SEJournal

Fall 2009, Vol. 19 No. 3

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A section of the recently constructed border wall separating Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona from the Mexican state of Sonora near the city of Sonoyta. Photo: © Jack Dykinga / iLCP

SEJ builds anew with EPA, starts Fund for Environmental Journalism

By CHRISTY GEORGE

As this issue goes to press, we are into the ninth month of 2009, but it's already a remarkably "meta" year for SEJ.

After spending months thinking about the crisis in journalism, the SEJ Board of Directors on August 1st voted to create a new Fund for Environmental Journalism. More on that in a minute.

We have also been working hard to start off on the right foot with the new Obama administration's Environmental Protection Agency.

And SEJ is on the verge of electing two or more new board members. Don't forget to vote!

From the start of 2009, board members have been engaged in meta-thinking: what's happening to the news business? How does that affect environmental journalists as a whole, and our members in particular? How will the losses and the new startups affect the environmental coverage the public craves? And how should SEJ respond on behalf of all our members, and the public?

January saw the beginning of rewriting and rethinking SEJ's Strategic Plan, and the beginning of what's sure to be a long-term quest for funding — not just to invest in SEJ's work, but also to help environmental journalism in general.

All this SEJ meta-thinking came as a new US president — one who appeared to understand the complexity and urgency of environmental challenges like climate change, renewable energy creation and how those issues link to a strong economy — took office and began staffing up federal environmental agencies.

While SEJ has a keen interest in making sure all the new relationships go smoothly for everyone, especially given past difficulties with previous administrations, there is arguably no single U. S. agency as important as the EPA. Over the years, SEJ has held numerous "Meet your EPA PIO" events at past annual conferences, and invited the new EPA chief to be part of a plenary session at the SEJ conference. We hope to do both this fall in Madison.

In early July, SEJ and top officials of EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson's staff had a conference call at their initiative. And, at their urging, we detailed frequent causes of friction between EPA and SEJ members.

Here's a short timeline of how we got there:

- In the wake of last December's devastating coal ash spill in Tennessee, SEJ wrote the outgoing Bush EPA outlining the difficulty the public, and our members, were having getting access to information about the spill, especially environmental monitoring data. We also asked EPA to post data on the EPA website the minute it's available, citing the Electronic Freedom of Information Act of 1996.
- In February, a month later, we got an answer from the interim Region 4 administrator, explaining the trouble they'd had initially, detailing the work they'd done since in publicizing test results and promising to do better.
- Also in February, SEJ wrote Lisa Jackson, congratulating her on her appointment and asking her to "roll back fully the information blackout that was imposed on the Toxics Release Inventory in recent years."
- In June, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) held an oversight hearing on EPA press restrictions.
- Also in June, SEJ's *WatchDog TipSheet* Editor Joe Davis attended an EPA meet and greet.
- And in June, SEJ extended an invitation to speak at SEJ's October conference in Madison to Administrator Jackson, as well as Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.
- At the end of June, we heard from Jackson's public affairs staff that they wanted to "meet your leadership for a getting to know you meet and greet/call."
- That on-the-record conference call happened in early July. On the line from SEJ were Executive Director Beth Parke, Joe Davis and me. From EPA, Seth Oster, associate administrator for public affairs, Allyn Brooks-LaSure, deputy associate administrator for public affairs, Adora Andy, press secretary, speech writer Michael Moats and our first contact, Shakeba Carter-Jenkins, special assistant to the deputy associate administrator for public affairs.

We spent a friendly and productive hour on the line, and although we were braced for inconsequential pleasantries, the EPA folks asked right away what our gripes were.

We briefly outlined the most persistent issues: failure to call people back promptly, "minders" when reporters interview staff scientists, a disconnect between how reporters inside and outside the Beltway are treated, the Bush-era legacy of FOIA denials and the lack of notification of upcoming press conferences. (If anyone is still having trouble with that, sign up for both your EPA region and for headquarters emails here: http://www.epa.gov/newsroom/email_signups.htm).

Their takeaway message for us was "we're not the Bush administration." They understand there's a lot of "baggage journalists are still carrying around from the last eight years." They said "those weren't the best practices," and added, "those days are left behind." They asked us to ask you to "give us the benefit of the doubt."

Our takeaway message for them was "transparency and access," or as Joe Davis put it, "access, access, access, access."

To use the hackneyed cop-out, only time will tell if this promising beginning will stick, but I am cautiously optimistic. Perhaps the best sign of all was the early release of raw data from the TRI on August 18th, though as we go to press, we have yet to see the analysis.

At the risk of burying the lead, let me finish with SEJ's newest

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New journalism-science initiatives alter how news is shaped

PHOTO BY KEN WEISS / COMPASSONLINE.ORG

Participants watch Juliet Eilperin of the *Washington Post* (far left) conduct a mock interview during a COMPASS workshop in March 2009.

By BOB WYSS

When Michael Lemonick recently completed a story for *Newsweek* about a plan to help less developed nations cope with climate change, he did not give the article at first to his editors.

Instead, he asked several scientists to review it. Sometimes, Lemonick knew, scientists want to make changes that will bore readers. Then he must debate them about the changes. But this time the changes were few and easy to make. He turned the story in, and *Newsweek* ran it.

Lemonick works for Climate Central, a non-profit news organization composed of scientists and journalists who provide news about the science of global warming.

The former *Time* magazine correspondent is still getting used to conferring with his science colleagues because the arrangement breaks the old rules giving the writer and editor final say over a story.

"At Climate Central I don't own the story, I collaborate with scientists to present a story that is reasonable and engaging," he said. So far he has found the process far more "intellectually honest."

A growing number of scientists appear to be climbing down from their ivory towers. In doing so, they are threatening to change journalism, including how the environment is covered.

The most prominent example is Climate Central, which was established last year and features the work of a longtime scientist and journalist, Heidi Cullen, formerly with The Weather Channel. At the Princeton, N.J.-based organization, scientists upset about how the press has reported climate issues have begun producing the news for print, broadcast and online sources.

Other scientists are seeking training so that they can better communicate with the press, the public and decision-makers.

For nearly 10 years now the Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea (COMPASS) has been training scientists on how to communicate with reporters. The organization has worked closely with the Aldo Leopold Leadership Program at Stanford, Calif. which shares many of the same goals.

Increasingly, programs on how scientists can better communicate are showing up at a variety of scientific meetings and conferences.

Nancy Baron, director of ocean science outreach for COMPASS, estimates the organization trains more than a thousand scientists each year in programs ranging from several hours up to a week.

Not everyone in the science community agrees that the role of a scientist is to talk to the public.

"There are many, many scientists who still do not think it is their job," she said. "Primarily the older scientists have that viewpoint. Many of the younger scientists clearly see the need."

Climate Central has been hailed as a new model for science and environmental journalism. While scientists at the organization

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do not completely agree on what the future holds, clearly a change is already under way.

Below are reports on two of these organizations at the forefront of the movement to open up science.

COMPASS

COMPASS was originally created to assist marine scientists but it has helped train scientists in a broad range of disciplines.

The workshops will vary but they are usually run by journalists and can include lectures, coaching during mock interviews and other sessions that are taped and critiqued either by the journalist or by the entire group of scientists. Topics can range from discussions about why the cultures of science and journalism clash, advice on how to think like a journalist, to better understanding of how to get one's message across. The organization is funded by a combination of grants and workshop fees.

The most ambitious of these workshops is held by the 20 fellows selected each year from around the country by the Leopold Program at Stanford University. Fellows spend a week of training from COMPASS on learning communication skills, and another session on how to deal with public policy makers.

PHOTO BY KEN WEISS

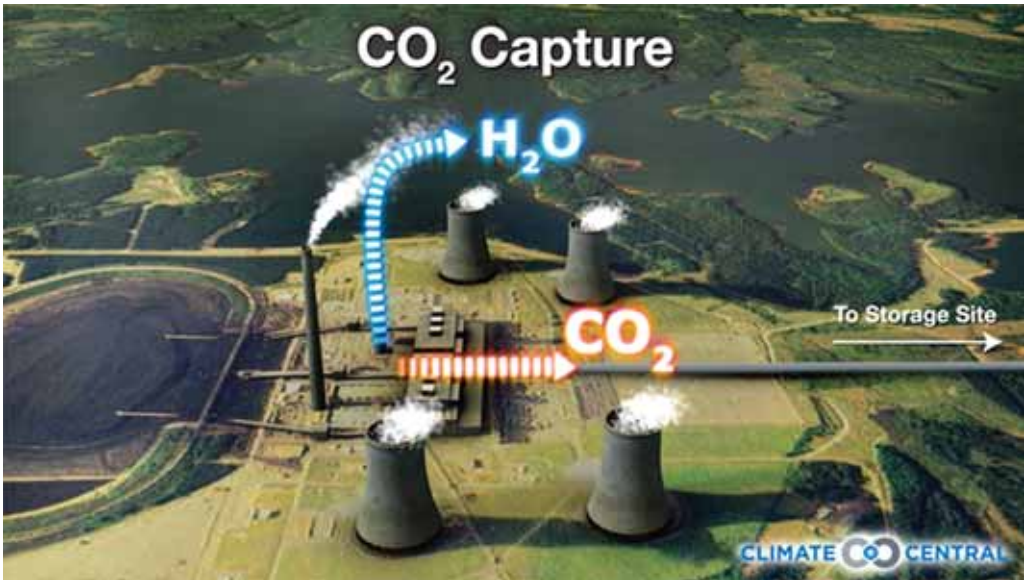
Nancy Baron of COMPASS, Christopher Joyce of National Public Radio and James Lindholm of CSU share a laugh during a mock interview scenario at a COMPASS workshop.

Baron said that the training programs aimed primarily at academic or research groups, such as a specific university or a science-based organization. However, it has also provided assistance to groups such as the Wildlife Conservation Society. The New York-based organization, created in 1895, says that its mission is "to save wildlife and wild places across the globe." Baron said that in such situations the organization is asked to include not only its own staff scientists but to also invite other government and academic scientists with similar interests.

She said COMPASS has no interest in simply serving as a public relations tool to help get an organizational message or brand out. "We only want to help the scientists get out a science message," she said.

COMPASS also works with individual scientists or teams of scientists who have completed ground-breaking research and want to make sure their study receives attention in the press. This more individualized training usually happens only a few times a year, usually when a study is about to be released by *Science* or at the annual meeting of the American Association for the

IMAGE COURTESY OF CLIMATE CENTRAL



Example of graphics used in Climate Central stories: carbon dioxide capture at a coal-burning power plant.

Advancement of Science (AAAS).

In these sessions the scientists can receive help with preparing press releases and press packages, and assistance in getting ready for interviews and press conferences. This can include staging mock interviews and then critiquing them.

Baron said these sessions came about when scientists sought out COMPASS for help and the organization responded. She said the studies are carefully vetted to make certain that they are well grounded in science and not advocacy.

When Baron was interviewed this past summer she was in the midst of working with scientists preparing for a July 31 release in *Science* about the state of the world's fisheries. The study by 20 scientists received widespread coverage from the wire services, major newspapers, broadcasters including PBS and online sites both nationally and internationally.

A study that mapped the health of the world's oceans, released in February 2008 at the AAAS meeting, received similar assistance from COMPASS. The media preparations involved in that release were discussed at a breakfast meeting at last year's SEJ conference in Roanoke, Va.

Climate Central

It is one thing to occasionally talk to reporters or prepare for a press conference, and another for scientists to go to work for a news organization such as Climate Central.

"Ultimately what we are seeking is to bring the scientific research, as it relates to climate change, to the public," explained Cullen. "We are like a little research organization that tries to visualize climate change research."

Designed on a non-profit model similar to ProPublica, which specializes in investigative journalism, Climate Central has a staff of 15 composed primarily of scientists with several longtime journalists.

The combination of the economic recession and the ongoing transformation of the news media has posed unexpected problems, according to Berrien Moore III, operations manager.

While Climate Central has a $4 million annual budget, largely because of a grant from the Schmidt Family Foundation, Moore said that losses in many philanthropic endowments have made fund-raising more difficult. Moore, who formerly ran the Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans and Space at the University of New Hampshire, has begun turning to government sources to finance up to one-third of the operation.

The dramatic cutbacks in print and broadcasting posed even more complicated issues for Climate Central in deciding where and how to disseminate its reporting. The organization spent much of this year working on a website that would serve as a platform to provide news, stories and broadcasts and other climate information to existing media and the public.

