

NewsPro

The Magazine for News Professionals

October 2011 **crain**

Journalists' Top Challenges

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Scott Simmons,
WAPT-TV, Biloxi, MS

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Natalie Wood, design engineer at the River Bend nuclear energy facility in Louisiana.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Environmental Journalists Are Asked to Do More With Less



One theme that came up repeatedly as we were putting together this issue of NewsPro was that these are unusually challenging times for environmental journalists.

An unprecedented series of economic, political, environmental and technological developments has transformed, and continues to transform, the industry into something that bears little resemblance to what it looked like just a few short years ago. Jobs have gone away or been scaled back, news outlets have shut down or moved online, and an increasingly polarized climate in Washington has raised the stakes in the national discourse and pushed the conversation on the environment in a more ideological—and some might say less scientific—direction.

For many of the dedicated men and women who have chosen environmental journalism as a career, the job has turned from an idealistic crusade to save the planet into an all-too-real struggle for survival, with little hope of making a difference in the world.

If nothing else, this charged backdrop gives us plenty to talk about at this year's Society of Environmental Journalists Conference. For its part, the SEJ has risen to the challenge by putting together an event that sets the bar higher than it has ever been. With the rich environmental tapestry of South Florida as a backdrop, the organization has readied a breathtaking array of events—diverse, innovative, timely and right on target. As environmental journalists are already well aware, the SEJ gets it.

And that matters, because the other theme that came up consistently is that the role of the environmental journalist has never been more important. Many of you will come away from SEJ with your batteries recharged, your knowledge expanded and your focus sharpened—all of which will be needed for the fight ahead.

It's hardly a stretch to say the planet's environmental health is at risk on a number of fronts—and the clock is ticking. But it's also no exaggeration to point out that the environmental journalist will have a lot to say about what happens next.

—Dennis R. Liff, Editor



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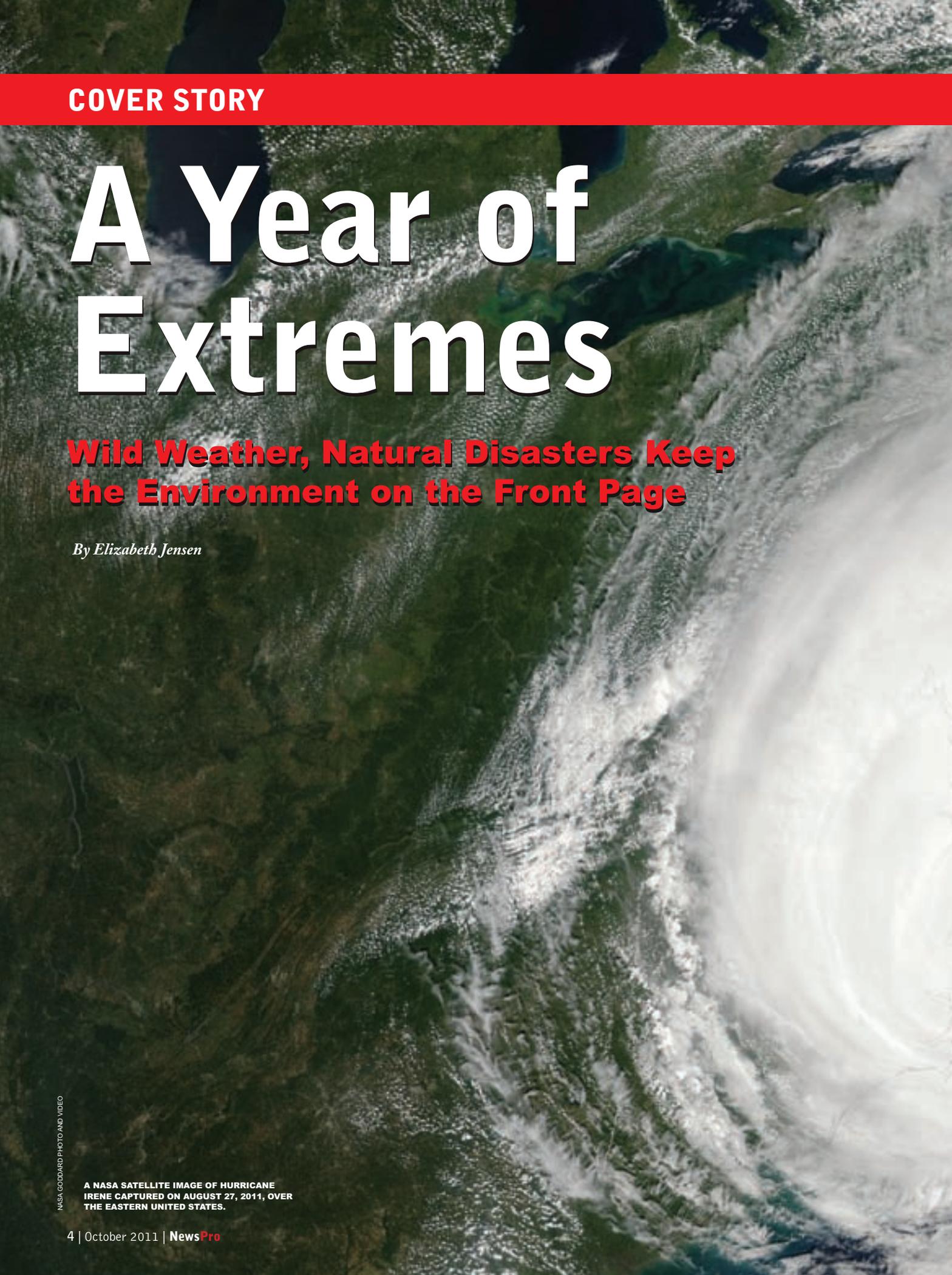
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COVER STORY

A Year of Extremes

**Wild Weather, Natural Disasters Keep
the Environment on the Front Page**

By Elizabeth Jensen

NASA GODDARD PHOTO AND VIDEO

A NASA SATELLITE IMAGE OF HURRICANE
IRENE CAPTURED ON AUGUST 27, 2011, OVER
THE EASTERN UNITED STATES.



If 2010 was the year of the oil spill, 2011 is shaping up as the year of extreme natural disasters, once again pushing environmental journalism into the breaking news realm.

Devastating tornadoes in the South in the spring, which followed record winter snowstorms in the Midwest and a paralyzing East Coast blizzard. Fast-moving and hard-to-control wildfires in the Southwest. A rare 5.8 magnitude East Coast earthquake in August, followed a week later by the first hurricane to make landfall in New Jersey since 1903, which unleashed epic flooding in upstate New York and Vermont.

Environmental journalists have sometimes struggled to find their role; particularly in scaled-back local newsrooms it is the meteorologists who are often on the front lines of these stories.

