at the Graduate College of Marshall University in South Charleston, W.Va., two years ago.

As far as we can tell, this was the first gathering in Central Appalachia at which local journalists heard from coal-industry executives, an industry business analyst, environmental and mine-safety activists and experts, and state and federal environment and safety regulators.

Lovern returned to the *Williamson Daily News* and wrote a three-part series on the coal industry in the region, followed by a two-part series on coal-waste dams and the dangers they pose. A few weeks later, 12 miners died in the Sago

Mine in West Virginia, so he did enterprise stories about mine safety and wrote a column critical of a coal company's handling of its public relations. He said the conference encouraged his coverage and commentary.

"It is great to get together with some of your peers, and discuss some of the problems and issues they may have," he said. "You can share information and pick up a lot of good pointers from experienced writers, who have covered the coal industry for many years."

Lovern now is the editor of the Coalfield Division of the West Virginia Standard newspapers, an upstart group that is challenging the status quo in several rural counties.

Another attendee at the "Covering Coal" conference was Marty Backus, then the publisher of the *Appalachian News-Express* in Pikeville, Ky., the only Eastern Kentucky daily that does any meaningful coverage of mountaintop removal. Backus' stance on his editorial page was generally pro-coal, but he wanted the industry held accountable and got his dander up when coal companies wouldn't return the paper's calls.

I ran into Backus a few weeks after the coal conference. He said he enjoyed it, but had hoped for more of a face-off between journalists and industry types, to create mutual understanding and better lines of communication. He agreed to host, and I agreed to run, a Coal-Media Roundtable. It drew 48 people, just over half of them from the industry, and the day ended with better feelings on both sides. "I think this is a good first step," said Bill Caylor, president of the Kentucky Coal Association.

As the mountaintop-removal issue has remained in the public eye, thanks mainly to activism by Appalachian writers and coverage by media based outside the mountains, the coal association has launched an advertising campaign, much like that its West Virginia counterpart did a few years ago.

To boost local news coverage of the issue, we assigned our intern from the Knight Community Journalism Fellows program at the University of Alabama to do a story on efforts against mountaintop removal in the four states where it occurs – West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee.

Mary Jo Shafer's reporting, which was published in several newspapers, showed that state-level efforts against mountaintop removal had reached the legislative level only in Kentucky, and following two failures there, activists in the four states agreed that they needed federal action – but also more support from people in the region. The need for more information on the subject, and other environmental topics there and in other parts of rural America, is clear.



*Al Cross is director of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, which is based at the University of Kentucky and has academic partners at 19 universities in 14 states. He worked 26 years for The (Louisville) Courier-Journal, the last 16 as political writer, and was president of the Society of Professional Journalists in 2001-02.*

# Network news going green

*America's TV networks racing to cover environmental issues*

By **JEFF BURNSIDE**

America's television network news operations are increasing their coverage of environmental issues, reflecting a pendulum swing of interest among Americans in general.

NBC News, for example, moved veteran correspondent Anne Thompson from the financial beat to the environment. "It's wonderful," says Thompson, a new SEJ member who is gleeful that she has a beat she sees as so timely and so compelling.

Perhaps the reigning dean of network environmental reporting is ABC News' Bill Blakemore, who has taken the beat to a new level of urgency – reflecting, he says, the urgency of the issue itself, particularly climate change. "Three and a half years ago," he says, "ABC leapt ahead of our two immediate competitors, NBC and CBS, in taking this story as seriously as it clearly deserves (to be). I am delighted that in the recent months, these two competitors have begun to catch up with us."

## "Planet in Peril"

CNN aired an unprecedented four-hour, two-night commitment to "Planet In Peril" in October featuring reporter/host Anderson Cooper, medical reporter Dr. Sanjay Gupta, and Animal Planet's Jeff Corwin. Each examined not just climate change but environmental degradation in 13 countries. David Doss, CNN's veteran executive producer, says there are "four killers: climate change, deforestation, population and species loss. You can't actually discuss any one of those without discussing the others. They're all interconnected." Doss says the ambitious project, seen by 17 million people and about to debut internationally, is

CNN's most expensive documentary ever. A sequel is in the works for 2008.

Peter Dykstra, SEJ member and CNN executive producer for science, technology, space, environment and weather, helped spearhead a one-hour special immediately after Al Gore won a share of the Nobel Peace Prize. Reporter/anchor Miles O'Brien, who fronts much of CNN's science and environment coverage, examined the accuracy of Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth."

CBS News is taking its evening news coverage of environmental issues to a new audience on the Internet. It's launching an Internet video broadcast called "Eco Beat," according to a CBS News ad seeking a reporter/host who is "smart, funny, irreverent and hip, oozing enthusiasm and creative energy." Because the project is still under wraps, CBS executives declined to offer details.

## Waking up green

The network morning shows are getting into the action, too. NBC's Today Show broadcast live from both polar ice caps and the equator simultaneously. ABC's Good Morning America has assigned Weather Editor Sam Champion to report on environmental issues especially with green consumer themes called "Just One Thing," says ABC News spokeswoman Bridgette Maney. ABC News also aired a Diane Sawyer series "Seven Ways to Save the World" on Earth Day last April that took its crews to seven continents.