In the interim, Climate Central has produced a series of stories that aired on the PBS *NewsHour*. The first was a feature on how a climate-related drought in Montana was changing stream flows and threatening trout populations. Others have aired on the effects of climate on Iowa's corn crop, Georgia coal production, and the installation of a carbon counter in New York City.

Cullen, who has a doctorate from Columbia University and formerly hosted *Forecast Earth* on The Weather Channel, is excited about the possibilities this new venture holds. She said the goal is to make science, and especially climate news, more readily accessible and visual.

For instance, for the Montana and other *NewsHour* stories, Climate Central has produced annotated scripts that document

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IMAGE COURTESY OF CLIMATE CENTRAL

Graphics used to illustrate the relationship of occurrence of snowmelt to wildfires in the West.

SEJ annual award winners: From books to investigations to explanatory gems

Pollution near schools, biological invaders, climate change (of course) and the tangled web of the environment and heredity. And those are but a few of the topics detailed by the award-winning entries in the Society of Environmental Journalists' 2008-2009 Awards for Reporting on the Environment. SEJ's journalism contest — the world's largest and most comprehensive awards for journalism on environmental topics — recognized 31 entries in 11 categories. Reporters, editors and journalism educators who served as contest judges pored over 187 entries to choose the finalists representing the best environmental reporting in print and on television, radio, the Internet and in student publications. SEJ will honor the winners Oct. 7, 2009, at a gala ceremony in the Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club in Madison, Wis., on the first day of SEJ's 19th annual conference. The Rachel Carson Environment Book Award winner will receive $10,000 and a pair of marble bookends bearing the contest, book and author information. The student winner will receive $250, a crystal trophy and up to $750 in travel assistance to the annual conference. Each of the other winning entries will receive $1,000 and a crystal trophy.

For a complete list of winners go to www.sej.org

SEJ's Rachel Carson Environment Book Award:
First Place: **Andrew Nikiforuk**
Co-published by Greystone Books and the David Suzuki Foundation
Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent

Nikiforuk paints an alarming picture in northern Alberta, Canada: International oil companies clear cut huge swaths of boreal forest, rake off the boggy soil, scoop up giant shovelfuls of oil sands with the largest machines on earth and use copious amounts of boiling water to separate tarry bitumen from the sand so it can be turned into petroleum for your car in Kansas. The toxic residue that comes off the sands is stored behind gigantic dikes that leak, and downstream people and fish are sick.

Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting, Print
First Place: **Blake Morrison and Brad Heath**
USA TODAY
The Smokestack Effect

A team from USA TODAY led by reporters Blake Morrison and Brad Heath analyzed millions of government records, led a nationwide canvas of independent air monitoring, and investigated polluting industries near schools in an exhaustive and original reporting project that proved the air outside hundreds of schools was rife with toxic chemicals unknown to parents, school officials and health authorities

Outstanding Beat, In-Depth Radio
First Place: David Baron
Independent producer for NPR's All Things Considered
Shifting Ground

Baron's pieces exhibited outstanding original research, excellent personalization of the stories, excellent use of natural sound and interesting interviews to clarify each story. Exactly what enterprising radio journalism should be. Each piece was entertaining and together formed a series on land-use conflicts not often reported on by the media.

Outstanding Beat/In-depth Reporting, Television
First Place: **David Novack, Richard Hankin, Samuel Henriques, Scott Shelley**
Sundance Channel/The Green
Burning the Future: Coal in America

A superbly balanced, focused, visual and personal narrative. Crafted solely through the eyes and voices of its subjects, this documentary's power is found in the unflinching effort to offer wide-ranging perspective regarding coal and our nation's energy needs.

Outstanding Beat Reporting, Print
First Place: **Kenneth R. Weiss,**
Los Angeles Times
A Warming Sea: Subtle Changes Can Have Profound Impacts

With clear, crisp and engaging prose, Weiss brought home the climate change story like few seasoned journalists have before him. Though his work was limited primarily to oceans, shorelines and Pacific Ocean fishing, Weiss went way beyond futuristic modeling and examined the here and now between southern California and Alaska.

Outstanding Explanatory Reporting, Print
First Place: **Valerie Brown**
Miller-McCune Magazine
Environment Becomes Heredity

In "Environment Becomes Heredity," Valerie Brown deftly explains the thorny issue of whether chemical exposure can trigger multi-generational health problems. Brown employs a solid scientific knowledge, plain English, and humor to reveal how mothers exposed to certain chemicals may be passing genetic time bombs on to their children and grandchildren.

Outstanding Online Reporting
First Place: **Kristen Lombardi, Steven Sunshine, Sarah Laskow, David Donald**
The Center for Public Integrity
The Hidden Costs of Clean Coal

Most people know that mining coal is a dirty business. Kristen Lombardi, with powerful imagery, offers readers another startling way that the reality of the industry that supplies half of America's power falls far short of its "clean coal" public relations campaign. Lombardi takes readers by the hand to witness the unintended consequences of "longwall mining." In an age of increasingly shallow reports dominating the Internet, it's refreshing — and vital — to see a package so richly reported and engaging. The interactive document library, podcast, map and video add richness to the presentation in ways that demonstrate the power of the online medium.

Outstanding Small-Market Reporting, Print
First Place: **Lowell Brown** amd **Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe**
Denton Record-Chronicle
Behind the Shale

The *Denton Record-Chronicle*'s series "Behind the Shale" sets the standard for reporting on environmental issues at small-circulation publications. With striking personal detail, the paper's reporters told a great behind-the-scenes story about how land deals really work in Texas. It's not a pretty sight: example after example showed how the tables are tilted to favor corporations and lawyers over residents and how little government agencies had done to curb abuses.

Outstanding Story, Television, Large Market
First Place: **Christopher Bauer, Jenny Oh, Josh Rosen, Laurie Schmidt, Paul Rogers**
KQED 9 San Francisco
QUEST: Tagging Pacific Predators

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New Journalism-Science Initiatives
continued from page 7

sources. She would also like to provide climate facts to meteorologists in the top markets. So on a particularly warm day, they could report on how many additional days at that level could be anticipated by the end of the century.

Lemonick also had been producing stories for print publications, although he anticipated he would be working more for the website as it developed.

The biggest challenge for the practitioners has been the often spirited discussions that break out between the journalists and the scientists on how to produce a story or broadcast that is both scientifically sound and yet still interesting to the general public.

"The scientists sometimes will say that this issue is far too complex of a process to dumb down," said Cullen. "There is a lot of discussion on this and some scientists are not comfortable with going too far in this direction."

Lemonick added, "We are learning each other's culture in a pretty fundamental way."

The other guiding tenet for the news stories is that they have to be based solidly on the science and not stray into advocacy. One reason many of the scientists on the staff agreed to leave their research or teaching positions is that they were so outraged by the combination of politics and distorted news coverage on the climate issue that they felt impelled to do something.

So far, news organizations, many of which have been dramatically reduced in both staff and resources, have accepted the stories and broadcasts with no qualms.

Lemonick said *Newsweek* accepted his climate story with very few questions about his affiliation to Climate Central because he has had a long-term relationship with the editor who he has kept abreast of the organization's development. Editors at other publications have sometimes asked questions to clarify Climate Central's non-profit status and funding sources before accepting his stories.

Most of those interviewed at Climate Central believed that the non-profit model they are using will likely be developed more in the future to get out technical information.

Will scientists take the roles played in the past by journalists?

"No, I don't think so," replied Cullen. "What is interesting is that everything is changing so much. Some scientists will put their foot into the journalistic shoe, but we need hard-core journalists just as much as we need scientists."

Moore thinks more scientists will join the fray, and he says it is already happening in areas such as medicine. "I think it will happen for two reasons," he said. "First, science is becoming increasingly more important, including to the fabric of economic life. And two, the new media situation now allows for that involvement to take place."

But in joining the public tussle, scientists will likely be challenged and will have to work hard to protect their credibility and the integrity of their research. Added Moore: "It will definitely come with more risks."

Bob Wyss is an associate professor of journalism at the University of Connecticut and and the author of Covering the Environment. *He teaches journalism and science students how to better communicate.*

Feature

Veteran newspaper writer finds teaching's hidden pleasures

By WILLIAM DIETRICH

We're midway through an academic quarter at Western Washington University's *Planet* magazine, and it's time for second-draft panic.

The spring of 2009 is our student environmental magazine's 30th Anniversary, and we've got stories with no point, stories with gaping holes, stories that ignore AP style, stories with no lead, stories that stop instead of end, stories with no pictures, and pictures with no stories.

By the pajamas of Captain Planet, have I jumped from the frying pan of daily journalism's freefall to the frustrating fires of academia? Can the magazine (and thus the world) be saved?

Even worse, does anyone listen to a thing I say?

Eventually. Written comments, helpful suggestions, a timed tirade, coaching by student editors, encouragement, blandishment, and positive examples — combined with the usual student habit of last-minute frenzy — produces third-draft resurrection yet again.

Hallelujah, in five weeks we've taken student reporters, many of them with no journalistic experience, to authorship of reasonably sophisticated environmental stories. The final product — 32 pages, ten stories, 28 pictures — makes me proud to be affiliated as the adviser. In the end, the students won't let *Planet*, or our planet, down.

COURTESY OF THE PLANET / PHOTO BY PAUL ISRAEL

The Winter 2009 issue of The Planet

If teaching environmental journalism is more challenging and time-consuming than I expected when I began in the fall of 2006 — after 33 years as a newspaper reporter — it's also more rewarding. For my colleagues being squeezed by newsroom budget apocalypse, I recommend it as a possibility.

I'm the fifth faculty adviser in *Planet's* history, and the first with mainstream journalistic experience. Three were academics and another was an apostle of alternative advocacy journalism. All of us brought valuable perspective to the environmental journalism program at Huxley College of the Environment, a division of WWU, which is located near the Canadian border in Bellingham, WA.

Huxley, which turns 40 next year, is one of the nation's first environmental colleges. It was Huxley student Brian Blix (now a Zen monk) who in 1979 founded a student environmental screed that began as a crude mimeographed sheet. Its name, *The Monthly Planet*, was a play off the *Daily Planet* of Superman fame.

Over the years, *Planet* became a magazine quarterly and one of several WWU publications supported by student fees. Its current annual budget is about $35,000. *Planet* takes a local and regional approach to environmental issues, and while it makes no claim to "cover" the environment, it regularly scoops the pros by getting some stories first. It has won a series of regional and national awards.

The university itself is generally at the leading wave of environmental thinking, with early programs on recycling, efficient automobiles and sustainability. Students have voted to assess themselves extra fees to buy renewable energy through the local utility, and campus newspaper stories blasting pollution predated the first Earth Day.

Academically I'm an odd duck, but that's tolerated at this university. I was a newspaper journalist starting in 1973, ramped down to half-time until I left the *Seattle Times* in a December 2008 buyout, and am an author of not just sober environmental books but commercial historical thrillers. I came on as a half-time, tenure-track professor without an advanced degree: hired for my practical knowledge, a shared Pulitzer, and my long-time affiliation with WWU as an alum.

My program is odd, too. Environmental journalism majors take a combination of classes from Huxley and WWU's journalism department, with me straddling both. Just as *Planet* magazine was founded by students, this combined major was the result of student demand.

The magazine averages 30 students a quarter, most with no interest in traditional mainstream journalism as a career. They're suspicious of the media, worried about the environment, and excited about writing.

With an early magazine mission statement of "environmental advocacy through responsible journalism," my initial concern was that I'd have to rein in rabid environmentalists with the harness of objective journalism.

What I actually found were young adults trying to negotiate a minefield of technological change, journalistic upheaval, and environmental debate with far less certainty than my boomer generation enjoyed.

For most, political memory extends back at most to the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Theirs is a post-9/11 world of two wars, two recessions, a stagnant stock market, endless culture clash, tight elections, and relentless hype and spin. The line between news and entertainment has become confused.

What they retain, bless them, is the energy, optimism and eagerness of youth.

Instead of guiding genteel ivory tower debate over the finer points of environmental journalism — which is what I thought I might be doing — I find myself mostly teaching basic skills. How do you tell a story, instead of simply regurgitating a report? How do you interview strangers? Can you identify a clear problem, and clear solution, in a mass of information? How do writers and photographers work together? What's it like to be edited by your peers? How do you manage time to meet deadlines?

Some of my students have never been to a factory or farm, never met an elected official, never interviewed a scientist, and never used a newspaper archive.