“Jumbled together is a good way to put it,” said Bud Ward, the editor of the Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media, of the current reporting landscape. The label is particularly accurate when it comes to reporting on climate change, which has, for better or worse, been pushed front and center by the weather events and the charged political environment.

Scientists traditionally are reluctant to pin any single weather event on climate change, but activists and even President Obama have made the link. In a provocative Washington Post editorial in May, Bill McKibben, founder of the climate change campaign 350.org, decried that caution in connecting the dots, and unleashed a torrent of 1,400 comments.

“I think a lot of the activists would very much like to say, ‘Aha—there’s climate change. We see its fingerprint in Hurricane You-name-it,’” said Mr. Ward. “But the scientific community is much more reserved in making that leap.”

That has left the journalists in the middle.

“This is a real touchy time for environmental journalists,” said Keith Kloor, a freelance journalist who has long covered environmental issues. “It’s become so politicized.”

But as Ward noted in a recent post on the Yale Forum’s website, under the headline “Inching Forward on ‘Holy Grail’ of Climate Change/Weather Link?,” scientists are slowly coming around. “I think some scientists are becoming a little less reserved or reticent in trying to make the connection. The media should follow the science and the science is moving; however incrementally, it’s moving closer on trying to make the connection,” he said.

Meanwhile, he said, there’s a need to make sure in this scaled-back era of journalism that the general assignment reporters, political reporters and meteorologists covering environmental issues are educated on the issues. “They may be more inclined to make a causal relationship or they may be more inclined to absolutely stonewall it—and neither will win in the battle of accuracy.”

Industry observers say the trend among environmental journalists is toward investigative reporting, with a strong, well-thought-out multimedia component. Non-profit news organizations such as ProPublica and the Center for Public Integrity are increasingly a part of that picture.

“Is it a good time to be a journalist of any kind? No,” said Beth Parke, executive director of SEJ. But she added that unlike 20 years ago, “No one would expect a serious news organization not to cover the environment now.” While the number of actual stories may be dropping, she said, “The quality has improved.”

Environmental journalists are “scrambling to stay in this field,” she said, even as they continue to lose their jobs: “The issues have never been more important; communities need this reporting more than ever and the ‘meaning factor’ of what you’re doing is growing even if the reward factor is not.”

What continues to fall by the wayside, however, is local-based community

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Job Security Tops List of Challenges

2011 Survey of SEJ members shows priorities shifting in response to economic pressures

By Hillary Atkin

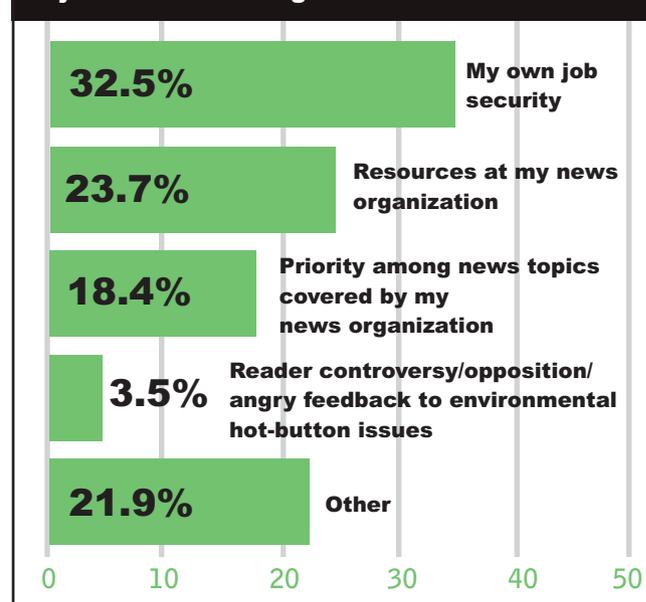
Global climate change and energy policy will be the two biggest stories for environmental journalists in the next few years, according to a new study conducted by the Society of Environmental Journalists and NewsPro in advance of the SEJ's 21st annual conference.

The poll surveyed the organization's members about a number of topics surrounding their jobs covering environmental issues. 114 people responded to the survey, amounting to about 8% of the membership.

Among the study's findings:

- Environmental journalists feel their own job security is the biggest challenge they face in their jobs.
- They say the biggest changes in their job in the past five years involve the use of social media and multimedia.
- They see increased awareness about green issues and the trend toward eating food grown locally as the most positive environmental trends in the U.S.

What is the biggest challenge in your job as a journalist covering environmental issues?



In response to the question “What is the biggest challenge in your job as a journalist covering environmental issues?” 32.5% said it was their own job security; 23.7% said it was resources at their respective news organizations; 18.4% chose the answer “Priority among news topics covered by my news organization”; and 3.5% picked “Reader controversy/opposition/angry feedback to environmental hot-button issues.” 21.9% chose “other.”

One respondent commented: “As a freelance journalist, it is securing enough assignments to develop a consistent beat/specialty as an environmental journalist. It’s difficult to develop relationships with sources, familiarity with subjects, and consistency with coverage when having to hustle and patch together assignments to make ends meet.”

Others had similar observations. One journalist wrote:

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The Politics of Climate Change

With an Election Year Ahead, the Heat Is On

By Elizabeth Jensen

In a recent commentary on the Yale Forum on Climate Change and the Media, Keith Kloor argued for a “more nuanced” conversation about climate change. Fat chance, at least for the moment, as the topic is already providing headlines for political writers from the Republican presidential candidate debates.

It’s a key area where politics, science and the environment overlap, and that could make it tricky territory for environmental reporters as the presidential election plays out in the coming year.

breaking through to the public,” said Kloor, a freelance writer who also blogs at collide-a-scape.com. “Rick Perry really put it front and center and focused a lot of people’s minds on it.”

Climate change “is playing a role in the GOP debate and has been for months, though it’s hard to say what the Republican voters think about it given no one has voted yet and no one will for many more months,” said Darren Samuelsohn, the senior energy and environment reporter for Politico Pro, via email.

Several of the candidates, he noted, have flip-flopped on the issue, backing antipollution measures such as cap-and-trade in the waning days of the Bush administration, but later reversing course “because of the mood of the GOP primary voters.”

One frontrunner, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, he noted, “once backed cap-and-trade early on as governor, then backed away because of concerns over the economy—and then he went hard after McCain on this in ‘08. Now Romney is getting heat for not being clear on exactly where he is on the science. He’s said he

believes humans cause global warming, but then backed away from that after getting criticism from Rush Limbaugh and company.”

Once the GOP nominee has been decided and the general election campaign begins, it’s unclear whether the topic will remain a major issue of debate.

The economy and employment “will shape the campaign; that’s what most people care about,” said Bill Allen, assistant professor of science journalism at the University of Missouri and a longtime science, environment and medical reporter at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. “It doesn’t look like it’s going to be a key issue.”

“It’s hard to say how this will all play” in the general election, said Samuelsohn. “I’m guessing Obama could use climate science to his benefit to appeal to moderate and independent voters. But there’ll be so many other issues in front of voters that likely will crowd it out, starting of course with the economy.”

