

SEJ AWARDS: FINALIST

DILIGENCE IN OREGON

Public TV's Weekly 'Field Guide' Takes a Varied Approach

By Allison J. Waldman
Special to TelevisionWeek

One of the three finalists for the SEJ Award in the category of outstanding beat/in-depth reporting is Oregon Public Broadcasting's "Oregon Field Guide," a weekly 30-minute news magazine program devoted to environmental topics. The episode that earned recognition by SEJ covered four different stories: the destruction of the Marmot Dam; an update on the wilderness status of Opal Creek; the scientific pursuit of microscopic ice worms; and the migration of toads.

"It's an incredible honor," "Oregon Field Guide" producer/reporter Vince Patton said of the SEJ recognition. "I've been very active in SEJ. It's a wonderful place to learn about environmental topics for reporters who don't necessarily cover the subject full time and they need a quick resource to get up to speed. Climate change is paramount today, and it's a great example. SEJ has so many climate change resources. That's become the story of the century."

"Oregon Field Guide" is unique among the finalists in the category in that its nominated episode deals with four distinct environmental issues. "The beauty of our program is that we're not a daily broadcast," said Mr. Patton. Because of that, "Oregon Field Guide" can spend more time focused on stories like the Marmot Dam—the first dam in North America to be removed without first digging out all the sediment behind it.

"The daily news stations, some of them covered the removal of the dam, some of them covered what followed," Mr. Patton said. "None of them did an entire piece like us. We did nearly 10 minutes, documenting the entire process."

The removal of the Marmot Dam yielded surprising results. "They decided to remove the dam and then leave it to the river itself to wash away a century of all the sediment and dirt that had piled up behind it. The scientists were curious to see what would happen," said Mr. Patton. "They predicted it could take weeks, months, maybe a year to wash it all

away. They were all completely wrong. One hundred years of sediment was gone by the next morning."

The segment on the Marmot Dam has become the most watched video on the Oregon Public Broadcasting Web site. "We've received requests for copies of it from as far away as Japan, and many of our viewers are scientists," said Mr. Patton.

While Marmot Dam was the most dramatic of the four segments in the episode, the other three stories were also compelling. Opal Creek was a follow-up to a report about the progress of the wilderness preserve created at the site, showing how it has become a protected watershed, Forest Education Center and tourist attraction. For the piece on ice worms, the reporters climbed 3,000 feet up the side of Mount Rainier.

"We ventured out on a glacier and waited. As the sun went down and the temperature cooled, not just thousands, not just millions, but billions of unbelievably tiny black worms came to the surface of the glacier," said Mr. Patton.

"They're only found in the Northwest and they eat bacteria and algae, and they're about as wide as two strands of hair.

They're very, very small, and with a zoom lens you could really see them."

The fourth piece was about toad migration. "It was a science story not cast as a science story. Sometimes when people hear 'science story,' their eyes glaze over. In the course of this story, they may have learned about ecology and the threats to the Western toad, but it was billed as children come to the rescue. We had the largest migration of toads in 14 years," said Mr. Patton.

The "Oregon Field Guide" team was in the right place at the right time. "On the peak day of the migration, a couple dozen children turned up and picked up thousands of toads, put them in buckets and carried them safely across the roads. The timing was so fortuitous because the migration really only lasted one day and we got over there just in time to catch it."

"Oregon Field Guide" finds environmental stories by getting out of the studio. "There's no shortage of stories," Mr. Patton said. "We're always getting ideas from people who write in. Our show covers the whole state." ■



RESCUED In "Guide's" piece on toad migration, kids toted buckets of the creatures to safety.



GUILTY Dan Rather's report revealed that FEMA knew about the trailers' formaldehyde levels before delivering a single one.

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RATHER: CASE OF THE TOXIC TRAILERS

Temporary Housing for Katrina's Homeless Made Occupants Ill

By Allison J. Waldman
Special to TelevisionWeek

The SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment are the world's largest and most comprehensive awards for journalism on environmental topics, and one of the finalists this year in the category of outstanding beat/in-depth reporting in television is a familiar name in broadcast journalism: Dan Rather.

Mr. Rather, in collaboration with Wayne Nelson, Chandra Simon, Resa Matthews, Elyse Kaftan has been nominated for HDNet's "Dan Rather Reports: Toxic Trailers," an investigative hour about what happened in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

When thousands of homeless families were given FEMA trailers as temporary shelter, they became ill. "Dan Rather Reports" discovered many of these trailers were emitting toxic levels of formaldehyde, and broke the news that FEMA was actually well aware of the problem before delivering a single trailer. Thanks to Mr. Rather's initial story and the follow-up, FEMA had to address the problems.

"Naturally I'm very glad, especially for the people I work with. They're some of the best journalists in the world," Mr. Rather said about the SEJ nomination. "I was also very pleased for Mark Cuban, who's given us complete, total, absolute creative and editorial control." Mr. Cuban is the owner of HDNet, and "Dan Rather Reports" is the net's signature news program.