And just how do environmental journalists do what we do? Translating career second-nature into teachable formulas is a challenge.

Most of my students don't expect to be newspaper environmental reporters any more than they expect to be supermodels or pro basketball players: it's not perceived as a realistic or even desirable possibility. They see themselves as environmental communicators more likely to wind up with NGOs, agencies, consulting firms, or schools.

So environmental journalism becomes a means to a more basic end. My real job is teaching research skills, critical thinking, careful observation, conciseness and the need to challenge one's own assumptions. We try to inculcate curiosity: to ask why, instead of accepting how things are.

Because the university is on a quarter system, there's never enough time. Query letters are written the night of the first day of class, and stories assigned the next day. There are three drafts to weigh in on, peer edits, individual conferences — and boom, final draft in five to six weeks. Editing, designing, printing and distribution consumes another four weeks. In a university of about 14,000 students we have the budget for roughly 2,000 copies (on 100 percent recycled paper.) This is supplemented by a website, http://planet.wwu.edu. Spring quarter saw the magazine's first video production: 21st Century, here we come!

There's no question that I learn more than the students do, another hidden pleasure of teaching. But will this generation save the world?

They will if given the chance. The pool of young talent is as deep as it ever was — if editors ever get a newsroom budget to tap it.

William Dietrich, a longtime science and environment writer at The Seattle Times*, also has authored non-fiction books and novels.*

A mix for success: Music, a scientific family and some radiation

By BILL DAWSON

Valerie Brown, an Oregon-based freelance journalist, found her way into journalism somewhat later in life than many people do — details below — but has clearly made up for lost time.

Brown was selected recently as the first-place winner for Outstanding Explanatory Reporting, Print, in SEJ's 8th Annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment. She earned the honor for her article in *Miller-McCune* magazine, "Environment Becomes Heredity," which discussed research in the field of epigenetics.

Valerie Brown

In defining that term, Wikipedia starts with this passage:

"In biology, the term epigenetics refers to changes in phenotype (appearance) or gene expression caused by mechanisms other than changes in the underlying DNA sequence, hence the name *epi-* (Greek: over; above) *-genetics*. These changes may remain through cell divisions for the remainder of the cell's life and may also last for multiple generations."

Here's what the SEJ judges had to say about Brown's skillful treatment of a subject that has potentially great significance but whose complexity might have daunted many other writers:

"In 'Environment Becomes Heredity,' Valerie Brown deftly explains the thorny issue of whether chemical exposure can trigger multi-generational health problems. Brown employs a solid scientific knowledge, plain English, and humor to reveal how mothers exposed to certain chemicals may be passing genetic time bombs on to their children and grandchildren. She also describes the vehicle for those inherited impacts — not DNA, but the protein structures that package all genetic materials. Brown's ability to break down the complicated scientific details surrounding how environmental impacts can affect future generations of animals was educational and entertaining — a rare combination in a story that dives into molecular biology, toxicology and genetics."

Brown responded to emailed questions by *SEJournal's* Bill Dawson.

Q: First, please tell me a little about your journalistic career. I understand that you did non-journalistic work for a number of years before deciding to go into journalism. What prompted that decision? Why journalism? Why did you decide to get a master's degree as a way to get into the field?

A: A journalism career was foreshadowed in high school, when I wangled my way onto the paper staff without actually taking the journalism classes. But as a young adult, music was much more compelling — I'd taken years of classical piano and played the flute in band. After dropping out of college I became a singer-songwriter, working for about 12 years in Portland, Oregon. Played a lot of clubs. Eventually burned out owing to the wretched working conditions and the extremely low pay. Dithered around for several years being depressed and working for lawyers (a circumstance unlikely to cure depression). Finally decided to finish up the old bachelor's degree, and the fastest way to do that was to major in general studies with a focus in social science, mainly history, political science and women's studies.

In my last year of that effort, I took some writing classes and entered three writing competitions — one local short story competition, a national essay contest, and the local weekly's essay contest. Won first in fiction and the national essay prize, third in the local essay. This was shocking. I decided to interpret it as a sign that I should morph my songwriting skills into some other form of writing. Since creative writing promised even fewer real-life rewards than the musical life, I figured I should be a journalist. And because I was already, ahem, mature — but without any relevant experience — I thought maybe a master's degree in journalism would help bridge that gap. Besides, with such a nebulous undergraduate degree, only a journalism graduate program would take me.

Q: Have you always been a freelancer or did you ever hold a job or jobs as a staff journalist first?

A: Always been a freelancer. The musical life had sort of predetermined my fate in that respect. Also I didn't think I could live on the starting salary of a staff reporter, which as I recall was about $12,000 a year at the time, so I kept the option of working part-time for lawyers open since I could make better money faster and lawyers would pay my health insurance. Also I didn't want to move to a really small town and write about high school wrestling for five years before a city daily would consider me.

Q: When and why did you decide to specialize in writing about science? Did you have a background in science?

A: I don't have any formal training in science. My dad had a degree in geology and two of his brothers graduated in metallurgy from the Colorado School of Mines. One brother worked for the Atomic Energy Commission and the other was basically a hard rock prospector. My dad also loved physics and astronomy.

He built an interferometer out of scrap materials in our basement because he wasn't quite convinced that the speed of light is constant and wanted to check Einstein's work (and Miller's, Michaelson's and Morley's). I grew up with *Science* magazine,

The Journal of Geophysical Research, and *Scientific American* around the house. This got me accustomed to reading stuff I had not the slightest clue about, and to begin to pick out its meaning from context.

Q: How did you get interested in writing about epigenetics? Was it one particular study that intrigued you? A tip from a scientist source? Accumulating information you gleaned from various places?

A: I think I was trolling through digests of scientific reports and came across the tidbit about the female rats rejecting all males from the lineage of the one female exposed to vinclozolin during pregnancy. Wow! Speed dating! Multigenerational effects! I was also gobsmacked just by the idea of epigenetics, because I have always been skeptical of the random-mutation-by-cosmic-rays-drives-evolution idea. I read a book some years ago by an Australian paleontologist who argued that the length of time spent in various developmental stages was what distinguished many species of dinosaur from each other — in other words, they had almost identical genomes except for the parts specifying the time spent, say, developing the femur; and variations like this would determine size, extent of armor plating and other attributes. Sort of like dog breeds. So it seemed there were many things affecting development and speciation besides stray cosmic rays, and perhaps organisms could be much more flexible in adapting to environmental changes. You might not have to change a gene or acquire a new one to change the organism, and adaptive changes might be more common than was thought.

"... the dose really doesn't make the poison, it's more like this dose plus that exposure at this developmental stage makes the poison. And what happens in the womb doesn't stay there – it can send out little time bombs to go off many years later."

Epigenetics strongly influences when and how genes are expressed, and this means you don't have to have a mutated gene to cause disease. You can just have the odd methyl group snipped off or put in the wrong place. And that means you might be able to fix the methyl deployment and cure or prevent a disease. Epigenetics also helps explain why looking for genetic causes of diseases, and gene therapy, haven't panned out as well as hoped.

I have also been interested in low-level exposures to chemicals and radiation for a long time, and suspicious of claims that such exposures are nothing to worry about. It is starting to emerge that such exposures may cause epigenetic changes without directly affecting genes. This is going to further roil up both the chemical and radiological status quo – the dose really doesn't make the poison, it's more like this dose plus that exposure at this developmental stage makes the poison. And what happens in the womb doesn't stay there — it can send out little time bombs to go off many years later.

All this just seems like big news to me.

Q: Your article on epigenetics, a serious subject, combines artful explanation of some quite complex science with a casual, conversational and sometimes humorous tone — passages like this one: "If you haven't already dropped this magazine and run away screaming, please keep reading. There are reasons for optimism in the tiny, tangled world of epigenetics." Is this an approach or style that you often use?

A: I used to use it a lot more when I was writing for weekly newspapers, which tend to have a snarky tone. Then I started writing for *Environmental Health Perspectives*, and my editor at the time was also a lawyer. She purged my writing of the snark, and a good thing, too. But *EHP* readers are more likely to be scientifically literate, whereas a lay audience needs some encouragement from time to time. Plus, if you're writing about the horrors of chemical exposures we seem powerless to prevent, humor is just about the only thing to cling to.

Q: The epigenetics article is long and multifaceted, weaving together a lot of different information — history, accounts of different studies, basic science. Was there one or a couple of aspects of doing it that you found unusually difficult or challenging?

A: Molecular biology, molecular biology, molecular biology. Talk about impenetrable. Also, it would have been easy to get distracted by the female rats' seemingly psychic ability to identify male rats whose grandmother had been dosed with vinclozolin — how do they do that? (Probably pheromones.) But the scientists were much more focused on the evidence of multigenerational effects and not that mesmerized by the females' detection mechanism.

Q: Tell me about your other work. Are there particular topics or fields that you specialize in, things that you write about more often than others? Does all of your work fall into the "explanatory" category? Do you concentrate on longer pieces like the epigenetics story? Apart from *Miller-McCune*, are there particular publications you write for regularly?

A: There are lots of teachers on both sides of my family, and I like explaining things to people. I've put together a couple of PowerPoint presentations and I enjoy giving those talks also. Besides *EHP* and *Miller-McCune*, I write occasionally for *Forest Magazine* and have written for *Science*, *High Country News*, *Environmental Science & Technology* and the *American Journal of Public Health.*

I think specialization in a difficult subject can be helpful. After I'd been writing for weeklies for awhile, and was completely disgusted by the 13-cents-a-word pay scale, I went to the library and found a directory of associations. I paged through it until I found the National Association of Science Writers. Joining the NASW was the single most effective thing I did to improve my freelance opportunities early on (not to say SEJ is less important — I just didn't join it right away). NASW membership led me to *EHP*. I took every assignment I was offered, and gradually developed expertise in the health effects of industrial chemicals, metals, pesticides and so on. The field of environmental health is changing rapidly, and there is convergence of toxicology, endocrinology, epi- and regular genetics, you name it — so it remains very challenging to write lucidly about it, and it is just as important as ever that there be intelligible and publicly available

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

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

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SEJournal Submission Deadlines

Spring Issue	February 1
Summer Issue	May 1
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From the printer of SEJournal: "Our coated paper choices are 10% to 30% PCW, SFI Participant, FSC Certified, or both. One supplier is a member of the Rainforest Alliance. The pages are printed with a soy based ink ... the entire journal can be recycled just like any other paper — although I don't know why someone would throw away such a fine publication."

information about it.

I also remain obsessed with ionizing radiation. This is because I am a thyroid cancer survivor and was exposed to fallout from the Nevada Test Site starting in the womb and periodically thereafter until I was about 10 years old. As many SEJers know, the nuclear world is a fascinating nest of snakes. In addition to health effects of radiation exposure, I'm getting more intrigued by the nightmarish chemistry of radioactive substances and the challenges it presents for dealing with weapons and power plant waste. Interest in radiation is more of a handicap than an asset at the moment, but I still think it's important.

I do feel that the various threads of journalistic experience I have are converging because of global warming. Global warming brings together environmental health and energy issues (including nuclear) as well as earth sciences. I find this gratifying as I'm interested in all of the above and I like to explain how they are interrelated.

Because of my environmental health background and my personal experience, I am also concerned that whatever solutions we find to global warming and the other environmental crises we face, we bear environmental justice in mind. Heretofore we have been perfectly willing to sacrifice some populations to benefit others. We need to examine this issue closely. If society decides to sacrifice some populations for the greater good, those populations should be informed and cared for when they experience the consequences of society's choices.

To complement areas of specialization, I think it probably helps to diversify in some way as well. I want to be able to survive in the Web era. I've just set up a blog. I've taken two online classes in web page design and coding and am learning to use Dreamweaver by trial and error. I took a Poynter webinar on Flash capabilities for journalism. I'm signed up for the SEJ conference workshop on creating video for the web. I have some skill in writing, performing and audio engineering music and other audio that might come in handy in multimedia journalism. It's all content, and I'm a content provider, right?

Q: With staff reductions at many outlets offering an increasing number of journalists the opportunity to consider freelancing — or maybe it would be more accurate to say confronting them with that necessity — I wonder if you have any thoughts to share with SEJ members on making a living as a freelancer. Do you have any encouragement to offer? Advice? Warnings?