Moreover, he said, by making it into an issue the president “exposes himself to attacks from Republicans for the climate policies he’s pushed and the economic implications they have.” □



COURTESY OF THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

TEXAS GOVERNOR AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RICK PERRY

Texas Gov. Rick Perry invoked Galileo in the Sept. 7 debate hosted by NBC News and Politico from the Reagan Library in Simi Valley, Calif., as he sought to fend off fellow candidate Jon Huntsman’s charge that Republicans risk becoming the “anti-science party” in rejecting scientific consensus on climate change, not to mention evolution. Perry’s parry on the climate change issue: “I do believe the science is not settled on this.” Galileo, he added, “was outnumbered for a spell.” (Galileo, in fact, was supported by fellow scientists, but not the clergy.)

In late September, at a California fundraising event, President Barack Obama jumped into the fray, quipping that Perry is “a governor whose state is on fire, denying climate change.” And former President Bill Clinton, opening his Clinton Global Initiative meeting in New York in late September, criticized the Republican candidates, saying that their reluctance to acknowledge the facts of climate change makes the United States “look like a joke,” according to a Politico report.

Until Perry started talking about climate change, the topic “wasn’t



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G E N E R A L M O T O R S

Evolving to Survive

Specialization and Multimedia Among Keys for Reporters

By Elizabeth Jensen

In late September, the Asbury Park Press's week-long August 2010 series "Barnegat Bay Under Stress" took home the Online News Association's prestigious Knight Award for Public Service and its \$5,000 prize money. It was just one of many honors for the series and its numerous creators, including Kirk Moore, a general assignment reporter who spends much of his time covering the environment and marine issues.

Moore is a rare example these days of an environmental reporter who has managed to hold on in an era of newspaper austerity.

A reporter at the Gannett-owned paper since 1983, he has survived the numerous rounds of layoffs and budget cuts that have taken their toll at Gannett papers—mirroring what has happened industrywide.

A consequence of all the cutbacks, said Dan Fagin, director of New York University's Science, Health and Environmental Reporting Program, is a "crisis in community-based, geography-based watchdog reporting on the environment. There's just way less of that, and that's scary. It's something we should all be concerned

about; the revenue models are just not there."

As newspapers and local TV stations have laid off specialized staff, environmental journalism is increasingly being produced by freelance journalists, reporters at topic-driven websites, and non-profit investigative news operations such as ProPublica.org.

"As newspaper staffs have become less important generators of copy, people have acquired specializations," Fagin said. "That can be traumatic for the journalists involved because you have to scramble and the compensation is not always as good."

But overall, he said, the quality of the work is generally higher.

It's still unclear which financial models will succeed, said Bill Allen, assistant professor of science journalism at the University of Missouri. "The turmoil currently seen in the changeover from a print business model to an online business model makes it a really uncertain scene," he said. "I'm not prepared to say it's going to be this or that."

Indeed, Fagin noted, unlike with specialized health care news

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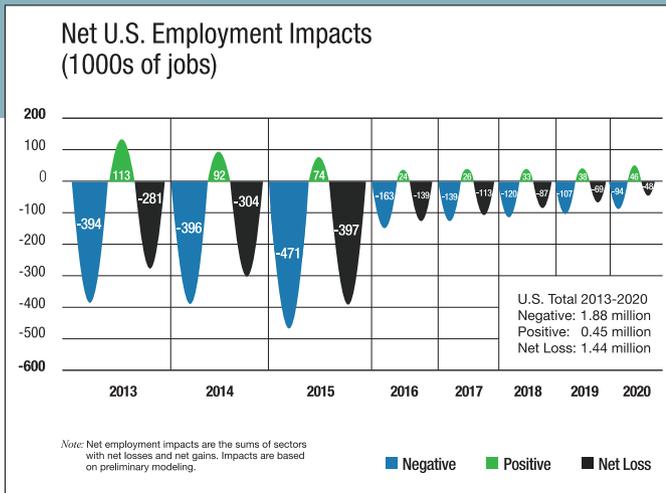
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NERA's preliminary analysis suggests the loss of American jobs would be heaviest over the next three years – over 980,000 job-years of lost employment. In addition, escalating electricity rates and an \$8 billion a year hike in natural gas prices because of the regulations would further jeopardize our economic recovery.

Just recently, the EPA finalized one of these rules, and NERA's analysis is being updated to include the new 1300-page final rule.

We should all be able to agree on how to achieve environmental progress without harming our economy and destroying jobs. That's why the EPA needs to make major changes to its regulations. Many others have also called on the EPA to take a more balanced approach to protecting the environment. These include Democratic and Republican members of Congress, labor unions, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, major manufacturers, state lawmakers, and governors...to name just a few.

To learn more about these regulations and NERA's preliminary analysis, visit AmericasPower.org.

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SEJ Raises the Bar

This Year's Conference Aims to Make History

By Allison J. Waldman

The 21st Annual Society of Environmental Journalists Conference, running Oct. 19-23 in Miami, shapes up as a blockbuster for a number of reasons. With a focus on topics that have never been more timely or more important, the gathering will be marked by star-studded panels, field trips unlike any others ever planned by SEJ organizers...and history will be made.

For starters, the organization has its sights set on a possible record turnout for SEJ 2011.

"We expect to set our all-time attendance record: close to 1,000 attendees," said Jeff Burnside, investigative reporter for NBC-owned WTVJ-TV in Miami and co-chairman of the 2011 conference. "If we do that, we will be the largest environmental journalism conference the world has ever seen."

And the theme of making history doesn't end there. "The opening night is going to be a barnburner," said Burnside. "It's unprecedented—we have all five members of the Cousteau family. They've never before appeared together, so even the family has not been able to pull off what we're going to pull off. Even they are surprised that this is coming together."

Not coincidentally, the Cousteau family's high-profile presence

comes at a conference where the world's oceans will be among the central themes.

"You want oceans, we got oceans," said SEJ Conference Director Jay Letto, who ran through a sampling of the event's ocean-related subject matter: "The BP spill and future of drilling; ocean acidification and coral reef impacts; changing Atlantic Ocean currents and climate change; aquarium trade in your back yard; deep oceans and biomedical prospecting; Cuba drilling oil near U.S. shores; and special sessions on the fate of dolphins and another on sharks."

Also among the environmental luminaries scheduled to take part: Ric O'Barry, founder of the Dolphin Project; noted environmental scientist and marine ecologist Jane Lubchenco; wildlife and conservation documentarian Hardy Jones; oceanographer Sylvia Earle, the driving force behind Google Earth's Explore the Ocean layer; and environmental writer Carl Hiaasen, author of "Team Rodent," "Strip Tease" and a string of bestsellers.

The Miami venue fulfills a wish SEJ has been pursuing for some time.