NBC Universal President Jeff Zucker launched a "Green Is Universal" week during November sweeps that incorporated environmental themes in everything from comedy scripts to Today Show segments – even email sig-



NBC: Green Is Universal:

[www.greenisuniversal.com](http://www.greenisuniversal.com)

ABC News: "Seven Ways to Save the World"

<http://abcnews.go.com/2020/GlobalWarming/story?id=3023804&page=1>

CNN: "Planet In Peril"

[www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2007/planet.in.peril](http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2007/planet.in.peril)

natures asking recipients to avoid printing emails. NBC Universal boasted 26 "platforms" that joined the green theme including "Jerry Springer Goes Green."

Ironically, it was the head of Fox News, often viewed as a conservative network, who may've prodded this latest increase in network environmental coverage. Soon after Rupert Murdoch met with "An Inconvenient Truth" producer Laurie David nearly more than a year ago, he mandated a green viewpoint through his News Corp.

## The Future

Will genuine environmental coverage at the TV networks continue? Or is it a passing trend intended to jump on the Green bandwagon using stunts?

Blakemore says current coverage is still "well behind the reality out there." But he says the issues will become so urgent that networks will have no choice but to continue close scrutiny. "I certainly hope," says CNN's Dykstra, "because it would journalistically be the right thing to do."



*Jeff Burnside is a special projects reporter at WTVJ, NBC 6 in Miami.*

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# Undersea reporting

*Reporting live from inside Aquarius*

By **JEFF BURNSIDE**

When I heard the anchor in my earpiece introducing me reporting live from an undersea research lab, I could hardly believe all the technical aspects were working.

But they were. So I figured I'd better stop being amazed and actually start talking. On Sept. 20, I was the first reporter ever to broadcast live from Aquarius, the world's only undersea lab, nine miles off Key Largo, Fla. next to a coral reef about 60 feet deep. Don't screw it up, I told myself.

"This may be the most amazing broadcast I've ever been a part of," said news anchor Kelly Craig back in the studio for South Florida's NBC station, WTVJ.

The gee-whiz factor here is critical because that's what gave us the reason to do the story. But, as a result, viewers got to learn about ocean acidification, reef degradation and climate change, the mysterious role of sponges in cleaning anthropogenic impacts on reef ecosystems, and more.

"So many of us in the newsroom are in awe with what the aquanauts are exploring and experiencing," said WTVJ News Director Yvette Miley, who gave the go-ahead for the significant investment in staff time. "We all thought 'what a cool project' and to be able to bring it to viewers was absolutely awesome."

Plus viewers got to see great role models in action. Scientists – young and old, male and female – were inside the lab giving our live cameras a tour of the 43-foot-by-9-foot habitat. Others were outside working wearing deep sea helmets that look like a high tech version of Jules Verne. Some divers happened to be in the window waving at the camera, adding a surreal juxta-

position to our broadcast.

Aquanauts live in Aquarius for 10 days at a time in pure saturation. Saturation, when the natural exhalation of the human body becomes acclimated to the heavy pressure at that depth, allows scientists to be in the water for nine hours at a time. They can accomplish in one mission what would take a year to do without saturation.

But it also means, in a life-or-death emergency, going to the surface is not an option. Ever. If they bolt up, they die. It takes a 16-hour process to decompress. So the emergency plans are impressive here. Of course, photographer Mike Zimmer and I did not saturate. So we shot our story days earlier, then returned to Aquarius for a one-hour visit before safety measures required us to return to the surface.

Just 20 seconds after my live broadcast ended with my Miami-based TV station, I heard a new voice in my earpiece. MSNBC was ready to put us on the air in about 30 seconds. "Ready?" the producer asked from their New York studio. Before I could answer, even she said, "This is really cool." Then we got a chance to tell a national audience about the crisis in the oceans; something so few Americans know about.

To make this all happen was beyond difficult. WTVJ News Operations Manager Rob Gibson says it required three separate video and audio links from the three cameras at the undersea lab nine miles off the Key Largo coast. A digital encoder called a V-Brick converted the analog audio and video into a digital signal that was transmitted up a fiber optic



Photo courtesy of DJ Rolfer, Liquid Pictures TV.

line to a buoy floating 55 feet above the lab. The buoy transmitted that signal using a 7 ghz microwave link back to a microwave receiver on shore. The signal then went back through a V-Brick encoder to convert back to analog. That signal was routed into a satellite truck parked nearby and beamed up to a satellite, which was downlinked at the TV studios near Miami, then sent to NBC headquarters in New York and broadcast live nationwide.

The live coverage "brought the excitement of the lab to the public," said Aquarius Senior Scientist Ellen Prager. "It's truly a national asset that really hasn't gotten the recognition it deserves."

Aquarius is owned by NOAA on behalf of the American people and operated by the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Funding, like many scientific endeavors, comes and goes. The Bush Administration recently cut the budget even further. The \$1.3 million it receives annually is not enough to cover costs. So Aquarius brings in extra money by doing work for NASA and the military. Aquarius leaders got wise and reached out to the media to help tell the taxpayers. Aquarius began long before the impacts of climate change on the oceans were fully understood. So now its work takes on greater importance.