Mr. Rather, a veteran of CBS News, is more than comfortable in his current home and speaks glow-



ingly of his boss. "He backs us in what we do, especially the tough stuff. So I was very pleased about it. We always like it when somebody recognizes our work but we don't start out saying that we want to win awards. We want to do good work."

The former CBS anchorman, who is currently in litigation with his former employer, hosts "Dan Rather Reports" on HDNet and acts as lead investigator. To him, environmental journalism is all about investigating.

"I see my job as a journalist as being an honest broker of information. My first responsibility is to be as accurate and as fair as possible," he said. "We acquire the information and put it out to the public. Now, there are a lot of interpretations, but ... there's a

particular way of doing investigative journalism. Use what is important for the public to know, and if someone in a position of power doesn't want the public to know, that's news."

While Mr. Rather is the name reporter on the "Toxic Trailers" story, the veteran newsmen shares the credit with his team. "A young woman named Chandra Simon was our original lead investigator. The arc of this story is that the people in the trailers were at first glad to get into the trailers because they had no place to live after Katrina," said Mr. Rather. "By the way, these trailers were made to help hurricane victims; they weren't made for sale to the public. After getting in them, people started to notice that their children had an unusual number of illnesses and other members of the family got sick."

Mr. Rather has a history of science and environmental journalism. In 1979, on CBS's "60 Minutes," for instance, he went after a company that was poisoning its workers. "It was a story that powerful people in powerful places didn't want out," Mr. Rather said. "The plant changed and the workers were compensated. And this formaldehyde story is right up there for me. It's just like that."

To Mr. Rather, environmental stories are an important brand of investigative journalism. "To me, it's a public service. I grew up in journalism with people who taught me that a public journal—and by journal they meant a newspaper, magazine, radio station or television station—is a public trust," he said. "To fulfill the responsibility of that public trust, you must see yourself as performing a public service. The reward you get is the sense that you've contributed. When it works, when your report is successful, then that's the reward." ■

DOING THE LEGWORK

For Journalists, Great Preparation Is Key to Great Results

By Allison J. Waldman
Special to TelevisionWeek

There's an old saying that success is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. For broadcasters and reporters working on stories about the environment, success has often been hard to achieve because of the complications involved in really being prepared. Tackling difficult stories involving science, technology and often hard to comprehend material, environmental reporters have to go the extra yard.

"I always go to the experts in the area I'm investigating, people who don't have a vested interest in the outcome," said Joel Grover, investigative reporter at KNBC-TV in Los Angeles. "For the story I worked on about the contaminated produce at the Seventh Street market, I sought out a food safety expert. I called him up and asked him to tell me how it works—who has jurisdiction over this, how does this whole thing work? He gave me the whole intricate system, from the farm to the fork."

It's incumbent on news professionals to be able to distinguish the experts from the spinmeisters, even if that means going to multiple sources and digging deeper. Still, there are times when the information that companies and organizations give out is designed to create the appearance of being green, rather than being an indication that real changes are being made.

"Sadly, that's true. That's a function of some of the economic issues in the media industry, where there are fewer people to do the work so

you sort of have to race around more to cover all your assignments," said Tim Wheeler, environmental reporter for The Baltimore Sun and president of the SEJ Board of Directors.

"It's important for us to be wary of getting sold a bill of goods. With marketing and everyone wanting to be portrayed as green, the question is who's really green and who's pale green or true green," said Mr. Wheeler. "You have to find the time to dig a little deeper and find that extra source who might provide a different point of view."

When whitewashing occurs in an environmental context, it's called "greenwashing." It's basically a coordinated attempt to hide unpleasant truths, and it is a focus of the Web site greenwashingindex.com, presented by Enviromedia—an advertising and public relations agency that's built on the idea that doing the right thing isn't just the right thing, but a powerful business advantage.

"A classic example of greenwashing might be an energy company that runs an advertising campaign touting a 'green' technology they're working on—but that 'green' technology represents only a sliver of the company's otherwise not-so-green business, or may be marketed on the heels of an oil spill or plant explosion," the Web site says.

There are companies that spend more time and money saying they're green than actually going green. "It's whitewashing, but with a green brush," the site says.

"To avoid meaningless, one-sided interviews or false information, reporters need to find and research opposing views on any environmental issue and vet the expert with questions from both

STUDY UP Author Kim Carlson advises learning both sides of the issue.



opposing and similar viewpoints prior to using them," said Kim Carlson, eco-preneur, green living expert and author of the upcoming book "Green Your Work: Boost Your Bottom Line While Reducing Your Eco-Footprint." "There is a tremendous amount of environmental content on the Web, and reporters can quickly get up to speed on the issues or an interviewee. There is plenty of information from business, environmental non-profits and government perspectives on any green issue."

To make sure the information from the experts is legitimate, Mr. Wheeler recommended seeking out verification of the source from a watchdog group. "SourceWatch is a collaborative project of the Center for Media and Democracy, and they've kept tabs on these things for some time. There's also an environmental marketing firm called TerraChoice in Texas. And SEJ has a tip sheet," he said.