A: Financially, I don't, really. I am not a good model for how to earn a steady income. I follow my nose. If I'm not interested in something, I have trouble drumming up the energy to do the work required to write about it. I do, however, cherish the autonomy of freelancing. It's not for sissies, and if you are a fashion plate, the freelance life will be very difficult for you. But there are many, many more freelancers now than when I started — a big pool of supportive colleagues. And the job is easier in some respects — the Web makes it possible to identify and contact sources anywhere in the world and to examine all kinds of information in relatively short order.

Also, for persons of a certain age, if we lose a job it may be that we will never get hired again. Learning to be self-propelled can be gratifying and liberating. Flexible hours are fabulous.

Bill Dawson is the SEJournal's *assistant editor.*

New online efforts expand environment coverage

By BILL DAWSON

Journalism's future — certainly its future hope — is online. We've been told that for years now. Over and over.

In 2005, for instance, Northwestern University's **Rich Gordon**, writing for *OJR*: *The Online Journalism Review*, had an upbeat piece headlined "Online opportunities make journalism's future bright, despite gloomy feelings."

In 2009, there's plenty of argument about the degree of brightness, so far, of that foretold future, but few would dispute the future's increasingly — though still, of course, far from entirely — online character.

Gordon suggested four years ago that the first years of the 21st century would be regarded, in hindsight, as "a period of exploding opportunity for journalists and the start of an exciting new era for journalism."

I'll leave it to others to debate whether the new era is yet living up to the "exploding" and "exciting" parts of that forecast. But there is certainly growing evidence that journalists are seizing online opportunities, often using non-profit business models, to report on environment issues along with other subjects.

(Rich) Gordon suggested four years ago that the first years of the 21st century would be regarded, in hindsight, as "a period of exploding opportunity for journalists ..."

Consider the Pocantico Declaration, issued in July following a meeting of 27 just-starting and well-established news organizations at the Rockefeller Foundation's Pocantico Conference Center in New York, many of which publish wholly or largely online. The manifesto expressed the signers' intention to create a non-profit investigative news network in this dramatic preamble:

"Resolved, that we, representatives of nonprofit news organizations, gather at a time when investigative reporting, so crucial to a functioning democracy, is under threat. There is an urgent need to nourish and sustain the emerging investigative journalism ecosystem to better serve the public."

Environmental reporting is a regular feature of a number of the organizations whose representatives signed the declaration, such as the Center for Public Integrity (CPI), founded in 1989 and therefore an early forerunner of the non-profit reporting trend of recent years. (Disclosure: I worked for the Center from 2001-03.)

CPI started off publishing its investigative reporting in print form, but now focuses on online presentations of its findings. Two of its reports were named the first- and second-place winners in the online category of SEJ's 8th Annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment.

The first-place winner was a package of stories entitled "The Hidden Costs of Clean Coal." Sharing the award were **Kristen Lombardi, Steven Sunshine, Sarah Laskow** and **David Donald**. The contest judges said, in part:

"In an age of increasingly shallow reports dominating the Internet, it's refreshing — and vital — to see a package so richly reported and explained in such an engaging and detailed way. The interactive document library, podcast, map and video add richness to the presentation in ways that demonstrate the power of the online medium."

"Perils of the New Pesticides," another CPI project, was the second-place online winner. The judges said that the "team of reporters (**M.B. Pell, Jillian Olsen** and **Jim Morris**) did a fantastic job mining a government database to uncover an astounding set of statistics: that pyrethrins and pyrethroids account for more than a quarter of all fatal, major and moderate cases of adverse human reaction."

ProPublica, a newer non-profit, online venture in investigative reporting that has made a considerable splash since its launch in 2008, places its reports in several sections on its website, one of which is Energy & Environment. ProPublica publishes its work on its own site and through distribution to other news organizations that may publish it in print or broadcast form — an illustration of growing synergy between online journalism with more traditional forms.

The organization, for example, won the third-place honor for investigative reporting in the latest SEJ awards for **Abrahm Lustgarten**'s project, "Is Natural Gas Drilling Endangering U.S. Water Supplies?" Posted on the ProPublica site itself, it was picked up by at least three newspapers, *BusinessWeek* magazine and WNYC radio.

The SEJ judges said Lustgarten's "stories on natural gas drilling started in upstate New York and followed the "fracking" trail westward to Colorado and Wyoming, at each stage carefully documenting how little regulators know about the environmental effects of a drilling process that so many energy companies are rushing to utilize."

(Lustgarten has continued to pursue the story, as with an article in July about "misleading data" provided to Congress by industry and another in August about a federal investigation of drinking water contamination possibly linked to the drilling method.)

While online outlet ProPublica's SEJ-honored project was also disseminated via print and broadcast, the third-place winner in that same online category was a newspaper, the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, for an investigative project on all-terrain vehicles' damage to public wildlands.

The judges praised the newspaper for "its use of interactive and video multimedia components to enrich the story package." Honored were staff members **James Shiffer, David Shaffer, Tom Meersman, Brian Peterson,** *continued on page 19*

Feature

Disorder at the borders: Photographers aim to document a

By ROGER ARCHIBALD

US MEXICO

PHOTO: © KEVIN SCHAFER / ILCP

At the interface of the two countries, a Mexican boy plays in the surf on Tijuana Beach where the US—Mexican border fence terminates at the Pacific Ocean.

The Southern Boundary

While working on a story in April 2008 for *Wildlife Conservation* Magazine about transnational bison in southwestern New Mexico, Washington, D.C.,-based writer and photographer Krista Schlyer was accompanying researchers on a flight over the herd's range when something caught her eye.

"I saw two bison jumping over the low barbed wire fence that marked the international border there," she remembers. "I had known about the wall before that, but that moment struck me, and I started working to raise awareness about it from then on."

The 'wall' Schlyer referred to was the impending barrier mandated in 2006 by Congress in its Secure Fence Act, intended to segregate the United States from Mexico over 700 miles of the two countries' shared boundary (all but thirty miles is now complete).

Increasing the structure's environmental impacts were provisions of the REAL ID Act, passed in 2005, that waived any laws or regulations that might interfere with "expeditious construction of the barriers" and severely limited legal challenges to waivers granted at the sole discretion of the Secretary of Homeland Security.

Concerned that the creation of such an impediment would pose a far greater impact on wildlife and the natural environment than human traffic, Schlyer turned to the International League of Conservation Photographers to document not only how the imposing structure altered the international landscape, but also how it affected the lives of people and wildlife that call the southern borderlands home.

The ILCP responded to Schlyer's alert with what has become that organization's signature response to environmental threats —a Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition. Designed to draw attention to an issue by focusing the skills of a number of recognized photographers on a particular locale for a finite period of time (see *SEJournal*, Summer 2008), RAVEs quickly produce a significant number of images for release to the media and other organizations seeking to promote similar environmental protection goals.

In fielding thirteen photographers over 2,000 miles of the US-Mexico boundary for almost four weeks during January and February of this year, the Borderlands RAVE became the ILCP's most ambitious such campaign to date. Altogether, the effort yielded over 10,000 separate images depicting the current state of the borderlands and life along it. And extensive ILCP blog entries by Schlyer and others detailed day-by-day progress of the RAVE, and can be viewed online at: http://www.ilcp.com/?cid=151 .

Creating the images is not enough. The weeks that the RAVE team put into making the pictures have been followed by months of

PHOTO: © KRISTA SCHLYER / ILCP

...nd protect borderland environments

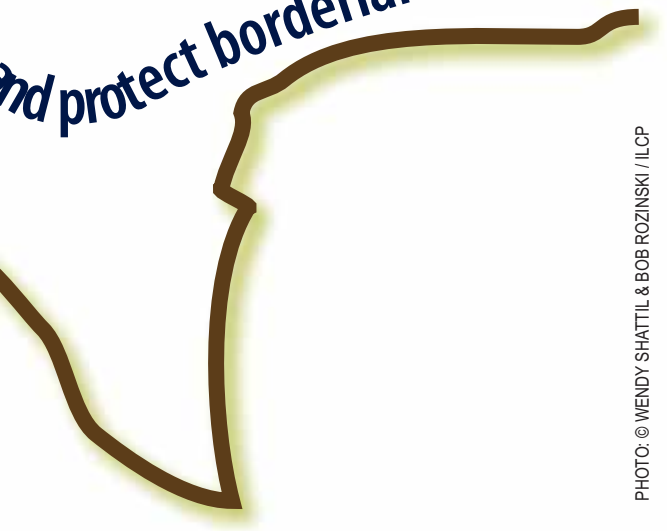

PHOTO: © WENDY SHATTIL & BOB ROZINSKI / ILCP

Below — Much of the border wall along the Lower Rio Grande has been built without consideration for its environmental impact, like this stretch in Hidalgo County, Texas, that completely severs a national wildlife refuge riparian corridor. Private property owners on American soil south of the wall are effectively exiled as well. Bottom — Two ILCP RAVE team members canoe down the Rio Grande below Big Bend National Park in south Texas. Left — Pronghorn antelope living in the area will not be free to cross the river as part of their natural range, if proposals to extend the wall to the complete border are adopted.

PHOTO: © CLAUDIO CONTRERAS KOOB / ILCP

effort by Schlyer and others to spread the message of the RAVE to as large a constituency as possible.

An early supporter of the work was Representative Raúl Grijalva (D) of Arizona, who has introduced legislation to give federal, state, local, and tribal land managers a say in border security decisions, and to restore laws intended to protect air, water, wildlife, culture, health and safety. At a Congressional briefing he hosted April 27, Grijalva screened a documentary on the borderlands RAVE, produced by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's multimedia division. Two days later, 30 large prints from the RAVE were displayed in the first-floor foyer of the Rayburn House Office Building.

Schlyer has been spending much of her time since then working on legislative matters with the Without Walls Network, a coalition including Defenders of Wildlife, the Sierra Club, Taxpayers for Common Sense, the Foundation for Change and Latin American Working Group.

The print exhibit is now on tour, having already visited Wyoming, New Mexico and Maryland. For the entire month of October, it will be on display at the Arts Council at the Federal Building in Greenwood, South Carolina. Then it returns to Capitol Hill for a one-week run in the Rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building starting Nov. 9th, which just happens to be the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

continued next page

The Northern Boundary

While the U.S. and Mexico share a river — the Rio Grande — that to a great extent separates them, Canada and the U.S. share a river in the west that very definitely connects the two countries, the North Fork of the Flathead. Those knowledgeable about the national parks may recognize it as the western boundary of Glacier National Park in northwest Montana, a waterway that enjoys National Wild and Scenic River status. But north of the border in British Columbia, where it rises and flows for its first 31 miles, the Flathead carries with no such similar protection.

That came as somewhat of a shock to Garth Lenz, a photographer based in Victoria, BC, when the ILCP asked him to lead a RAVE in July to document environmental threats to the headwaters of the river. He was aware of the impacts of mountaintop removal mining in the Appalachians, but "I had no idea it even occurred in my home province," he says. "But in the Flathead's neighboring Elk Valley, it's been a major economic force for many years."

Unlike the southern boundary where the fence or wall is already well established, the Flathead watershed in Canada has so far avoided disruption. The quality of its water is so pristine, according to the ILCP, that "scientists recognize it as relatively unspoiled." That could change rapidly if planned coal mining operations like those nearby expand. Or if a proposed gold mine on the banks of the river just ten miles upstream of Glacier National Park gets a green light.

Such threats were enough to prompt UNESCO to send a fact-finding mission to the Flathead Valley in September to determine whether the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, which was declared a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve in 1995, is endangered by environmental degradation. If that's found to be the case, it will become the only such resource of "extraordinary cultural or natural value" to be so designated in North America.

Seven photographers contributed their efforts to the Flathead RAVE between July 16th & 29th (see their blog at: http://www.ilcp.com/?cid=211), supported by Wildsight (http://www.wildsight.ca), Flathead Wild (http://www.flathead.ca) and Lighthawk (http://www.lighthawk.org), a group of volunteer private pilots who provide aerial reconnaissance support for environmental causes.

Their efforts could not have been better timed.

In early August, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar visited the Flathead River along with Montana's Senate delegation and officials from Glacier National Park, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary next year. Standing on the river bank, he stated. "We have to aim for an international covenant between the United States and Canada that will protect the Flathead water basin."

Sen. Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat added: "I've been working on this for 33 years. I don't know of any effort that's more important."

Roger Archibald (www.NaturalArch.com), a photographer and writer based in Boston, is the photo editor of SEJournal.