*Jeff Burnside is a special projects reporter at WTVJ, NBC 6 in Miami. Reach him at [jeff.burnside@nbc.com](mailto:jeff.burnside@nbc.com).*

*Powderhouse*, both in Massachusetts. She also writes for her own blog, *Beanpodder.com*, where she covers everything “green” in Massachusetts, including eco-friendly businesses and services and local environmental issues and events.

**Mark Neuzil** has a new part-time job as a journalist for *Minnpost*, a new news source in Minneapolis started by the former publisher of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Joel Kramer ([www.minnpost.com](http://www.minnpost.com)). It will have both on-line and print versions and is organized as a nonprofit. Neuzil will cover environment and agriculture.

**Cleo Paskal** is a visiting professor in the Department of Geopolitics at Manipal University, India. Along with teaching, she will help formulate the environmental change and security component of a post-graduate course in International Relations and Public Policy.

**Jodi Peterson** was recently promoted to associate editor of *High Country News* ([hcn.org](http://hcn.org)), a nonprofit newsmagazine covering environmental, natural resources and community issues in the 11 Western states.

Previously, she was the publication’s news editor.

**David Poulson** accepted a national Knight-Batten award recognizing innovative journalism on behalf of Michigan State University students who built an environmental news and information service. Poulson, associate director of MSU’s Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, was a co-leader of the project that created the Great Lakes Wiki ([www.greatlakeswiki.org](http://www.greatlakeswiki.org)).

**Dick Russell**, author of “Eye of the Whale” and “Striper Wars,” has collaborated on a new memoir by Jesse Ventura, the wrestler turned independent Minnesota governor. Titled “Don’t Start the Revolution Without Me,” the book is written through the lens of a road trip to Baja, Mexico, taken by Ventura and his wife. It will be published next April by Skyhorse (New York).

**Judith A. Stock** writes about her recent stories that include “Designing Your Sustainable Dream Home: 10 Things Every Eco-Home Should Have” ([www.naturalhomemagazine.com/article/2007/07/10-things.html](http://www.naturalhomemagazine.com/article/2007/07/10-things.html)) in *Natural*

*Home* magazine; “Ten Steps to a Greener Home” to be published in the *Oregonian* newspaper; and “Discovering Green Design,” to be published by HGTV *Ideas* magazine in April or May 2008. She is also interviewing Ed Begley of “Living with Ed” for a Q&A with for *Cooking Light* that will run mid-year 2008.

Freelancer **Jennifer Weeks** wrote an online environmental science text, part of a multimedia course called “The Habitable Planet: A Systems Approach to Environmental Science,” produced by the Annenberg Foundation. The 13-chapter text covers environmental science topics such as ocean and atmospheric circulation, ecosystems, population, and water resources. Each chapter includes a 30-minute video featuring prominent environmental scientists. The course also includes interactive simulations and a guide for high-school teachers ([www.learner.org/channel/courses/envsci/index.html](http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/envsci/index.html)).



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# Bookshelf

## Exploration of 'God's reservoir' informs and delights

Reviewed by KRESTIA DeGEORGE

Sometimes, being the biggest, the oldest and the deepest thing can define its fundamental nature.

A case in point: Russia's Lake Baikal. In his new book, "Sacred Sea: A Journey to Lake Baikal," SEJ member Peter Thomson makes a strong case that the lake's superlative features set it apart from the rest of the world's large freshwater seas.

At 25 million years old, Baikal makes North America's Great Lakes look like what they are, in geological terms: ephemeral puddles left behind by the last ice age.

With oxygen mysteriously present more than a mile below the surface, so is animal life. That's just one of the lake's unique features. It also has one of the world's only distinct species of freshwater seal. And an endemic shrimp species linked to Baikal's legendary ability to purify itself.

In a remote region of a country that doesn't have a good reputation for ease of access to outsiders or environmental safeguards, Baikal is an environmental journalist's dream subject.

So when his marriage ends in divorce, Thomson (founding editor and producer of NPR's Living on Earth) leaves his old life behind and embarks on a meandering surface transportation-only circumnavigation of the planet, with Baikal as the centerpiece and main goal. The

resulting book is a pleasure to read, thanks to Thomson's sparse, lyrical prose.

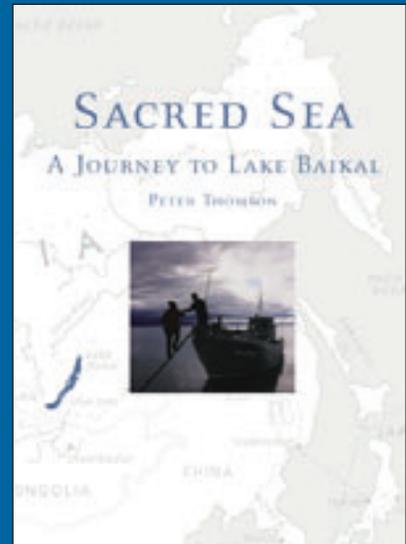
On his way east via railways, ferries, and a trans-Pacific freighter, Thomson tells of adventures through the American and Canadian West, Korea, Japan and Russian Far East that would stir the wanderlust in almost anyone. But all of these are just a warmup for the main course: Baikal.