"For decades, SEJ has been trying to bring a conference to Florida," Burnside said.

That effort finally paid off, thanks to hard work by Burnside, co-chair Angela Posada Swafford of Muy Interesante, the SEJ board and others—along with a big assist from the University of Miami, host of this year's conference.

The university, Burnside noted, "is internationally renowned for its research in science and environmental endeavors."

"Miami and Florida are such dynamic places environmentally and culturally," he added. "It's also the jumping-off point for international environmental issues. So our conference this year, more than any in the past, will have a tremendous international influence."

Being in Miami also opens up the possibility of visits to the Everglades and the National Hurricane Center—with its new "Wall of Wind"—along with reef diving, shark tagging, an undersea lab and even Biscayne Bay's Turkey Point nuclear complex—all of which are scheduled for field trips in connection with the conference.

"South Florida is a hugely important location on the environment beat," said Beth Parke, Executive Director of SEJ. "Look at how many critical issues of the decade are on full display and under full study here: climate change and sea-level rise, hurricanes, fisheries, marine and coastal issues, oil issues, nuclear power, renewable resources, biodiversity, the Everglades, Big Sugar and, of course,

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JEFF BURNSIDE

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It's the Water

Increasingly, Water is the Focus of Environmental Issues

By Hillary Atkin

Whether it's ocean acidification, water scarcity, pollution generated by stormwater runoff, contaminated wells, lack of safe drinking water or restoring coastal ecosystems and marine protected areas, environmental journalists differ on the most important water-related issues—but they agree that all of those topics warrant additional and continuing coverage.

Often the issues that get reported on are the ones that hit closest to home, affecting the population's health and food supply.

"As a Westerner, I'd have to say that water scarcity is a critical issue for the Western U.S., and for desert areas everywhere," said Christy George, a television producer and SEJ board member. "As climate change impacts kick in more, scarcity issues increasingly will

affect places we think of as having plenty of water. One example is the water war between Georgia, Alabama and Florida, which share a watershed."



In other parts of the country, water pollution is the big story among environmental issues, whether it's caused by stormwater runoff, leftover industrial contamination or, in the case of the Gulf Coast, the BP oil spill.

Some environmental journalists who specialize in water issues are also concerned about "dead zones," created by pollution runoff from land, which are growing in both number and

size around the world from added fertilizers, pesticides, flame retardants, mining waste, and even discarded pharmaceuticals.

Scientists are studying the impact on various species, including

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How Open Is the EPA?

New Policy May Make Access Even More Difficult

By Dinah Eng

Environmental journalists, who have long complained about having limited access to scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency, are fighting new EPA draft guidelines that require having public affairs officials present at all media interviews.

The draft “Scientific Integrity Policy” puts in writing a previously unwritten “minders and permissions” EPA practice, as well as promoting “the responsibility of every EPA employee to conduct, utilize, and communicate science with the highest degree of honesty, integrity, and transparency, both within and outside the Agency.”

Carolyn Whetzel, president of the Society of Environmental Journalists and California correspondent for BNA, joined a number of open-government advocacy groups—including the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, the Union of Concerned Scientists and OMB Watch—in criticizing the draft policy.

“Our members are opposed to the minders and permission issues,” Whetzel said. “One of the more troubling aspects of what’s happened is that reporters are having a hard time getting the help they need from EPA, especially on deadline.”

“Is it because the EPA press people can’t connect with the person who has the information? I don’t know. It leads to speculation that they don’t want to provide the information.”

Whetzel said reporters outside the nation’s capital seem to be having the most trouble getting help on their stories, and SEJ is trying to help bridge the gap via conversations with EPA officials.

She said earlier conversations led to EPA releasing its announcements at times of the day that work for reporters in all time zones, but efforts to change the minders and permission practices have not been successful.

SEJ members have reported problems setting up interviews and getting information nearly daily, said Ken Ward Jr., chairman of the SEJ Freedom of Information Task Force and a staff writer for The Charleston Gazette.

“If reporters try to contact someone from EPA, they get kicked to the press office, which doesn’t respond in a timely manner,” Ward said. “The press people ask for written questions in advance, but are not responsive to the questions. Instead, they give general statements that mean nothing.”

A question on climate change, for example, is likely to be answered with a statement “saying EPA is very concerned with climate change and is doing everything it can about the issue,” he said. “The public affairs officers are trying to run EPA like a political campaign.”

Ward said the agency’s public affairs officers include a mixture of political appointees and career civil servants, with the higher-ranking spokespersons usually being political appointees.



SEAN MOULTON

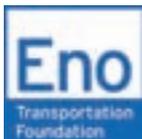
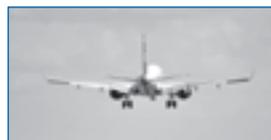
When it comes to general agency transparency, Sean Moulton, director of federal information policy for OMB Watch, gives EPA high marks.

“EPA people are big believers in getting their information out there, and do a better-than-average job,” Moulton said. “That said, open access to experts is something they struggle with. This idea of monitoring communications with press relations people is not necessarily interference, but makes the process too vulnerable to interference, and has a chilling effect.”

He noted that EPA is one of the few federal agencies to put out a draft policy for comment, but he said the guidelines are incomplete. While violations of scientific integrity clearly include fabricating facts or plagiarism, he said the draft policy doesn’t mention things like government censorship and delays in releasing information, which are real concerns when it comes to politically motivated activities.

“There are no good reasons to delay the release of information except that it doesn’t look good,” Moulton said. “We urged them

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to clarify these things and to create better mechanisms for enforcement when there is an issue. We pointed EPA to NOAA's [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] policy, which we think has some of the best language of any of the agencies."



Moulton said EPA's policy needs to include ways to ensure that allegations of misdoing are reviewed in a timely manner. For example, he notes, if a scientist complains that the agency is interfering with the release of information about global warming, and it takes a year to investigate the complaint, that delay in ensuring accountability could make complaining a moot issue.

"The stated intention of the policy is that the administration is trying to be helpful and clear, and the minders are there to make sure no miscommunications are made," Moulton said. "But that doesn't change the fact that it's so difficult to get these conversations started. I take it to be unintentional, to some extent, but it's off-putting to the reporters and scientists, who think it's not worth going through all that scrutiny to get a few questions answered."

While reporters have difficulty getting responses from EPA officials, much more information has been released online by the agency in the past three years, said Christy George, former SEJ president and an independent producer working for "History Detectives."

"The Obama administration, as a whole, and EPA is echoing an administration-wide desire to be on the Web for the public," George said. "What happens with professional journalists is that EPA will say, the information's on the Web. Go look on the Web. But journalists have follow-up questions."

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COURTESY BLUE LEGACY

ALEXANDRA COUSTEAU

Cousteau Family Reunion

Descendants Keep Up the Work of the Famed Explorer

By Hillary Atkin

It's certain to be one of the high points of SEJ 2011—an opening night event kicking off the Miami conference with the appearance of five descendants of legendary ocean explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau.