PHOTO: © GARTH LENZ /ILCP

The Greenhills mountaintop removal coal mine in Elk Valley, British Columbia is only one drainage away from the headwaters of the North Fork of the Flathead River, one of North America's cleanest and purest waterways, where several different mining interests seek to expand their operations.

The Beat continued from page 15

Glenn Howatt and **Mark Boswell**.

Illustrating what has come to be called "convergent" journalism, one of the nation's most prominent traditional-media outlets — *USA Today* — was the first-place winner in SEJ's investigative category for a project that drew the judges' praise in part for its impressive web-based component.

Produced by a team of reporters led by **Blake Morrison** and **Brad Heath**, "The Smokestack Effect" investigated industries near schools and reported on levels of toxic pollutants there. The SEJ judges noted the journalists had "compiled tens of millions of government records about air toxics from more than two dozen sources into what *Editor & Publisher* called 'one of the most extensive online database reports of any newspaper.'"

Other online endeavors relating to environmental issues won recognition for a couple of newspapers in the Associated Press Managing Editors' latest annual awards, announced in August.

The News Journal of Wilmington, Del., was a finalist in APME's third annual Innovator of the Year award for AllGreenToMe. That's the name of the newspaper's multi-page website that the APME judges said "brings print and online together and provides an international look at environmental challenges facing Delaware."

The Las Vegas Sun was one of three newspapers that received the organization's third annual Online Convergence awards. *The Sun* was recognized "for a cutting-edge multimedia presentation and interactive database exploring a serious water shortage in the Las Vegas valley."

Declaring that "the old model for supporting and conducting public service journalism has collapsed," (InvestigateWest's) About page declares a mission with heavy emphasis on environmental and related matters ...

The West, much more broadly defined, is the focus of a recently launched investigative and narrative news organization and website, fittingly called InvestigateWest.

Declaring that "the old model for supporting and conducting public service journalism has collapsed," the site's About page declares a mission with heavy emphasis on environmental and related matters: "InvestigateWest is a new model for investigative journalism focused on the West and on issues that resonate here — the environment, social justice and health."

The non-profit venture's staff includes SEJ board member **Robert McClure** and others who worked formerly for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* before its owner, Hearst Corporation, slashed the *P-I*'s staff to a tiny fraction of what it had been and ceased publication of its print editions this year.

(Another SEJ connection: InvestigateWest's advisory board includes SEJ's executive director, **Beth Parke**.)

McClure took his admired "Dateline Earth" blog to InvestigateWest, where it can now be found on the new organization's website. Some headlines from August posts suggest the blog continues to have an extensive scope, the Western focus of InvestigateWest notwithstanding:

"Global warming? Ha — throw another lump of coal on the barbie, Australians say."

"Florida's population declines — a weird and strange occurrence."

"Pacific Northwest salmon populations shift dramatically."

Also launched this summer was another web-based venture, Texas Wild Network, whose editor-in-chief is **Robert Macias**, for five years the editorial director of *Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine*. In an introductory note dated Aug. 5, he explained the premise of the new journalistic enterprise:

"It is my belief — my bet, if you will — that there is a large number of Texas-based environmentalists, nature lovers, and outdoors enthusiasts whose needs and interests are not being adequately addressed by any publication, in print or online."

The Texas Wild Network site says it will mainly focus on three areas – "nature, environmental issues, and green living." Macias alerted readers to expect coverage with an edge, recalling that an ancestor had signed the Texas Declaration of Independence:

"While that was a long time ago, a certain rebellious streak seems to have survived through the generations. I care about this state, and I'm willing to fight for it. Not with knives or guns but with a far more powerful weapon: accurate information."

Regionally focused online journalistic ventures of longer duration, while they don't have the new Texas site's singularly environmental focus, have continued to publish engaging environmental coverage, including these two recent reports on scientific activities:

Freelancer **Rebecca Tolin**, writing for Voice of San Diego, reported in "Return of the Garbage Patch Kids" on a research mission by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography to study the North Pacific Gyre, "an area abut 1,000 miles off the California coast where 3.5 million tons of plastic from North America and Asia has collected."

Blending the local with the global, Minnesota journalist and author **William Souder** had an update in MinnPost on a prominent scientific mystery. His lead: "Remember Minnesota's famous deformed frogs? New studies from two groups of researchers working half a world apart have just added important insights into this tantalizing environmental puzzle — while leaving a full explanation still out of reach."

Meanwhile, two related non-profit websites that got started as far-reaching aggregators of others' environmental coverage have continued to expand their own original reporting, which they introduced late last year.

In so doing, Environmental Health News and The Daily Climate have been carrying forward the same strong emphasis on science that has marked the two ventures from the start. Both are published by **John Peterson Myers**, a biologist and author who was instrumental in founding SEJ.

Shortly before the compilation of this edition of The Beat, for example, Environmental Health News published these two original articles:

"Cancer in wildlife, normally rare, can signal toxic dangers," by **Crystal Gammon**, who reported that scientists are finding cancers in wild animals that appear to be caused or hastened by environmental contaminants, *continued on page 25*

In the journalism storms, these awards and achievements stand out

By JUDY FAHYS

Even with the turmoil in the news industry, a number of SEJers reported awards, new projects and interesting new professional connections.

Stephanie Hemphill, a reporter and producer with Minnesota Public Radio, said several SEJ members attended an international journalists' conference on climate change in Sweden in May. They were briefed on Sweden's plans as the new president of the European Union, preparations for the Copenhagen climate change summit in December, and related developments in Europe. Joining Stephanie at the meeting were **Christy George** of Oregon Public Broadcasting, **Marley Shebala** of *Navajo Times*, **Len Ackland** of the School of Journalism at the University of Colorado at Boulder, freelance TV correspondent **Leslie Dodson, John Fleck** of *Albuquerque Journal*, **David Baron** of PRI's The World and **Mark Schleifstein** of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*.

Cara Ellen Modisett, editor of *Blue Ridge Country* and a part-time reporter for WVTF public radio in Virginia, has launched a new blog, RidgeLines, which can be read at BlueRidgeCountry.com.
http://www.blueridgecountry.com/blogs/ridgelines

Stephanie Cohen was one of 12 journalists who received a 2009-2010 fellowship from the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media. The fellowship will allow her to look over the next year at how stimulus funding will be used by community colleges to retrain Americans for green jobs and publish her findings in a series of articles for MarketWatch.

The Press Club of New Orleans presented two awards to *Times-Picayune* environment reporter and SEJ member **Mark Schleifstein** and fellow staff writer **Bob Marshall** and graphics editor **Dan Swenson** for their December 2008 series "Losing Louisiana, " which detailed how rising sea levels fueled by global warming, combined with sinking soils, threaten homes and livelihoods along the state's coastline. The series placed first in the science, health and technology category and also won the Alex Waller Memorial Award, given to the overall best print news entry. The series and graphics are on the Web at http://www.nola.com/coastal/

Michigan sportsmen and women recently lauded Michigan State University's **Jim Detjen** as Conservation Communicator of the Year. A founding member of SEJ, Detjen was cited at the Michigan United Conservation Clubs' 2009 annual convention for having "played a significant role in training thousands of journalism students and professional journalists to write about conservation issues in Michigan, the United States and around the world. And for his positive influence on the ever-changing, essential field of outdoor journalism."

Christine Heinrichs noted a full summer schedule of appearances in California, including HenCam Party (hmmm, what to wear to a HenCam?), and guest appearances at showings of Mad City Chickens, http://www.tarazod.com/filmsmadchicks.html, a film in which she is interviewed. She also teamed up with SEJ colleague **Trish Riley** for a bookstore appearance at Sustainable Living Night in Morro Bay.

Bill Kovarik, academic representative on SEJ's Board of Directors, was awarded the CanWest Global Media Fellowship and will be in residence this fall at the University of Western Ontario in Canada teaching environmental journalism and doing research into sustainability and the media.

Mark Neuzil's book, *The Environment and the Press: From Adventure Writing to Advocacy* (Northwestern University Press), is one of three finalists for the Tankard Award, given annually by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication to the best book on journalism/communication. Neuzil is a professor at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., and a regular contributor to *MinnPost*, an on-line newspaper in Minneapolis.

Judy Fahys is environment writer at The Salt Lake Tribune. *Contact her with your news of your latest award, book project or job change at fahys@sltrib.com.*

SEJ Annual Awards continued from page 8

Outstanding visuals, strong interviews and great narration make this KQED story an example of truly great environmental reporting. The Quest team unveiled the story about project TOPP, or Tagging of Pacific Predators, clearly, thoroughly and dramatically. Large sea inhabitants like blue fin tuna, giant leatherback turtles, manta rays and sharks are caught and fitted with electronic tags that relay information via satellite, bringing science to what Warner Chabot, then vice president of the Ocean Conservancy, called "the verge of a virtual information explosion."

Outstanding Story, Television, Small Market
First Place: **Jim Parsons, Kendall Cross, Michael Lazorko**
WTAE-TV Pittsburgh, PA
Drill Baby Drill

This is the kind of outstanding environmental journalism that every newsroom should commit to report. Parsons examined the complicated issue of natural gas drilling and the impact it has on water volume in rivers and creeks and managed to tell the story in a visually compelling and impactful way. His reporting was balanced and complete with eye-opening results. In particular, the line of trucks sucking all of the water out of a river won't easily be forgotten.

Outstanding Student Reporting
First Place: **Mimi Abebe, Melissa Drozda, Cassie Fleming, Alex Haueter, Lucas Jameson, Kosuke Koiwai, Aaron Price, Kate Veik**
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NET TV
Ethanol: Salvation or Damnation?

The ethanol report was well-reported and exhaustive. The students took a vital issue in their community and shone a light on a wide variety of angles. That they went far enough to find people in their community affected by ethanol's varied impacts — from farmers to families shopping for tortillas — made this a clear-cut winner.

Germ killer, largely unregulated, attracts new concern for wildlife

By CHERYL HOGUE

Triclosan is showing up in dolphins

The germ-killing ingredient in an array of drug store items is already a target of advocates because of fears that it could breed a resistant superbug or harm development of frogs.

But now, this chemical, triclosan, is showing up in dolphins. This finding could generate closer regulatory scrutiny.

Triclosan is the active ingredient in many antibacterial soaps, deodorants, and toothpastes. This synthetic compound is also incorporated into plastic items such as baby-changing stations in public restrooms and in anti-odor cloth, such as shoe linings. And it's been detected in rivers, farm fields where sewage sludge is applied, and in people's bodies and breast milk.

For the past several years, triclosan has popped up in the news regularly. Many stories, pegged to cold and flu season, focus on the germ-killing abilities of plain soap versus antibacterial soap. Health experts say both types are efficient at getting germs off hands — and that there's no scientific benefit from using antimicrobial soap as opposed to regular soap. Consumers keep buying antibacterial soap.

There is a concern that widespread use of antibacterial soaps will give rise to superbugs, just as injudicious use of prescription antibiotics can lead to the evolution of resistant germs. Some advocates are calling for a ban of the chemical in hand soaps used outside of hospitals and other medical settings.

But concerns about triclosan are bigger than just fears of resistant bacteria. The chemical is an endocrine disrupter. Scientists have found that triclosan can interfere with thyroid functioning. Exposure to the chemical can cause frogs to mature too quickly because of thyroid perturbations.

Since triclosan-containing hygiene products get washed off the body and down the drain, they end up at the local sewage treatment plant. The Soap and Detergent Association, an industry trade group, cites studies showing that processes in wastewater plants remove 90 to 98% of the chemical from the treated effluent that gets discharged into waterways. A lot of the chemical ends up adsorbed to bits of sludge.

Now, for the first time, scientists have found triclosan in marine mammals. Researchers from the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, Environment Canada, and Florida Atlantic University discovered triclosan had bioaccumulated in dolphins off South Carolina and Florida. They reported their findings in the August-September 2009 issue of the journal *Environmental Pollution*.

Scientists say they aren't overly surprised by this new finding, since consumers buy and use so many triclosan-containing toiletries. These products are considered the main source of triclosan in water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, plastic and cloth articles containing triclosan, often sold under the names of Biofresh and Microban, "are unlikely to contribute significant quantities of triclosan … to surface water."

Researchers haven't yet determined whether the small amount of triclosan found in dolphins could affect the animals' thyroid function — though there is some speculation it could.