In addition, Mr. Wheeler recognizes the important contribution provided by the public. "There is no shortage of folks who will jump on your reporting if they think you're unfair or sloppy or wrong or left things out. That's from all sides of the issues," he said.

William Brent, a cleantech blogger (www.mrcleantech.com) and also the head of the cleantech practice of the PR firm Weber Shandwick, urges the media to seek out unimpeachable sources. "There are true experts out there who can call bullshit. Find them and talk to them. What's discouraging, however, is that the experts are often other media or executives at companies." ■

AN ENERGY RESOURCE

Energy Policy TV Lets Users Tap Into Industry Database

By Hillary Atkin
Special to TelevisionWeek

Environmental journalists working in all forms of media can find a wealth of knowledge online, and now they can tap into a repository of information geared toward stakeholders in the energy industry while gaining access to industry events and speeches all over the country without leaving the office.

The service is called Energy Policy TV (www.energypolicyTV.com), and it encompasses video channels on subjects including oil, gas, electricity, nuclear power, solar energy, energy infrastructure, wind power, coal, sustainability, biofuels, transportation, climate change and conservation—along with channels for state government and Congress on energy-related issues.

"Our overriding goal and our mission is education," said Scott Nance, manager of content acquisition for the Washington-based Web site. "We cover all the sectors and we don't take a position on anything. What we are about is having stakeholders talk to other stakeholders through Web video. The people in our videos are in government, NGOs and academia, all speaking to each other."

The on-demand video content—currently more than 1,200 videos—includes speakers, hearings and conferences, and stays on the Web site for a year.

"Whether it's a congressional hearing or a press conference, they can find out what people are actually saying," Mr. Nance said. "It's not an interpretation. The audience can watch a congressman or a



CEO saying these things. There are many educational events, and the site is very broad and deep in terms of content, keeping people abreast of the latest elements in energy and environmental policy."

Energy Policy TV went live about 18 months ago. It was founded by CEO Grant Stockdale, who for many years was the associate publisher of The Energy Daily.

"He saw all these different meetings that go on that not everyone can get to. He thought that Web video was the way to access all of it via the desktop," said Mr. Nance.

About 30% of the audience of EP TV is made up of lawmakers, officials from the U.S. Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency and other government entities. About 40% is made up of people in the energy industry, and the balance of the audience is from academia, nongovernmental organizations and the media. The site is funded by sponsorship, and advertisers have included British Petroleum and Volvo.

"The feedback has been very positive, and people appreciate being able to find out what's going on, and having this information on their desktops," said Mr. Nance. "We encourage people to tape their events and then post those, but unlike YouTube, where anyone can post anything, we have an editorial process. There can't be straight advertising. There has to be a substantive discussion." ■

NAVIGATING NEWS FEEDS

Services Becoming More Environmental

By Jarre Fees
Special to TelevisionWeek

Some networks—BBC comes to mind—have such a strong news presence that their trucks seem to show up automatically in even the most remote areas of the world whenever there's a newsworthy occurrence.

For everyone else, there's Thomson Reuters or Associated Press. Or Bloomberg, or Scripps Howard. There's also Cybercast News Service (CNS), Catholic

News Service, Iraqi News Agency and even the Student News Daily. Strategic News Service covers the computing and communications industries. ABC News, CBS News, Fox News, CNN and MSNBC all have prominent online coverage; CNN Newsource provides coverage for other media as well.

So far, nobody covers environmental news exclusively, although most of the major services provide links, clips or text of environmental issues, some of

them quite extensive. For general print journalism and wire services, subscribers usually get an edited story they can print or a link they can add to their Web sites.

For television, news services such as Reuters and AP provide raw footage that is edited at local stations for the evening news.

Nart Bouran, the London-based Reuters director of television, said the agency has "over 80 news bureaus, which means a strong journalistic presence. In Beijing, we have a couple of hun-

dred people. In a small area it might be only five."

When viewers flip through channels to get a clearer picture of a presidential address, a wildfire or a train wreck, the same feed is generally being provided by one news service, he said. Broadcast news services are "wholesalers of video," he said. "No journalists are on camera. It's raw footage with natural sound. The customer gets a video, gets who shot it and what restrictions apply, as well as live footage."

Like most of the larger news services, Reuters also provides print and wire services for newspapers, along with text, graphics and photo services for networks

as large as NBC, BBC and Fox, and for places as small as "anywhere that has a TV station."

"We've been having more and more demand to cover more stories on global warming," Mr. Bouran said, "and requests to cover inventions to deal with environmental problems and to find out what other people are doing [about those problems]."

The Associated Press also has a huge library both for Internet and broadcast use, offering 500,000 clip reels in its online database. The library includes a large number of clip reels on the environment: There are 418 clips of polar bears, for instance, of which 328 relate specifically to the environment. ■