Appropriately, just steps from the Atlantic Ocean's Biscayne Bay, Jean-Michel, Cousteau's son, and his children Fabien and Céline, along with their first cousins Alexandra and Philippe Cousteau Jr.—the children of Jacques Cousteau's late son Philippe—will discuss how they are continuing the legacy of the famed oceanographer and filmmaker.

"We are all branches of the same tree addressing issues in our own ways," said Alexandra Cousteau, who established the Blue Legacy International organization in 2008 to further her family's work protecting the Earth's oceans by leveraging films, documentaries and new technologies to connect audiences to their local watersheds and the planet's water.

She and a crew have logged 18,000 miles traveling to regions including the Colorado River Delta, the Great Lakes, the Tennessee Valley and the Carolina coast, meeting local water conservationists and helping them reach out to their communities to raise awareness and shape the conversations about water, from oceans to rivers, lakes, fresh water and the ways they interconnect.

"It's an exciting time for us at Blue Legacy, coming out of

expeditions which allowed me to look at different aspects of water conservation in terms of quantity, pollution and quality issues and seeing how systems are degrading," said Alexandra Cousteau. "We have a whole new agenda of projects, and will be sharing those objectives and missions with SEJ."

The organization has produced 70 films, each five to eight minutes long, from the past two expedition years on topics including restoring and helping protect rivers, streams, lakes and coastlines and preserving fragile water resources that could be destroyed by mining.

From infancy on, each of the family members participated in ocean expeditions around the world with their father and grandfather, Jacques, who is credited with educating, enlightening and entertaining generations of people around the globe about the wonders of the oceans and marine ecologies—and the importance of preserving them.

Cousteau was born in France in 1910 and died in Paris in 1997, leaving behind 144 films and television documentaries, more than 50 books and an environmental society that bears his name with more than 300,000 members. During his career as a French naval officer, which ended in 1949, he is credited with improving the aqualung, which gave birth to the open-circuit scuba technology

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Rising Tide

Sea Levels Are Up—And Skeptics Are Converting

By Jarre Fees

The next time the SEJ Conference takes place in Miami, it may have to be held on a submarine.

Southeast Florida is one of the world's most vulnerable urban areas in terms of the threat posed by rising sea levels, said University of Miami Professor Harold Wanless. Mitigation projects are already under way in Miami-Dade County, he said, but it might already be too late to solve the problem.

"The coastal sea-level rise is already under way," Wanless said, "and there's no way to stop it in the short term."

Wanless, who chairs the Department of Geological Sciences at the University of Miami, studies sedimentology and environmental and coastal geology and is one of the speakers for Thursday's drive tour "South Florida and Sea-Level Rise."

Wanless said he has been "giving talks about rising sea levels since the 1980s" but that he didn't realize the problem was caused by global warming until the '90s.

"Miami will lose everything with a two- or three-foot rise," Wanless said. "We have no fresh water resources. We won't be able to keep flood water out or fresh water in."

Wanless noted that the rate of sea level rise has been monitored since 1930, and said the sea level in South Florida has risen about 10 inches in that time. The rate, he added, is accelerating, with a

further rise of about five feet expected by the end of the century.

Even after he realized the rise in sea level was caused by global warming, Wanless said, he ran into naysayers and skeptics at every turn.

"There's always going to be people who deny global warming," Wanless said. "Scientists always look for holes."

One of the scientists looking for holes was Stu Ostro, senior meteorologist and director of weather communications at the Weather Channel.

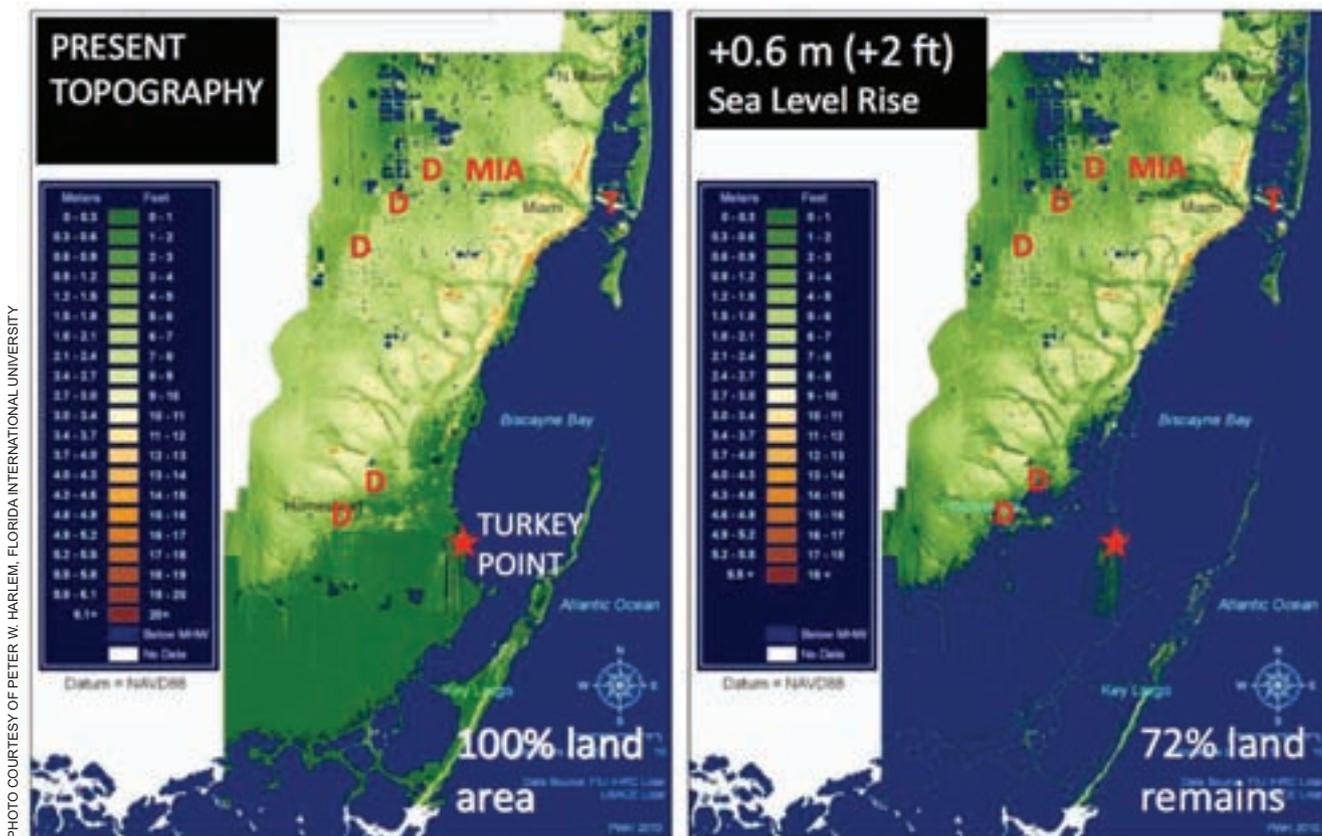
"I used to be very skeptical that anything was out of the ordinary" with regard to extreme weather, Ostro said, "given that there have been extremes for as long as there has been weather. But my point of view flipped a few years ago."