The Soap and Detergent Association dismisses the detection of "minute traces" of triclosan found in dolphins. "The research basically tells us that the analytical science available today is amazing. You can find just about anything you want to just about anywhere if you're looking for it," says Paul DeLeo, the group's director of environmental safety.

As more data emerge on triclosan, the Food & Drug Administration and EPA will have to determine whether the chemical warrants further regulation.

EPA registers triclosan as a pesticide when it's used in objects like antimicrobial cutting boards or mildew-resistant mattress covers. In late 2008, the agency allowed pesticide uses of triclosan to continue, but the agency said it will revisit its decision in 2013 because of emerging science about the compound.

The environmental agency does not currently regulate triclosan as a water pollutant.

Meanwhile, FDA registers uses of triclosan for use in toiletries such as hand soaps, toothpaste, facial tissues, and antiseptics. It last updated its regulations on triclosan in 1994. Consumer and environmental groups are pressuring FDA to ban triclosan for uses outside of medical settings such as hospitals. Consumer advocates Food & Water Watch and Beyond Pesticides, an environmental group formerly known as the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides, primarily cite concern about antimicrobial resistance.

Keep your eyes open for more studies about this compound and whether it can affect mammals.

- Article in *Environmental Pollution* on triclosan in dolphins: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2009.04.002
- EPA 2008 decision on triclosan: http://tinyurl.com/l8tgm7
- Soap and Detergent Association: www.cleaning101.com
- Beyond Pesticides backgrounder on triclosan: http://tinyurl.com/6v7wj

Cheryl Hogue covers national and international environmental policy for Chemical & Engineering News *in Washington, D.C.*

This tool will quickly provide journalism's most forgotten W

By DAVID POULSON and JEFF GILLIES

EPA had just announced new mercury limits for cement factories and we were short on art to go with our story on the Great Lakes Echo, an environmental news service operated by Michigan State University's Knight Center for Environmental Journalism.

No problem. Well before deadline we had in place a map locating every cement factory in the eight-state region. And when clicked, each point listed the factory name and the most recent report of the amount of mercury it put into the air.

IMAGE COURTESY JEFF GILLIES, GREAT LAKES ECHO

EPA records show the Great Lakes states' 26 cement plants emitted more than 2,100 pounds of mercury in 2007, the most recent reporting year.

You can't beat Google maps for providing the most forgotten of journalism's five Ws — the where. They are fast, efficient, informative and are another point of entry into those messy environmental stories.

If you haven't fooled around with Google maps, go to www.maps.google.com and click on Help. The tutorials will get you rolling with basic maps. That's a good start. If nothing else, such maps help break up those long, ugly text blocks.

But what if you need to plot a lot of points precisely and fast? That is surprisingly easy with some basic spreadsheet skills, a set of data that includes latitude and longitude, and an online tool discussed below.

Mapping is increasingly important for environmental journalists to evaluate and display data. And a surprising number of environmental data sets contain latitude and longitude.

When we were in a jam with the cement story, we turned to the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), a federal data set used by many environmental reporters. They often use it once a year to identify a region's greatest polluters. But what many overlook is the data's utility when covering day-to-day stories involving a particular contaminant or industry.

In our case we wanted data on cement plants. But we only wanted cement plants in eight states. And we only wanted to know how much mercury they emitted. What's more, we wanted to know exactly where each factory was located.

Here's how you can do something similar:

Preparing the Spreadsheet Data

Download spreadsheets of the most recent TRI data for the entire country or individual states here: http://www.epa.gov/tri/tridata/tri07/data/index.htm

The files are zipped packages of seven spreadsheets. Windows computers should unzip the files automatically. Macintosh users will need a program like Stuffit Expander. Once you have access to all seven spreadsheets, use Excel to open the file with the number "1" in the file name. If Excel asks you any questions about how the file should be opened, just click "Next." The default options should work fine.

The spreadsheet you open will be big — dozens of columns wide and likely thousands of rows long. Each row is given a number, and each column is given a letter or set of letters.

You first need to limit your data to the facilities and chemicals you want to map. Click the Data menu at the top of the Excel window. Under the Filter option, pick AutoFilter. This will stick drop-down menus at the top of each column. Use these to filter by county or city. Navigate to the column called "CHEMICAL NAME" (column BC) and select a chemical from the drop-down list to pare the spreadsheet to a single pollutant.

Limit to a specific industry by filtering for its North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code, a six-digit number that identifies what a facility does. Look for a column that says "PRIMARY NAICS CODE" (column AI). If you filter this column for the code 221112, for example, you'll only see power plants burning fossil fuels. Look up NAICS codes here: http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/ .

Or you can find a facility in the spreadsheet that you know is in the appropriate industry. Find the six-digit code in the facility's NAICS column, and then find it in the drop-down menu at the top of the NAICS column.

Once you've limited the data to the facilities and chemicals you're after, create a new spreadsheet (File>New). This will be the spreadsheet that gets converted into a map file. It will be identified as the map sheet for the rest of this exercise.

In the map sheet, type into the top first five columns the words Latitude, Longitude, Name, Description, Icon. If you don't use these exact column headers, the map won't work. It should look like this:

	A	B	C	D	E	
1	Latitude	Longitude	Name	Description	Icon	
2						
3						

Latitude and Longitude: Back on your TRI spreadsheet, highlight (click and drag with the mouse) and copy (CTRL+C, Command+C, or right click) the latitude data found in column AO. Paste (Ctrl+V, Command+V, or right click) the data into the first column of the map sheet, below the word Latitude. Do the same with the longitude data in column AP.

Name: Whatever goes here will be the big text at the top of the bubble that pops up when you click on a placemark in a Google map. Depending on your map, either the Facility Name (column J) or the Facility City (column L) are good choices. Whatever your choice, copy it from the TRI sheet to the map sheet.

Description: This is for the information bubble that pops up on the Google map. If you didn't include the facility name in the Name column, you'll want to get that in here. Depending on your mapping goals, this is also a good place for displaying how many pounds (the default measurement unit for TRI data) of a chemical a facility released. The TRI data contains air, land and water emissions, so you'll have to poke around to find what is most relevant to your story. In our cement case, we wanted total air emissions (column CT in the TRI sheet).

You could just copy and paste the raw numbers into this column, but it only takes a few extra steps and some pretty basic Excel maneuvering to come up with something that looks and communicates much better.

Copy the emissions numbers from the TRI spreadsheet into an unused column (F should work) on the map sheet, starting at the second row. Now go back to the Description column, and in the first empty cell type:

= "Reported "&F2&" pounds of mercury emissions in 2007."

Press enter. That's an Excel formula that will display the sentence "Reported X pounds of mercury emissions in 2007," but we'll replace X with the appropriate number. Be sure to leave a space after "Reported" and before "pounds." This formula uses F2 because that's the cell where the emissions data should start. If you put the emissions data somewhere else, just replace F2 with whatever cell your data starts in. Finally, if you're not tracking mercury emissions, be sure not to use the word 'mercury.' Replace it with the contaminant you are tracking.

Now, if you click the cell in which you just typed that formula, a black box should appear around the cell. Click and hold the bottom right corner of that box and drag it down the column until you've filled as many rows as you need. This should magically fill in the rest of the Description column with a sentence about emissions.

Icon: If you're fine with the default Google map location marker, which looks like an upside-down blue teardrop, leave this blank. If not, head to the Web site you'll be using to convert the spreadsheet into a map file, found here: http://www.earthpoint.us/ExcelToKml.aspx. At the very bottom of the page is a table of all the possible icons and a corresponding number. Pick an icon and plug its number into the Icon column. Again, drag the corner of the cell down the column to fill out the rest of the rows.

The spreadsheet work is done. Save it with a relevant name in a location you'll remember.

Make It a Map

Head to the Earth Point Excel to KML converter at http://www.earthpoint.us/ExcelToKml.aspx. KML is a type of file used by mapping programs. Like Microsoft Word uses a .doc file to put words on your screen, Google Earth and Google maps use a .kml file to put maps on your screen. The Earth Point Excel to KML converter will make a .kml file out of the map sheet. You can then load the .kml file into a Google map.

The Earth Point site lets you create an unlimited number of free maps with up to 200 locations. Want more locations? Set up a paid account. They're inexpensive.

To get started, click the "Browse" or "Choose File" button on the Earth Point Web site. Find where you saved your map sheet and click "Open." Now click "View in Google Earth." This will either open your new map in Google Earth, or give you the option of downloading the file. If it opens in Google Earth, click File, Save and Save Place As, and save it somewhere you remember.

Now go to http://maps.google.com If you don't already have a Google account (if you use Gmail, you do), you'll have to make one.

From the Google Maps site, click "My Maps," then "Create new map." Above the box where you enter the map's title, find the word "Import." Click it. A box that says "Import KML" will pop up. Click "Browse" or "Choose Files," locate your KML file, which is likely named something like EarthPointExcel.kml. Click "Upload from file."

In a few seconds, all of the coordinates from your spreadsheet should be plotted on your Google map. Each point is clickable and will contain the relevant info from the Description column. Be sure to replace the default Earth Point mumbo jumbo in the Title and Description boxes to the left.

Use the zoom bar on the left of the map and the Map, Satellite and Terrain buttons above the map to make everything look how you want it. The "Link" button on the top right corner of the map will give you an address that will send others to the map. Even better, "Customize and preview embedded map" will let you pick the dimensions and zoom level of a map that you can plunk down on any web page where you can use HTML.

David Poulson is the associate director and Jeff Gillies is a graduate assistant at the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism at Michigan State University.

Letting the reader see your editorial judgments might enhance them

By BUD WARD

Environmental reporters should spend more time covering issues they just don't cover.

I know what you're thinking ... then, they'd be covering it.

Not exactly. Hear me out.

The public at large hasn't the faintest idea how much material comes across the desk, over the transom, whatever, of the most sentient environmental journalists.

Not the faintest.

They have no notion of concepts such as a limited news hole, competition for finite air time and column inches from other legitimate news items (and, increasingly, even from the most transparently illegitimate but "entertaining"). Nor, in many cases, do they have much notion of even their own limitations or appetite for serious environmental news.

Those are all items properly in the portfolio of serious environmental journalists and of their presumably equally serious editors.

So enter the notion of covering issues you don't, or just can't, cover.

The thought arose recently as the result of an inquiry to the Web site I edit, http://climatemediaforum.yale.edu . A seemingly earnest reader asked why the site continues to represent the existence of some kind of scientific accord, "consensus," on the notions of observed atmospheric warming and of a significant human influence on that warming.

Simple, I directly responded, though politely and respectfully. I'll quote here just what I replied:

"We are guided in our understanding of climate change science by the foremost scientific bodies in the world — the National Academy of Sciences, IPCC, the American Geophysical Union, the American Assn for the Advancement of Science, the American Meteorological Society, the Royal Society of London, and the Physics Society. Each of these organizations reports an overwhelming agreement among relevant sciences on proven observations of warming and on a significant, not exclusive, human role in that warming. Each indicates that neither the quality nor the quantity of dissenting views on those issues detracts from the overwhelming consensus on the strength of the scientific evidence. Until some of those organizations find scientific evidence to the contrary, we must be guided by their expertise."

Those points were nonstarters, it turns out. The rebuttal came in the form of a snarky reference to the widely dismissed "Oregon Petition" and the purported 31,000-plus scientists' signatures. It's a straw horse veteran climate journalists know not to take seriously.

As for the organizations supporting the IPCC science? The reader's take: "The stuffy old organizations you mentioned in your first e-mail are totally out of touch with recent developments. How many in those organizations are actually climatologists, meteorologists, paleontologists, or geologists?? Not many?? Didn't think so."

So we'll continue, so long as the reputable scientific community does, to represent broad scientific agreement on those two points, and to not "balance" with those few maintaining otherwise.

Another example, again one well known to journalists tilling these fertile fields:

An Environmental Protection Agency career civil servant, an economist, recently penned a tome on climate science, as seen from his perspective as an intelligent, but nonscientist, perspective. No problem there, but EPA civil servants and political appointees above him in effect have been accused of covering up the 90-plus-page report in their political and policy zeal to issue their carbon dioxide "endangerment" decision opening the way for regulation.

Cover it, or not? Had the economist written knowledgeably on a field in which he has proven expertise — let's say, for instance, economics, cost/benefits, that sort of thing — and argued knowledgeably about the agency's direction — and had that report then been suppressed — it for sure would have been news.