Thomson traveled halfway around the world to see this lake and from the first glimpse – through the smudged windows of a Trans-Siberian Railway car – it doesn't disappoint.

Despite pristine appearances, he soon discovers all may not be well with "God's reservoir."

One of his first visits is to a pulp mill on the shores of the lake that is discharging much more organic sulfur and organochlorines than it is permitted under Russian law. During a tour of the plant, he encounters contradictory attitudes among officials on the matter of Baikal's water quality. Later, he writes: "Somewhere deep in my brain, the voices of the two Natalias at the Baikalsk Plant resonate like a sympathetic string on a piano – *There is not really any problem and we are committed to fixing it.*"

Despite the plant's pollution discharges, the proximity of a nearby industrial corridor and additional contaminants flushing down the Selenga River from Mongolia, Baikal appears



### SACRED SEA:

A Journey to Lake Baikal

BY PETER THOMSON  
Oxford University Press, \$29.95

to defy the odds and maintain its purity. That's one interpretation. Through Thomson's discussions with several scientists, an ecological portrait of the lake emerges that helps to explain pollution's effects on the lake.

The story is compelling on its own merits but Thomson's real genius is fleshing out the characters he meets on his journey. A young Japanese man in his first-ever drinking contest with legendary Russian tipplers. A Buryat woman hearing a recording of her own voice singing for the first time. A conflicted bureaucrat. A handful of tireless scientists and zealous activists. A pair of researchers he dubs Dr. Despair and Dr. Hope.

By populating "Sacred Sea" with interesting people, Thomson tells Baikal's story in a way that no collection of facts, official statements and competing claims ever could.

*Krestia DeGeorge is the editor of the Anchorage Press in Alaska.*

## The next big thing is not plastics

Reviewed by SUSAN MORAN

Ron Pernick caught the “clean-tech” wave well before it crested. In fact it’s safe to say he helped shape it, or at least frame it. A former Internet maven, Pernick co-founded Clean Edge, a research and consulting firm, in 2000, just as the dot-com boom was revealing signs of a bust. One of the first research and consulting firms to track the “clean technology” sector, Clean Edge juggles research, conference organizing, consulting for companies and cities, and it creates sustainability indices for stock exchanges.

This new book defines clean tech as “any product, service, or process that delivers value using limited or nonrenewable resources and/or creates significantly less waste than conventional offerings. (The authors exclude nuclear energy.)

As its subtitle suggests, “Clean Tech Revolution” is aimed at investors, entrepreneurs and to a lesser extent public policy officials. But any journalist wanting to follow solar, wind, bio-fuel, biopolymers, green building, electric and hybrid-type vehicles, electricity distribution, portable technology and water filtration will learn plenty from the book. Consider it a primer.

The authors have a history in following emerging technologies. Pernick worked in marketing and communications for many years for Internet companies. His co-author and Clean Tech employee Clint Wilder was previously a business journalist with *Information Week*. As Pernick did, many of today’s clean-tech entrepreneurs and investors migrated in recent years from Internet and high-tech companies. One example is Japan’s Sharp Corp., a major consumer electronics manufacturer, which has become the leading maker of solar PV panels. The company plans to make up to 710 megawatts worth of solar modules this year.

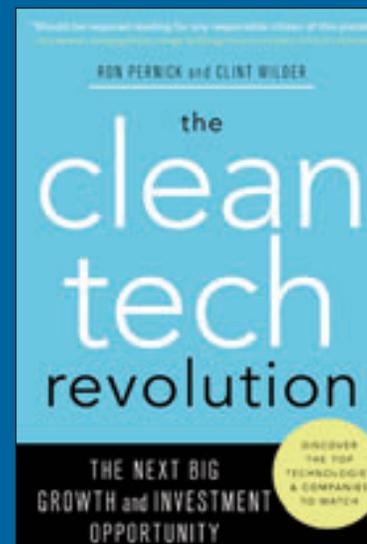
What the book does best is follow the money trail. The trail is getting more trodden, as prominent venture capitalists are channeling their dot-com fortunes (and losses) into clean-tech startups and funds ranging from ethanol to nanotechnology. Some of the more notable and well-heeled investors include Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, with its Greentech investment fund; Vinod Khosla, co-founder of Sun Microsystems, an ethanol evangelist and investor; and the Carlyle Group, a huge global private equity firm with close ties to the Bush administration and stakes in Middle East oil that has invested in bio-ethanol and solar power.

The money trail is also crowded with mutual funds and index-based funds focused on clean-tech-related companies, which include multinational corporations. The authors do not make recommendations on individual stocks or companies.

The authors warn companies that hawk “green” products that they will not win over mainstream consumers by just appealing to their do-good and eco-conscious minds; products and services must ultimately be high quality and cost-competitive, they write. (This hits close to home. I’ve finally given up on Seventh Generation laundry detergent after seeing my once-white socks and underwear turn gray-er with each wash.)