Ostro, who was featured in the September 2010 issue of *The Week* as one of six prominent global warming skeptics who switched sides, said via email that he has been "looking at weather patterns obsessively" throughout his three-decade career, and has become convinced that "something significant" has changed in global weather patterns.

The change, Ostro said, is "something that goes beyond just business-as-usual natural variability, including these frequent and

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IMAGE FROM A POWERPOINT BASED ON LIDAR SURVEYS, CREATED BY PETER W. HARLEM AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, SHOWS A PORTION OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY WITH ITS CURRENT SEA LEVEL, ON THE LEFT, CONTRASTED WITH THE PART OF THE COUNTY THAT WOULD REMAIN ABOVE WATER AFTER A TWO-FOOT RISE IN SEA LEVEL.



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Internet as a Virtual Database

Websites Offering New Tools for Environmental Journalists

By Jarre Fees

Environmental journalists now have a treasure trove of free electronic information at their fingertips, with websites focused on both research and document sharing providing access to the kind of virtual database once dreamed of only by science fiction writers.

Google Earth's Explore the Ocean (sylviaearlealliance.org/googleearth) offers 3D maps and underwater video tours of different parts of the world, and heavily promotes conservation in conjunction with the Sylvia Earle Alliance.

Charlotte Vick, Google content manager for the Sylvia Earle Alliance, said she "curates all content" for Google Earth's Explore the Ocean layer. "We're a lead generator," Vick said. "If you want to tell stories about what's happening in the ocean, you can cruise around first in a virtual tour and see what's actually going on."

Vick, who began working with Google and the Sylvia Earle Alliance in early 2008 to develop Explore the Ocean, said the site's aim is "to tell stories about what's happening in the ocean, who's doing them and why they matter."

In addition to presenting the work of journalists, the site posts documents by "ocean scientists and conservationists," Vick said. "We also get a lot of things put in there simply by people who care."

Along with showcasing environmental hot spots such as the Gulf Coast after the BP Oil Spill, Vick said the site's underwater tours also cover less obvious subject matter. For example, the virtual tour of the U.S. Pacific Ocean, she said, "offers some of the most interesting and remarkable data we've ever seen. We can see boats sunk in WWII, where the detail is so fine you can actually make out the gun turrets."

Other sites also focus on a broad range of issues. Environmental Health News (ehn.org) generates leads on worldwide environmental topics and offers a free newsletter.

Peter Dykstra, who used the site as a journalist at CNN starting "at least eight years ago," became the site's publisher this year. The website publishes original science, environmental and health stories and aggregates environmental news from around the globe 365 days a year.

The Daily Climate (dailyclimate.org), edited by SEJ board member Douglas Fischer and also published by Dykstra, provides information exclusively on worldwide climate change and related topics.

Dykstra said the two sites can be used not just by journalists, but also by "policymakers, teachers, scientists, for-profit businesses and NGOs."

Once the leads are generated and stories are written, the document-sharing service DocumentCloud (documentcloud.org) kicks in. When it started in 2009, program director Amanda B. Hickman said the site's founders "had no idea how much information sharing would be going on in just a few short years."

DocumentCloud "doesn't do research or gather or aggregate news," Hickman said. "You
continued on page 48



CHARLOTTE VICK

The Next Generation

How University EJ Programs Are Evolving

By Jarre Fees

The environment is making headlines—and there’s no shortage of new voices eager to tell the story.

That’s one of the consistent comments from educators training the next generation of environmental journalists.

“There is great interest in learning new ways of telling environmental stories, especially online,” said Dan Fagin, associate professor and academic director of NYU’s Science, Health and Environmental Reporting Program. “Since SHERP has such a strong online component, including Web video, we’ve benefited from that growing interest.”

“A student from 10 years ago would barely recognize our program today,” Fagin said. “The pace is much more intense now, mostly because we do much more technical training for the Web, including video and audio.”

In spite of the new technology and fast pace, Fagin said the school has not reduced its “traditional commitment to narrative storytelling, which is still at the heart of what journalists do.”

Tom Yulsman, associate professor at the University of Colorado’s School of Journalism & Mass Communication and co-director

of the Center for Environmental Journalism, said journalism in general and environmental journalism in particular are “still alive and well here at the University of Colorado.”

But Colorado J-school has gone through some changes. “We are no longer a stand-alone school within the university,” Yulsman said, “but our faculty are all intact, we are teaching the same courses, and we are continuing to admit new students.”