Despite some advocates' subsequent efforts to make hay of the report, was this really such news as to command space in *your* limited news budget? The "science" as presented was, after all, dated, meticulously cherry-picked, and readily refutable by authoritative sources. Any claim of academic excellence or scientific seriousness just didn't hold up. Why go to the bother of suppressing something so easily dismissed simply by reference to authoritative science?

And while not handled as well as it might have been (particularly given long-standing objections that the predecessor Bush administration had suppressed climate science findings), even the cover-up charge appeared shaky ... and the document was freely available to anyone wanting it.

Cover or not cover? What if, as it might, it becomes a stumbling point — a rallying cry — for those using it to try to forestall legislation? Won't we wish then that we had addressed it earlier? Yes, perhaps. But can't we still do so at that point? Yes, certainly.

The specialized inside-the-Beltway newsletters were all over it, of course. As perhaps they should be. So too the bloggers, surely those partisan for or against climate legislation. No surprise there.

Many mainstream news organizations, however (yours included?) in effect decided not to cover — an entirely responsible

and understandable editorial judgment.

So why cover something you decide, for purely journalistic reasons, not to cover in the first place? The answer lies in that term, "purely journalistic reasons."

It's one of the beauties of the Web, of the Internet, of blogs. Reporters can periodically — let's say, monthly — write briefly about those things they decided *not* to cover that month: Their rationale and providing links, even, for those wanting to know more. They can thereby open the doors to their own internal news decision-making, let the public see in, all in the interest of their better understanding the news-making process.

Among SEJ members, there are and have been rich dialogues on issues just like these — whether or not to cover the aged and largely rejected views of climate science "contrarians"; whether doing so, even if dismissing their arguments, grants them an unwarranted standing in the public's minds.

Bunk? Or de-bunk, that is the question.

In the end, the answer may be both. And it may be neither. But by reporting on the whys and wherefores of *not* covering certain issues, environmental reporters may just be giving more credence to the seriousness of the issues they *do* cover out-the-chute.

That, in the end, might best serve not only the best interest of serious environmental journalism, but also of the American public and of an informed citizenry. They do, after all, go hand in hand. And they are, in the end, why so many of us got into this crazy business in the first place.

Try it. You may like it. And your audience may, too.

Bud Ward is an independent journalism educator and founder/ former editor of Environment Writer. *He now is editor of the* Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media.

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highlighting possible dangers to humans from the same substances.

"California unveils new goal for controversial carcinogen in water," by **Marla Cone**, the former *Los Angeles Times* environmental reporter who becam editor-in-chief of Environmental Health News last year. She reported that the proposal for chromium 6, made famous by Erin Brockovich, "culminates a decade of debate among scientists trying to decide what concentration is safe to drink."

Also in August, The Daily Climate published an original article by that site's editor, **Douglas Fischer**, on the threat of increasingly acidic ocean waters to Alaska's fisheries. He wrote:

"The Arctic's increased vulnerability to climate change is not limited to higher temperatures and melting permafrost.

"New research from the University of Alaska Fairbanks suggests Arctic oceans are particularly susceptible to acidification, with potentially dire consequences to Alaska's rich crab and salmon fisheries."

SEJournal *assistant editor Bill Dawson has hands-on experience in launching a non-profit, online journalism venture. He is the founding editor of* Texas Climate News*, a web-based magazine that reports on climate change and sustainability issues and is published by the Houston Advanced Research Center. It began operation in late 2008.*

President's Message
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initiative: the Fund for Environmental Journalism.

The first germ of an idea surfaced at our January meeting: Should SEJ become a publisher, producer or commissioner of environmental journalism? If not, where does SEJ fit? How can we help members stay working, and get more and better environmental journalism assignments?

At our April meeting in New Orleans, the board — with input from several members involved in new media enterprises — decided not to do anything that could be interpreted as competing with our own members.

Board members and staff were still trying to decide how to help in late July when we met in Washington state to brainstorm and strategize with a small group of environmental foundation folks who really "get" SEJ.

The funders who attended were savvy and engaged people who know SEJ, and they seemed impatient with small gestures. They wanted to find that elusive new revenue model that will save all of journalism and they eagerly suggested bold moves — government funding for journalism through an annual taxpayer checkoff, or a new funding device — a new Kindle or the next Craigslist — to which journalism could hitch its star. But they also offered sound advice: consider sustainable business models, and remember that philanthropists look for an exit strategy before investing in a new area, like journalism.

What emerged at our board meeting the next day was the notion of a fund for environmental journalism that is not a venture capital fund, but rather an incubator for new ideas, projects and training. For instance, the fund might cover travel costs for a story, pay someone's way to a workshop on entrepreneurial skills or help someone finish a major project.

Before you call or email about how to apply, please understand that the fund doesn't have a dime to its name. We're just starting to fundraise. If we see success before the year is out, 2009 will be a remarkable year indeed.

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

A key to improving your video — get good audio

A Sennheiser MKE 400 shotgun microphone.
PHOTO COURTESY OF SENNHEISER

By ROB SHEPPARD

Video has gotten a lot of attention lately, especially now that nearly all still cameras include high-quality video capture. Many non-TV news organizations are expanding its use for possibilities on the web. Adding video to your own skills can make you more marketable in today's world. And it can give subject matter and interviews a sense of immediacy and reality that no other media can offer.

One of the keys to good video is good audio. Audio is often given less attention because you don't "see" it while shooting. The camcorder doesn't necessarily make audio easy to record or check, especially compared to the visual part of video. Yet it is often said in the video and film industries that good audio makes the visuals look better.

You could spend a lot of money on audio gear, and if you were going into full-time documentary production with high-end production values, you might need to do that, or at least hire a good audio person who brings his or her own gear. But most journalists today who are exploring video are looking to it as a way of expanding their capabilities and cannot afford to invest a great deal of money in gear.

The low-priced camcorders available today are very good, but one thing to keep in mind is that at the less-expensive level of camera, you will find mixed acceptance by broadcasters. And if the audio is poor or worse, then the acceptance of that video becomes unlikely.

If you are mainly going to the web, an inexpensive but good camera will be fine. But you still need quality audio.
There are four basic ways of recording audio:

- Built-in camera mike
- Handheld mike
- Lavalier mike
- Shotgun mike

Let's get rid of the first one right away. If you want good audio, forget about a built-in microphone. Such microphones cannot be placed or aimed properly and they pick up camera motor noise as well as any handling noise. This is one serious shortcoming of some digital SLRs that now record video. And when buying a video camera, be sure you can add an external mike.

A handheld mike gives the look of a traditional news journalist, but it can be hard to use for interviews if you have no experience with it. It also looks really odd when held with a disembodied hand in front of an interview subject, and it looks pretty dorky if the interview subject is holding the mike.

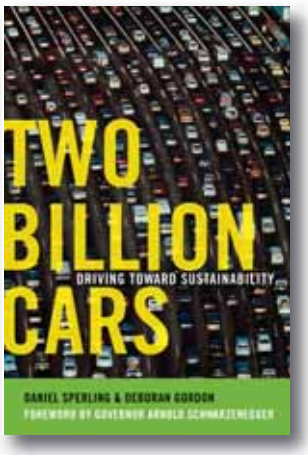
The best audio solutions for most on-the-run video shooters are lavalier and shotgun mikes. You will find excellent models from Sennheiser and Audio-Technica in a range of prices. Azden also offers many lower-priced models that work quite well. Low-priced camcorders will have a simple mike jack, usually a mini-plug, which can be fine. High-end camcorders will use professional audio gear with XLR-plugs that include some special electronics — be sure you get a microphone with plugs that fit your camera.

A lavalier mike is a small microphone that clips onto the subject's collar or shirt near their face. Wireless is convenient, but can be problematic in some locations, whereas a wired mike that plugs directly into the camera will always give good sound. Lavalier mikes are very good in noisier locations as they can be placed close to the sound source (the interview subject, for example).

I find a shotgun mike is excellent for anyone who needs to shoot quickly and easily all by themselves. A shotgun mike can give excellent audio quality and you are not dealing with a lot of cords. You attach it to your camera and its narrow angle of audio acceptance can give you excellent audio with most subjects. The biggest thing to watch here is the recording environment. Sometimes a slight change in mike placement (which might be camera placement with a shotgun mike) will have a huge difference in sound. You may also have to get closer to your subject. Canon and Panasonic make a couple of excellent, inexpensive shotgun mikes, plus Sennheiser has a good little one, too.

A very important addition to your tools if you want good audio is a good set of earphones. This also implies that it is very helpful to have an earphone jack on your camera! The sound from your camera's tiny speaker is not going to tell you what your audio is really like. Only by listening to what your microphone is actually "hearing" can you tell what your audio really sounds like. This can be a huge help in deciding on an interview location or microphone placement. A number of manufacturers make good, small headsets, including noise-canceling earphones that will help you better hear your audio. I have a pair of Sony noise-canceling earphones that are easy to carry, reasonably priced and work well.

Rob Sheppard worked in professional video production for many years before becoming editor of Outdoor Photographer *magazine and a group editorial director at Werner Publishing. He helped start* PCPhoto *(now* Digital Photo*) and* HDVideoPro *magazines. Now he works independently and video is an important addition to his capabilities.*



A good travel guide to our transportation future

Two Billion Cars:
Driving Toward Sustainability

by Daniel Sperling and Deborah Gordon

Oxford University Press, $24.95

Reviewed by JENNIFER WEEKS

The environmental impacts of America's love affair with automobiles, as Daniel Sperling and Deborah Gordon lay them out in *Two Billion Cars*, are so depressing that readers may want to start this book at the end. There the authors sketch out a vision for a sustainable transportation system, circa 2050, that doesn't depend on oil or vehicles powered by internal combustion engines.

In this world people carry pocket-sized computers that offer transportation options at the click of a few buttons, including car-sharing, ride-sharing, bus rapid transit and other choices. Private autos are powered with hydrogen (made from clean fuels) or a combination of electricity and cellulosic biofuels. Carbon emissions from transportation are 50 to 80 percent lower than today's levels, the air is cleaner, and roads are less crowded.

With that picture in mind, it's a little easier to flip to the front of the book and see how we get there from here. Sperling, a professor of engineering and environmental policy at the University of California-Davis, and Gordon, a transportation policy analyst, start with a clear message: the United States has created a transportation monoculture that resists innovation, and the rest of the world is following suit. That path leads to a planet with two billion cars and other vehicles by 2020, which is unsustainable for many reasons, including climate change, regional air pollution, and competition for scarce oil resources. Even today's most innovative alternatives, such as the Toyota Prius and Brazil's sugar-based ethanol industry, are baby steps toward the changes that are needed. "The world is still in denial about the staggering challenge it faces and the radical transformation it must undertake," the authors warn.

How can we break the transportation monoculture? Sperling and Gordon say it will take a major shift to electric-drive technology, which is much more efficient than internal combustion engines (today's gasoline engines waste about two-thirds of the fuel they burn). Hybrid electric vehicles like those on the roads today are a start, but battery electric cars and fuel cells will eventually become the dominant options. The best use of biofuels, the authors believe, is as substitutes for electric vehicles in areas like the U.S. Midwest where most electricity comes from coal (so heavy use of electric vehicles would increase greenhouse gas and criteria pollutant emissions from coal-burning power plants).

Along with new fuels, we also need new kinds of transportation that give people alternatives to driving alone. Sperling and Gordon don't see conventional mass transit as a solution, at least in wealthy nations, because it doesn't attract enough users. Instead they look to new services that use information and wireless technologies to offer options like "smart paratransit" (on-demand local shuttle service without fixed routes or schedules), small neighborhood vehicles, and telecommuting. Giving people more ways to get from A to B, they argue, will make them more willing to get out of their cars.

This book also looks critically at the U.S. auto industry and large oil companies and the business cultures that make them resist innovation. Sperling and Gordon are skeptical of arguments that world oil production is nearing its peak, but they see a different problem. Oil companies may be able to tap unconventional sources like Canadian tar sands and western oil shale, but these sources are dirtier and more expensive than conventional oil reserves. "The world is caught in a trap and oil is the bait," they write. Without new policies that make energy companies invest much more heavily in alternative fuels, Big Oil will keep doing what it does best: large fossil energy projects.

Car makers and consumers also need to change their ways. Automakers are starting to shift toward electric-drive vehicles, but higher fuel economy requirements and greenhouse gas emissions standards would push them along. Price floors for gasoline and diesel would give investors more incentive to support alternative fuels. And incentives like pay-as-you-drive insurance would make consumers think more about how many miles they log in their cars.