Echoing the investors they track, the authors predict renewable resource-based technology will help wean us from fossil fuels. Wind, solar, hydrogen and biofuels sectors will grow fourfold to more than \$226 billion in 2016, up from \$55.4 billion in 2006, they say.

A skeptical journalist might say the predictions in the book are self-motivated, given that Clean Edge makes its money directly and indirect-



### THE CLEAN TECH REVOLUTION:

The Next Big Growth and Investment Opportunity

BY RON PERNICK AND CLINT WILDER  
Collins, \$26.95

ly off many of the companies involved. Another weak spot in the book: Little input from environmentalists and public health experts.

Furthermore, the authors devote limited space to public policy measures to promote clean technology, such as statewide and federal subsidies, tax incentives, “sin” taxes (such as a carbon tax) and cap-and-trade schemes.

The book concludes with a six-point investment plan for city or state policy makers. The plan suggests ways cities and regions can build a regional technology cluster, shift subsidies from conventional to clean technology, launch a clean-tech fund (modeled after former President Bill Clinton’s Clinton Global Initiative), and implement a carbon tax or trading scheme.

*Susan Moran is a freelance reporter based in Boulder, Colo.*

# Magazines jump on environment

By **BILL DAWSON**

Many signs suggest that environmental topics – not just environmental news, in the strict sense – are assuming a bigger place in the journalistic universe, perhaps becoming an enduring Big Deal for editors, news directors, network executives and other media decision-makers.

(Historical note for newcomers to environmental journalism: The prospects for wide-ranging Big Deal status for the beat have waxed and waned in the past.)

The magazine industry serves as an example of recent developments. I can't remember exactly when I started noticing what looked like a surge in environmentally themed magazine coverage of different kinds – issue examinations, personality profiles, business/economy stories, breezy lifestyle/consumer pieces. It was sometime in 2006, I think.

In any case, even without benefit of anything remotely resembling a statistical content analysis, I believe that impression was right and that such an increase has picked up speed. Others have noticed evidence, as well.

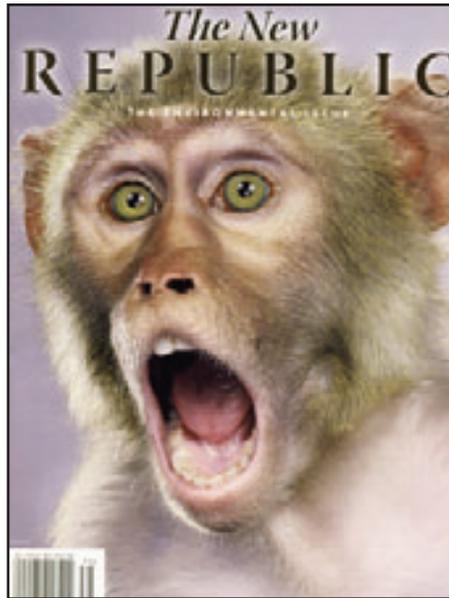
In the 2007 edition of the *New York Review of Magazines* ([www.nyrm.org/legere\\_well.html](http://www.nyrm.org/legere_well.html)), produced annually by journalism students at Columbia University, an article that contrasted coverage of global warming in *Forbes* and *Business Week* included this observation:

“As the debate over climate change has evolved from whether the earth is warming to whether humans are causing it to how businesses can make money while polluting less, the sophistication and volume of coverage in most financial journals has increased.”

Following is an admittedly selective sample of environmental coverage – not just of climate – that

appeared in a variety of magazines over the last few months. If this is a genuine journalistic trend, these stories provide a snapshot of it.

*Time*, notable for coverage of envi-



ronmental subjects in the past, has continued to pay consistent attention to global warming and other topics. On some of the stories, “Going Green” appears as a department heading, like the magazine’s “Nation” and “Essay” and other story categories.

In the Oct. 15 issue, for example, a two-page photo of a forlorn polar bear on an ice floe was graced by a single paragraph of text on new findings about summer ice melt in the Arctic. (*Time*’s editors are fond of such polar bear images. Another one was on the magazine’s eye-catching “Be Worried. Be Very Worried” cover about global warming for the April 3, 2006, issue. A polar bear was also on the cover of a special *Time* collection of global warming articles that was on newsstands in the recent months.)

Another article in the Oct. 15

issue, “Eco-Rebels,” by **Bryan Walsh**, focused on how “skeptics” about global warming are now “questioning the best way to deal with it.” ([www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1668475,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1668475,00.html)) Other recent *Time* issues have also included multiple articles on environmental subjects.

In the Dec. 3 edition, Walsh’s “Postcard: Cornwall” dispatch ([www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1668834,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1668834,00.html)) presented a case study of “how green concerns have become a daily part of British life.” Two of four Person of the Year suggestions that the magazine solicited from prominent figures in different fields were environmental in nature – author John Irving’s nomination of Al Gore and comedian Whoopi Goldberg’s proposal of “the word green.”