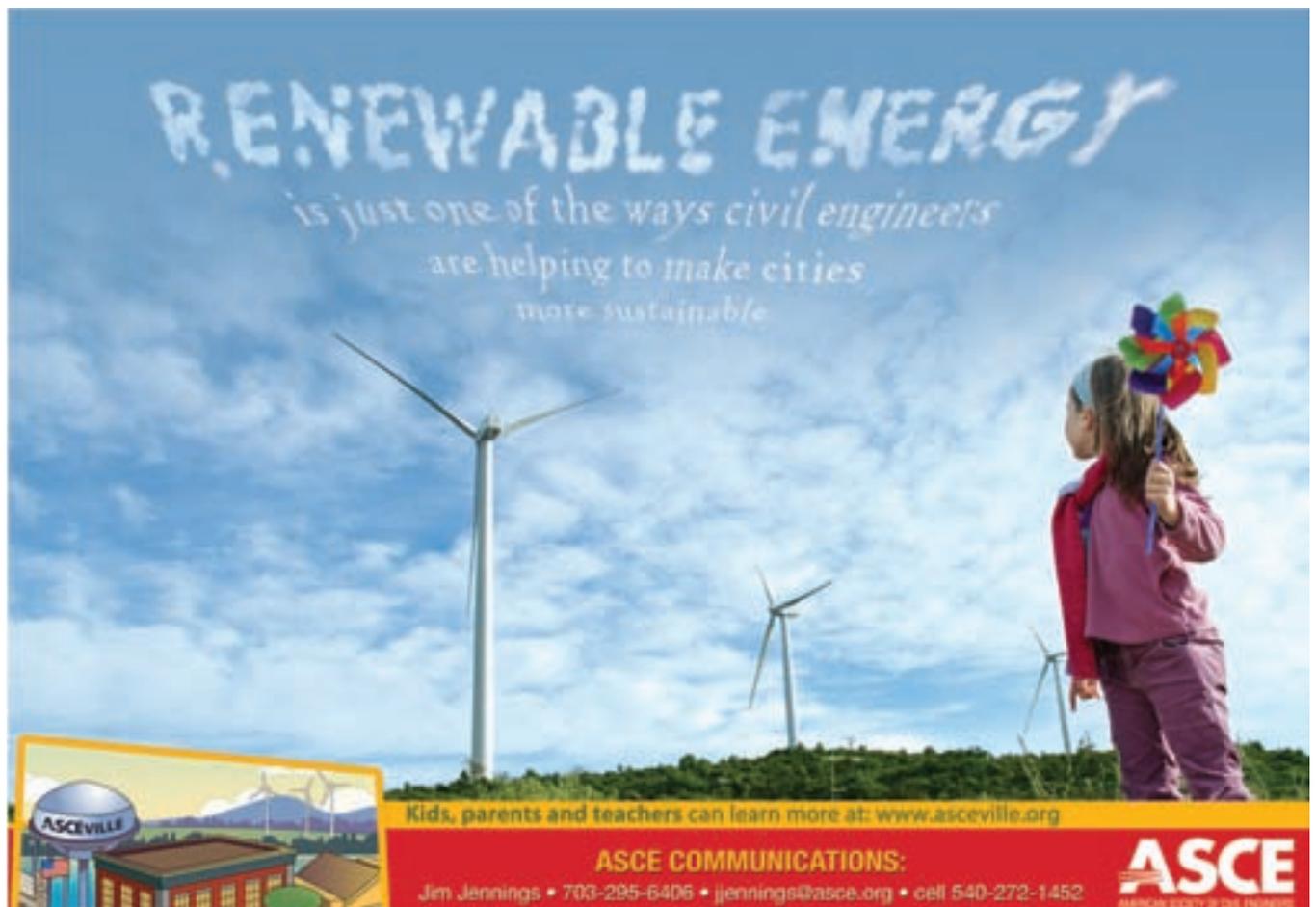
“The Center for Environmental Journalism is one of the cornerstones of the journalism program, and it is doing better than it ever has.”

Yulsman said one reason the program continues to thrive is an influx of non-traditional journalism students.

“We’re getting demand from people in the sciences,” he said, “because they’re publishing scientific papers. There’s a big push for scientists to communicate their work better to the public if they want grants to carry out their research.”

Yulsman said the Colorado journalism program overall is “in a two-year transition period. During this time, it is anticipated that a

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a Recurring
Theme in the
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This Year**

SEJ Awards Coverage by Jarre Fees

One of the most eagerly anticipated events of every SEJ Conference is the presentation of the organization's annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment. This year's winners will be honored Saturday night, Oct. 22, in a glitzy but environmentally conscious gala at Miami's Setai Hotel.

**KEVIN CARMODY AWARD—
OUTSTANDING IN-DEPTH REPORTING**

First Place—Large Market

One of the night's top honors is the Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding In-Depth Reporting, Large Market, which will be presented to "The True Story Behind the Oil Spill" by Abraham Lustgarten, a journalist at ProPublica, with independent producers Martin Smith, Marcela Gaviria and Ryan Knutson for "PBS Frontline."

"Frontline" produced a documentary based on the series of reports: "The Spill: The Troubled History of an Oil Giant."

"There are serious consequences of the spill, environmentally speaking," Lustgarten said. "Within 48 hours, it had already become one of the most significant occurrences in the history of the oil and gas industry."

Leaving the coverage of the environmental impact to others, however, Lustgarten said he and ProPublica "right away stepped

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SEJ AWARDS CHANGE WITH THE TIMES

The Society of Environmental Journalists created its awards program 10 years ago to recognize the work done by environmental journalists in a variety of media, including print, radio and television.

Douglas Fischer, Daily Climate editor and co-chair of the SEJ awards committee, said for this year the categories have been adjusted to reflect the changing nature of the industry.

“The lines between media are blurring,” Fischer said. “We’ve got newsprint reporting with video elements that are online. All the different media now have different components, and we wanted to move more toward a reflection of that.”

For the 10th annual SEJ awards, the divisions between print and electronic media have been scrapped. The Kevin Carmody Awards for outstanding beat/in-depth reporting in the radio, television and print categories have been folded into two categories: outstanding in-depth reporting, large market, and outstanding in-depth reporting, small market. The categories are distinguished by subscription numbers and/or number of online hits. Other categories have been combined or eliminated altogether in order to keep abreast of the times.

Fischer said he was pleased both by the quality of this year’s entries and by the judges’ response to the category changes.

“Some judges were concerned with how you compare a two-minute TV segment with 30 inches of print,” Fischer said, “but good journalism stands out regardless of the medium.”

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(Continued from page 22)

back to look at it from a business standpoint.”

Lustgarten had already been writing about BP’s business practices for a year when the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded in April 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico. “There were things in BP’s



ABRAHAM LUSTGARTEN

background that made this explosion predictable, going back to 2006 when BP had a spill in Alaska,” he said. He followed the company closely, covering it at Fortune before the explosion and writing several pieces afterward for The Wall Street Journal.

While Lustgarten was following BP, “Frontline” producers Smith, Gaviria and Knutson were following Lustgarten.

“We were chomping at the bit to get at that story,” Gaviria said. “‘Frontline’ had us doing something else but we were very keen to do it. We had been following Abraham’s reporting so we had a leg up.”

“The bones of the project existed already,” Lustgarten said. “A lot of the investigative reporting had been done, and then [‘Frontline’] showed up and we were able to go deeper into the business angle and management of the company.”

“Had Abraham not been working on this story and following BP so closely, it would have been really hard to get this story on the air when we did,” Gaviria said.

“Instead of focusing on the spill,” she said, “we wanted to look at the pattern. Was this oil company any different from the others? Were they more reckless? Were they paying attention to safety?”

The hardest part was “getting access to the BP players,” she said. “We must have written to every executive and former executive we could find.”

In addition to contacting management, Lustgarten said the team also “focused on whistle blowers” and other employees; no mean feat, as BP has “90 or 100 thousand employees around the world.”

“BP had actively worked to suppress and contain information,” Lustgarten said, “and punished workers who raised [safety] concerns. That had created an environment of fear within the company.”

He and the “Frontline” producers continued to press for answers.

Lustgarten said his “biggest challenge was getting close enough to and building the trust of people so they would tell us about the problems” they had had with BP.

The team decided to focus on the areas where BP had had previous accidents or spills: Alaska and Texas City. They contacted victims of the previous BP accidents, and a lot of their attention, Gaviria said, was “spent on getting an interview with Eva Rowe.”

Rowe, who lost her parents in the 2005 BP Oil Refinery explosion in Texas City, initially refused to accept BP’s settlement offer. She and BP finally settled out of court in 2007, but the terms of Rowe’s remarkable settlement included the release of several hundred thousand documents that showed the inner workings of BP management.