Transportation coverage has focused this year on restructuring of the Big Three automakers, but solutions are more likely to come from places that have the most to gain from finding alternatives. This book spotlights two: California, which is pioneering greenhouse gas emission standards for cars, and China, which the authors believe could become a leader in transforming vehicles, fuels and mobility options — especially if wealthy countries help China develop sustainable transportation strategies. The road to a 21st century transportation system may take some strange turns, but this book is a good travel guide.

Freelance writer Jennifer Weeks (jw@jenniferweeks.com) is based in Watertown, Mass. She and Deborah Gordon both worked at the Union of Concerned Scientists from 1994-96.

Book Shelf

A CSI-like thriller aims to protect wildlife

Animal Investigators:
How the World's First Wildlife Forensics Lab is Solving Crimes and Saving Endangered Species

by Laurel A. Neme
Scribner, $25

Reviewed by CHRISTINE HEINRICHS

The CSI shows on TV brought human forensic science into the living room. Laurel Neme dissects the world of wildlife CSI, with a *modus operandi* more professional than the glitz of an entertainment series. She illustrates the scientific precision required with true-crime accounts from the underworld of wildlife trafficking.

Neme's focus is the work done at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, the only one of its kind in the country. The lab opened its doors in 1989, after years of political wrangling.

Having a facility for wildlife crimes is critical for several reasons. Wildlife forensics would never get priority in labs doing human forensics work, which are already so overwhelmed that testing of human crime scene materials lags years behind. Also, the requirements of wildlife crimes are quite different from those of human crimes. In human crimes, investigators at least know what species they are working with and that the violence that killed them is a crime. In the case of wildlife crimes, the victims show up as carved figurines, purses, shawls, powdered medicine or, in the case of caviar, food. Some wildlife trade is legal, so making a verifiable determination of what species was killed to make the product, where and when are crucial to the legal process of charging a crime.

That's the task the lab took on: establishing the protocols and data that meet legal standards to give law enforcement the facts to determine what laws have been broken. In the case of wildlife, the date when a species was listed may determine whether the product violates the law. Nabbing a poacher for hunting out of season is one thing. Making a case against organized wildlife traffickers — whose business is estimated at as much as $20 billion annually, equaling or exceeding the legal trade — requires more sophistication.

Neme's book follows various wildlife species through the lab processes used to help law enforcement officers solve crimes and convict the guilty: Alaskan walrus, North American and Asian bears, and South American birds. Working at the leading edge of wildlife crime forensics, the lab and its scientists had to develop and refine the methods they use to bolster criminal cases.

The book's depiction of the lab's walrus investigation reveals a complex case that required its scientists to figure out whether the animals died naturally or were killed, and if the latter, whether they were killed legally by subsistence hunters. The researchers not only faced scientific problems, but also the social and political difficulties of Alaskan natives whose subsistence hunting was in question. Not an enviable position to be in. Neme teases out the strands of logic and lab work that eventually established ways to tell a walrus that was legally hunted for subsistence from the many which were illegally taken for their ivory. The disgusting field work on decomposing walruses ultimately allowed the investigators to identify the bleached condition of cervical bones as a marker of illegal hunting.

The lab's investigation of illegal sales of bear bile, in demand as medicine in Asian communities, raised other challenges. Crystallized bear bile sells for over $1,000 a gram, about 20 times the price of heroin. But it turns out many of the alleged bear bile products are made of pig bile, which when purchased from pig processing plants is completely legal. It's beyond law enforcement to pursue fraud against someone selling fake bear bile and it complicates prosecution of actual bear crimes. In this case, the lab's work established that no wildlife crime had been committed. This buttressed the lab's reputation for impartiality and strict science, increasing the weight of its testimony for future prosecutions. In nine out of ten cases, Neme writes, defense attorneys don't bother challenging the lab's results.

The existence of bear bile farms had somehow escaped my attention before reading this book. How much worse does it get? The bears face truly horrible conditions and the excess quantities of bear bile produced at the farms have inspired merchants to add it to personal care products, beyond its traditional use for the most severe illnesses. "Rather than dying to cure human diseases, bears are now being killed for garish consumer products for the wealthy," Neme writes.

Neme follows the twists and turns of an illegal trafficker in South American bird feathers to some dismaying end purchasers, including a Dickinson University anthropology professor, art gallery owners, lawyers and the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Demand for the feathers also encourages native peoples to make items of cultural significance purely for the trade, debasing their cultural meaning and corroding tribal life, she writes. But too often, low priority is given to wildlife crimes worldwide, making them easy to get away with and highly profitable. The professor, zoo director, art gallery owners and lawyers got off with fines and forfeiture of the artifacts. The Smithsonian secretary pleaded out to a single misdemeanor violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, for which he paid no fine. He was placed on probation for two years and sentenced to 100 hours of community service. The trafficker was sentenced to 40 months in jail. He escaped after serving 24 months and remains at large.

The Oregon lab plays an important role in fighting wildlife crimes, but Neme says the proactive way to save endangered wildlife is to nip illegal sales and curtail consumer demand. "Rather than concentrating on catching sturgeon poachers, who operate in remote locales and are easily replaced by others, agents pursue illegal caviar traders who are the real motivation behind the illegal killing," she writes. "When consumers' tastes change they can reduce demand and shift a product toward substitutes." Acceptance of alternative ingredients also could help stop the illegal trade. Neme points out that the products sold as rare

animal parts typically only contain minute concentrations. For example, the federal lab in Oregon has shown that less than 0.5 percent of the medicines that claim to contain deer musk actually do. Edgard Espinoza, the lab's deputy director, says the percentage of actual rare animal ingredients could be even less for tiger bone and rhino horn, used to counter male impotence. It makes one wonder if Viagra might inadvertently be the savior of wildlife, Neme writes.

Christine Heinrichs writes about domestic poultry and other sustainable agriculture issues. Her second book on raising traditional breeds in small flocks, How to Raise Poultry, *was published by Voyageur Press in March 2009. She lives in Cambria, California where she hopes the killing of three elephant seals on the beach in 2008 will some day be solved.*

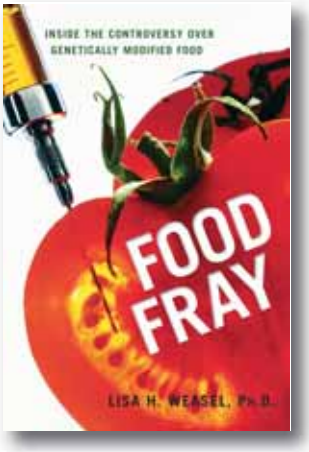
Overly strident, but still instructive on GM controversy

Food Fray:

Inside the Controversy over Genetically Modified Food

by Lisa Weasel

Amacom, $23



Reviewed by KATHLEEN REGAN

Genetically modified food: Is it Frankenfood or the key to solving world hunger?

Genetic manipulation of food, foodstuffs and seeds is almost always characterized in one of these ways but it is much more complex than its supporters or detractors would have us believe. It is a collection of sophisticated and rapidly changing technologies that intersect with huge profits and politics — a combination that should always raise ethical concerns.

Food Fray, by Lisa Weasel, a molecular biologist, is an attempt to clarify the controversy over genetically modified food. She is well positioned to understand and explain the science behind GMOs so their ethical, political and economic implications can be evaluated. But her purpose is to write about these implications as well as scientific aspects of the controversy.

Weasel recounts some of the miserable events that have led to the prevalence of GMOs in our food supply. For example, Monsanto has paid farmers in India to testify to the success of a genetically modified cotton plant that had already failed and harassed American farmers for ostensibly stealing GM seeds. These are only two examples in a long and disturbing list.

She recounts cases involving the misuse of GM technology to increase yields of products for which we already have a surplus and to secure private ownership of genetic innovations. She provides only a few examples of its application to solving problems, implying that these are not nearly enough to counteract its negative effects. Sadly, even when such applications exist, they are often hijacked for short-term profits, with the technology's humanitarian applications often falling by the wayside. There are also some hysterically funny (in retrospect) examples of failed GMO projects, like the Flavr Savr tomato. But Weasel's outraged tone often prejudices the stories when the facts alone would have done the job.

The strengths of this book, however, are twofold. First, Weasel's explanations of the science behind various approaches to genetic modification are clear and accessible to the non-scientist. Her explanation of the modification of plants for built-in resistance to herbicides or the injection of rBGH (recombinant bovine growth hormone), for example, are sophisticated enough to be meaningful but easily understood. Because there are so many types of genetic modification, these detailed explanations are valuable to the interested citizen. Second, Weasel gives a solid account of several grassroots movements that have developed in opposition to GMOs. She lets the activists trying to stand up to the giants of GMO industry speak for themselves. We learn just how they have been successful, what it took to achieve their goals and the struggles in which they still engage.

But in spite of her efforts, this is not an objective characterization of GMOs. She is clearly on one side of the issue and the book falters when she indulges in biased accounting. (For example, biotech scientists are "brash", while anti-GMO activists are "indefatigable.") There is nothing wrong with being on one side of an issue or another but one should be honest about where one stands. For an SEJer who reports on issues like GMOs that are contentious, complicated, confusing, and emotional, it is critical to remember the job of the journalist: to advance public understanding by providing information about issues in such a way that the public can make distinctions, make decisions or take action on those issues. *Food Fray* is worth reading and Weasel is a good writer. But for those of us who report on the environment, one lesson from this book — especially its first few strident chapters — is how not to write about contentious scientific issues.

Kathy Regan is a freelance writer based in Ludwigsburg, Germany. After nearly 20 years working in ecosystems research, she is now finishing a master's degree in environmental sustainability and food production.

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by Kim Carlson

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

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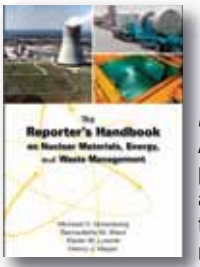
Air
Our Planet's Ailing Atmosphere

by Hans Tammemagi

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

spr10



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

by Michael R. Greenberg

Bernadette M West, Karen W. Lowrie, Henry J. Mayer

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

wntr10

Paving Paradise

by Craig Pittman & Matthew Waite

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

The Crooked Mile

by Kevin Clemens

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

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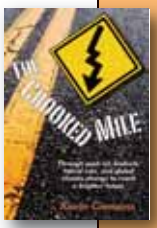

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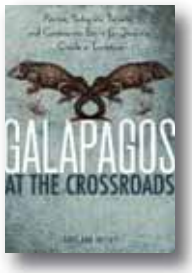

Galapagos at the Crossroads:

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

by Carol Ann Bassett

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

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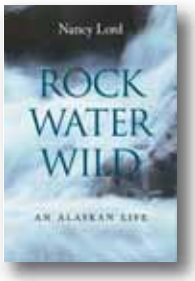

Rock, Water, Wild: An Alaskan Life

by Nancy Lord

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

Gators, Gourdheads and Pufflings

by Susan D. Jewell

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

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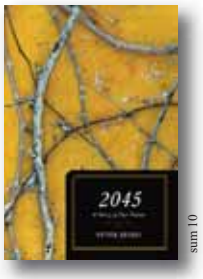

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2045: A Story of our Future

by Peter Seidel

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

Smithsonian Ocean
Our Water Our World

by Deborah Cramer

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

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Save Gas, Save the Planet

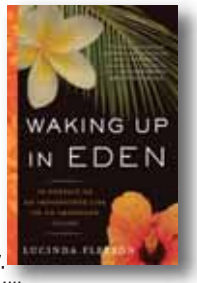
by John Addison

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

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

by Lucinda Fleeson

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



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Rescue Warriors
The U.S. Coast Guard America's Forgotten Heroes

by David Helvarg

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

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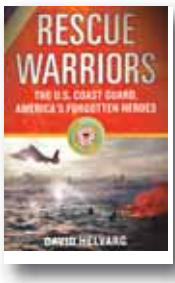

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A fisherman releases a 15-inch cutthroat trout he'd caught near the headwaters of the North Fork of the Flathead River in British Columbia. Famed for its water quality, the Flathead has been designated a National Wild and Scenic River in the United States, where it serves as the western boundary of Glacier National Park in Montana. But its first 31 miles in Canada enjoy no such similar protection, and nearby mountaintop removal coal mining operations are seeking to expand into the Flathead drainage. The potential threat to this resource prompted the International League of Conservation Photographers to launch a Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition (RAVE) in July to document current conditions there (see story on page16).