In that same issue, a full-page article by **Eric Pooley** (“The Green Campaign”) examined the legislative and electoral politics of climate change. In the Nov. 12 issue, **Jeffrey Kluger** produced a one-page chart ([www.time.com/time/2007/includes/eco\\_vote.pdf](http://www.time.com/time/2007/includes/eco_vote.pdf)) comparing six major presidential candidates on the environment. Kluger’s conclusions regarding the “greenest” candidates: “For the GOP, it’s McCain. For the Dems, a toss-up.”

NBC anchor Brian Williams nominated “Mother Earth” as Person of the Year in the Dec. 10 issue, which also had a one-page preview of the Dec. 3-14 climate negotiations in Bali.

A *Time* competitor, *U.S. News & World Report*, published “Power Revolution” in its Oct. 26 edition. ([www.usnews.com/articles/business/economy/2007/10/26/power-revolution\\_print.htm](http://www.usnews.com/articles/business/economy/2007/10/26/power-revolution_print.htm)) The 2,600-word piece by **Marianne Lavelle** examined

*Continued on p. 27*

# A Natural Resource



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efforts by Silicon Valley-based venture capital fund to jump-start solar and other alternative energy technologies: “The high-rolling risk takers who brought you personal computing, the telecommunications revolution, the commercialization of the Internet, and, of course, Google now aim to do nothing less than save planet Earth—and make billions while doing it.”

Another newsweekly, *The Week*, which summarizes other news outlets’ coverage, led off its “Main Stories” section in its Nov. 30 issue with “An urgent warning on climate change,” which sampled news and opinion on the Nov. 17 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that synthesized the three earlier reports by the IPCC in 2007.

The biweekly *New Republic*, meanwhile, presented its Sept. 24 edition as “The Environmental Issue.” Environmental content comprised one of five shorter, front-of-the-book pieces and two of three longer features, as well as a back-page essay. Leading “The Mall” section at the front of the magazine was an article by two scientists, arguing that worldwide species extinctions are “an unparalleled calamity, far more severe than global warming.”

One of the two longer feature articles, by **James Verini**, profiled Environmental Defense’s Fred Krupp and asked whether he is “an environ-

mental savior or a corporate stooge.” The second long piece was an excerpt from “Break Through,” a book by **Ted Nordhaus** and **Michael Shellenberger**, known for their 2004 “Death of Environmentalism” essay ([www.grist.org/news/maindish/2005/01/13/doe-reprint/](http://www.grist.org/news/maindish/2005/01/13/doe-reprint/)). In the article, the writers called for “a more opti-



mistic narrative from the environmental community.”

*Outside*, no stranger to environmental issues coverage, produced its own presidential politics guide in its December issue, with more detail than *Time*’s. The four-page summary of 11 candidates’ positions by writer **Amanda Griscom Little** was based on “exclusive interviews with every one

of the Democrats and most of the Republicans” who were included in the article. The writer’s full interviews with the presidential hopefuls, including some candidates not in the article, are on *Outside*’s website ([www.outsideonline.com/candidates](http://www.outsideonline.com/candidates)) and on Grist.org (<http://grist.org/feature/2007/07/06/candidates/>), its partner in the venture.

The cover story in the same issue of *Outside* was a profile by **Hampton Sides** of British entrepreneur Richard Branson, including discussion of the \$25 million prize he has offered to the inventor of viable technology to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and Branson’s other “entrepreneurial” activities.

*Rolling Stone* focused on a less optimistic figure in its Nov. 1 issue ([www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/16956300/the\\_prophet\\_of\\_climate\\_change\\_james\\_lovelock](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/16956300/the_prophet_of_climate_change_james_lovelock)) in a detailed, 6,000-word profile of British scientist and Gaia hypothesist James Lovelock and his prediction that “the Earth’s population will be culled (by global warming) from today’s 6.6 billion to as few as 500 million” by 2100. Writer **Jeff Goodell**’s conclusion: Lovelock “may well be wrong. Not because he’s misread the science (although that’s certainly possible) but because he’s misread human beings.”

*The New Yorker*’s Nov. 5 issue had a much longer (13,000 words) profile of Paul Watson, founder of the “vigilante” Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. [www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/11/05/071105fa\\_fact\\_khatchadourian?printable=true](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/11/05/071105fa_fact_khatchadourian?printable=true)) The piece by **Raffi Khatchadourian** is replete with the type of details that lengthy *New Yorker* articles are famous for, such as this description: “Watson is fifty-six years old, pudgy and muscular. His hair, which is white, often hangs over his eyes in unkempt bangs. During trips to Antarctica, he usually grows a beard or a goatee.”

The same issue of the magazine included a 3,000-word article by **Elizabeth Kolbert** (author of “Field Notes from a Catastrophe,” the book

*Continued on p. 29*

## E-Reporting Biz, from p. 4

Mission” analogies apply.

With a presidential election campaign well under way and inevitable changes in the U.S. approach to climate change certain regardless of which party prevails, environmental reporters face career-making opportunities and challenges to ... do it right. The foundational changes under way with many of their employers in the journalism business won’t make things any easier.

But in the end, it’s up to them and their newsroom colleagues to hold the line on the independent and

aggressive journalism practices and traditions that will be called on to report this seminal climate change economic and social issue effectively and fairly. They need to rise to the challenges at their door. And need to do so now.



*Bud Ward is an independent journalism educator and writer and a co-founder of SEJ. The founder and former editor of Environment Writer, he now is editor of the Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media, [climatemediaforum.yale.edu](http://climatemediaforum.yale.edu).*

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based on her *New Yorker* articles about global warming), in which she reviewed two new books about automotive technology and the related implications for energy and environmental policy. ([www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2007/11/05/071105crbo\\_books\\_kolbert](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2007/11/05/071105crbo_books_kolbert))

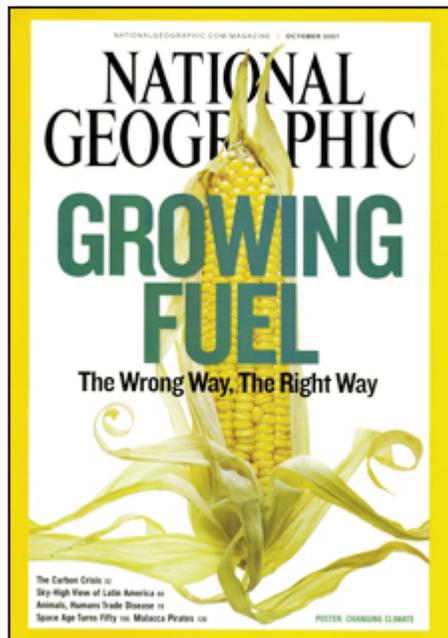
*Harper's*, another venerable general-interest magazine with a commitment to long-form journalism, published "Toxic Inaction: Why poisonous, unregulated chemicals end up in our blood" in its October issue. The article, by **Mark Schapiro**, editorial director of the Center for Investigative Reporting, explored "the nascent science of biomonitoring" and what it has revealed about chemical contamination of Americans' bodies, contrasted Europe's aggressive new REACH regulations for toxic chemicals with U.S. policies under the Bush administration, and reported that "many American states, tired of waiting for direction from Washington" are looking at REACH as a model for state rules.

Magazines that typically confine themselves to a more narrowly defined set of subjects have also focused on environmentally related subjects recently.

*Harvard Business Review's* October issue included a "Forethought Special Report" titled "Climate Business/ Business Climate." The 12 articles included "Regulation: If You're Not at the Table, You're on the Menu," "Reputation: When Being Green Backfires," and "Markets: Investors Hunger for Clean Energy." An associated blog post noted that Gore had remarked when he spoke at Harvard Business School in December, that "addressing climate change also represents one of the biggest business opportunities in history." ([http://conversationstarter.hbsp.com/2007/10/a\\_strategic\\_approach\\_to\\_climat.html](http://conversationstarter.hbsp.com/2007/10/a_strategic_approach_to_climat.html))

*Dwell*, an architecture and design magazine, published its "annual

green issue" in November. Included were articles about various sustainability-oriented residential concepts; an announcement by owner-founder **Lara Hedberg Deam** that the publication would be printed on recycled paper in 2008; and a grumbling introductory note by editor-in-chief **Sam Grawe** about "the spectacle of green's ascent to fad-dom" in the culture at large.



No surprise, but two distinguished magazines with long track records of environmental coverage before that ascent – *Smithsonian* and *National Geographic* – have continued to devote much thoughtful attention to the environment lately, perhaps even more than usual.

In *Smithsonian's* October issue ([www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/October\\_2007.html](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/October_2007.html)) were articles about the precarious status of mountain gorillas in Africa and global warming researchers using Henry David Thoreau's records in Massachusetts. The November issue ([www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/November\\_2007.html](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/November_2007.html)) had articles discussing cleanup efforts on the Ganges and a conservation debate about jaguars in the American West, along with a critical look at biofuels by

**Richard Coniff**, who argues that "we need to stop being dazzled by the word and start looking closely at the realities before blind enthusiasm leads us into economic and environmental catastrophes."

*National Geographic*, which is engaged in a continuing collaboration with NPR called "Climate Connections," published its own examination of biofuels as the cover story of the October issue ("Growing Fuel: The Wrong Way, The Right Way"). Writer **Joel K. Bourne Jr.** summed up his findings: "Hard numbers – supply, efficiency, and, most important, price at the pump – will determine the future of ethanol and biodiesel. But for now green fuels have an undeniable romance." (<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/2007-10/tableofcontents.html?fs=www7.nationalgeographic.com>)

The article was billed as the start of a new series in the magazine called "Meeting the Climate Challenge." It was introduced by an essay, "Carbon's New Math," in which writer **Bill McKibben** provided a brief overview of policy options for reducing fossil-fuel use. One of *National Geographic's* signature poster maps, "Changing Climate," was also tucked into the magazine.

Continuing the climate theme, *National Geographic's* December issue included an essay on permafrost by author Barry Lopez, accompanying aerial photographs by Bernhard Edmaier. "When I look at these photographs, I feel a twinge of misgiving," Lopez concludes. "Disintegration of this frozen habitat is now occurring around the world. A silent warning." (<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/2007-12/permafrost/barry-lopez.html?fs=mountain.nationalgeographic.com>)



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

one to disclose or use (which would include publishing or broadcasting) information farmers would report to the new National Animal Identification System to be established under the bill.

SEJ will continue to track threats to the ability of journalists to gather and report information about environmental issues.

Never mind that some of the same information is already a matter of public record, such as the location of “confined animal feeding operations” regulated under the federal Clean Water Act. Or that anyone with eyes to see or nose to smell might be able to spot livestock on a farm from a nearby public road.

With even less time to respond – the farm bill already was being debated on the Senate floor – SEJ’s First Amendment Task Force sprang into action. Joe once again drafted, and the task force leadership blessed a letter to be sent to all 100 senators calling such restrictions “unprecedented and unconstitutional.” The letter urged senators to remove the secrecy provision from the bill.

Six other journalism groups signed on to SEJ’s letter. Other J-groups joined with open-government advocacy groups in signing a similar letter opposing the farm bill information restrictions.

As I write this, the outcome of both these issues is unresolved. Rest assured that SEJ will continue to track these and other threats to the ability of journalists to gather and report information about environmental issues. And we’ll keep speaking out, when appropriate, because this form of advocacy is for the cause of honest journalism and a better-informed public.

A watchdog’s job is often a thankless one, but I hope you’ll join me in expressing heartfelt appreciation to the members of the First Amendment Task Force, particularly Joe Davis and Chairman Ken Ward, for their vigilance and dedication to this vital effort. And one of the best ways to thank them is to pitch in and help. The task force could always use more eyes and ears, but it could also use some extra hands at researching issues, writing letters and publicizing actions taken.

We’re all busy, but this is a form of giving back to our family of environmental journalists that fills you with a sense of larger purpose!



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

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framing gene therapy risk from an individual point of view. This differed from its framing of agrifoods, which amplified risk “to all sorts of medical interventions with multiple populations,” the researchers stated.

U.K. reports, on the other hand, framed gene therapy positively, while treating Gelsinger’s death as a local story specific to the United States and mentioning it in only 2.3 percent of all gene therapy stories, compared to its mention in 22 percent of U.S. gene therapy coverage.

The researchers also found that the *Post* reports were generally negative for both agricultural and medical biotech, focusing more on the environmental and food safety risks of agrifoods than the *Times* and more on all risks associated with medical biotech. On a more specific level, the two papers each focused on the risks of human cloning and xenotransplantation more than their benefits.

To understand how these frames might have occurred, the researchers compared journalistic framing of biotech risks to “informational milestones” in the scientific development of biotech applications, including the birth of Dolly the sheep in 1997; a U.K. researcher’s controversial televised statement in 1999 that GM potatoes had seriously damaged the organs of lab rats; a 1999 study showing that the monarch butterfly had been harmed by GM foods; and Gelsinger’s death in 1999.

The monarch butterfly story was negatively framed in both countries and was the only event that the two papers framed in the same way. Dolly the sheep was framed negatively in the *Post* and positively in the *Times*. The televised report on the effect of GM potatoes on lab rats, a controversial event in the scientific community, received balanced coverage in both countries and actually broadened the *London Times’* coverage of GM foods to address their environmental risks and benefits, the researchers found.

In a brief check of their findings with poll data, they found that public

opinion changed with the volume and tone of news coverage in each country.

This research shows that “the very same event can be framed differently,” the researchers wrote. “The local focus and selective use of the same information provides the strongest evidence yet that the media can frame ... public debate through its coverage.”

For more information, see Leonie A. Marks, Nicholas Kalaitzandonakes, Lee Wilkins, and Ludmila Zakharova, “Mass Media Framing of Biotechnology

News” in *Public Understanding of Science*, Volume 16, Number 2 (April 2007), pp. 183-203.

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## Science survey, from p. 12

identifiable as potentially risky from international databases and other historical records. Yet they were allowed to be brought into the country. More than a billion individual animals imported during that time were not even identified.

Even species with no previous history of causing trouble can be evaluated for potential harm. Recently developed tools, called quantitative models, can predict whether a species is likely to cause problems with 80- to 90-percent accuracy – even with relatively little information on the species. These tools are being fine-tuned for higher accuracy.

Organisms whose risks cannot be easily assessed could be allowed into the country, but monitored closely afterward for a prompt response in case of any problems. Using the case of the invasive rusty crayfish in the Great Lakes region, David Lodge of University of Notre Dame in Indiana and his colleagues have showed that even with species that have just become established in a new environment, simple models with the available, preliminary data can be used to predict its invasiveness. And prevention of further invasion if done in the

early stages is possible with simple educational measures that yield big economic benefits.

Australia and New Zealand

Even species with no history of causing trouble can be evaluated for potential harm. Recently developed tools, called quantitative models, can predict whether a species is likely to cause problems with 80- to 90-percent accuracy – even with relatively little information on the species.

adopted these measures years ago, opting for environmentally safe animal and plant trades. They are continuing to save billions of dollars that would otherwise have gone into hopeless efforts to manage non-native species when it is already too late.

 *Rhithu Chatterjee invaded the United States from India in 2002 and reports for Environmental Science & Technology.*



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