Because he had covered the oil company for so many years, Lustgarten said that even early on in the investigation he “intuitively suspected what we would end up finding.” But he also said he learned a few things along the way. “On one hand it’s a business lesson about BP always trying to find the most efficient and profitable path.

“For a publicly traded company, that always presents serious risks and pitfalls for disasters,” Lustgarten said.

“There were plenty of signs and indications that a problem was unfolding, well-read by varied agencies in the U.S. government,” he said, “which failed to do anything about it.”

Lustgarten, who has turned his investigation into a book, “Run to Failure,” to be published by W.W. Norton, said the BP spill is “a lesson of federal oversight and the inability of federal agencies to coordinate anything in order to prevent accidents like this from happening in the first place.”

Second place honors for In-depth, Large Market reporting went to “The Pierced Heart of Madagascar” by freelancer Robert Draper, with photographer Pascal Maitre, for National Geographic.

Third place went to “Fueling Fears” by Jim Morris, senior reporter; Chris Hamby, reporter; and Emma Schwartz, reporter; at the Center for Public Integrity; and M.B. Pell, staff writer, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, in partnership with ABC News, working along with reporter Matthew Mosk and correspondent Brian Ross.

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KEVIN CARMODY AWARD— OUTSTANDING IN-DEPTH REPORTING

First Place—Small Market

Joaquin Sapien, Sarasota Herald-Tribune reporter Aaron Kessler and ProPublica news applications developer Jeff Larson are the first-place winners of SEJ's Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding In-Depth Reporting, Small Market category.



JOAQUIN SAPIEN

“Chinese Drywall: Why one of the biggest defective product investigations in U.S. history has left homeowners struggling for help” even comes with its own interactive database on the ProPublica website so readers can find homes where the drywall has been installed.

But the high-tech stuff came after the legwork.

“Aaron [Kessler] had been reporting on Chinese drywall for a year or more, because it’s a major issue in Sarasota,” Sapien said.

Kessler approached ProPublica, Sapien said, when he began to see the issue as “more of a national story, because the drywall had been imported all over the country.”

“Most of the builders tried to claim they never used [the drywall],” Kessler said, “but we walked the streets and talked to people. We

were initially going house to house.”

What Kessler and Sapien found in those houses was contaminated drywall that emitted a foul odor, caused headaches, nosebleeds and respiratory distress, corroded wiring and ruined appliances and electronic equipment. And it was being used to build homes, mostly across the South, including at least 200 homes built by Habitat for Humanity.

“We went into a bunch of houses and unscrewed the electric plugs,” Sapien said. “That’s how we were able to say the Habitat’s got a problem.”

Kessler said Habitat for Humanity “used a lot of the Chinese board and actually kept using it all through 2009.” In fact, the reporters discovered that Habitat for Humanity had continued to use the drywall for at least a year after other local builders realized there was a problem and stopped using it.

According to the ProPublica interactive database, in October 2010 the Consumer Product Safety Commission reported it had received “fewer than 3,500” complaints about the tainted drywall. ProPublica and the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, however, “found nearly twice that number, around 6,900 homes.”

Kessler, who left the Herald-Tribune in March for the Detroit Free Press’s Washington Bureau, said, “The hardest part was that the companies involved did not want to admit there was a problem.”

In addition to asking questions of builders and home-improvement stores and talking to homeowners, the reporters combed through thousands of documents.

“Some of the most revelatory documents came out of court records,” Sapien said.

“We contacted attorneys who were representing some of these homeowners and gained their trust, and they shared some of the court documents they had obtained.”

One of the biggest challenges in doing the story, Sapien said, was “grasping the complexity of the politics and the science involved and trying to make sense of all that at once. We were trying to figure out exactly what it was in the drywall, and it was really frustrating because it seemed like nobody wanted to get to the root cause of the problem.”

On top of that, Sapien said, no one knew who to complain to. The CDC? The EPA? The Consumer Product Safety Commission eventually became the lead federal agency on the drywall issue, he said, “but they weren’t really capable or equipped to do the kind of investigation it required.”

JoAnn Valenti, Emerita Professor of Communications and one of three jurors for the Kevin Carmody small market category, said, “This is an issue that could have gone unreported and underreported. These reporters bit the bullet and went after it.”

Kessler said the problem is a long way from being over. “Some people lost their houses in Hurricane Katrina, moved into trailers provided by FEMA that were loaded with formaldehyde, then moved back into their houses that had been rebuilt with Chinese drywall,” he said. “Some of them are just walking away from their



AARON KESSLER

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SEJ ANNUAL AWARDS FOR REPORTING ON THE ENVIRONMENT

(Continued from page 26)

houses altogether. And we still don't necessarily know where a lot of the material ended up. Is it going to pop up again in a couple of years?"

Second place honors in the Carmody small market category went to Laura Legere, staff writer at Scranton Times-Tribune, for "Deep Impact: Natural Gas Drilling in the Marcellus Shale." Third place went to "Accidental Wilderness" by David Wolman, freelance journalist, High Country News.

LARGE MARKET BEAT REPORTING

First Place

The SEJ Award in the Outstanding Beat Reporting, Large Market category goes to "BP Oil Spill Coverage" by Josh Harkinson, Mac McClelland, Kate Sheppard and Julia Whitty, for Mother Jones.

Sheppard said the four writers talked to "contacts from different trade and environmental groups, regulators, lawmakers and the scientific communities" and noted that they had written "probably 300 stories on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, starting within a week after the explosion. We're still writing stories explaining the latest science and updating the Mother Jones website."

Sheppard, who works in the Mother Jones Washington bureau—the other writers are based in San Francisco—said each writer's assignments were dictated by their strengths and the areas they normally cover.

"I cover energy regulations and offshore policy," Sheppard said, "so I'm going to hearings and asking questions in Washington. The human rights side was covered by Mac (McClelland), and Julia (Whitty) works with environmental and natural science, so her stories were focused on that side of it.

"Josh (Harkinson) lived in Texas and had a lot of oil industry contacts."



KATE SHEPPARD

SEJ judges noted the Mother Jones entry was "an impressive devotion of resources to cover a major story. The journalists wove intriguing narratives into their stories, which reflected both a depth of knowledge and aggressive reporting. In the best journalistic tradition, they did not take 'no' from authorities, but pursued the stories and the human face of the disaster."

Said Sheppard: "We had to ask who to believe and who's telling the truth—and who has things to cover up? Who was in charge of covering it up?"

In particular, she said, she wanted to know "what politicians have been funded by BP, and who got the most funding?"

"BP was always going to dispute how much oil was spilled," she added, "because the amount they have to pay is dependent on how many gallons were spilled."

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Rising Tide *(continued from page 18)*

wild weather extremes occurring in the context of such things as the stunning loss of Arctic sea ice that has happened more, not less, rapidly than models predicted.”

Switching sides has not always been smooth.

Ostro makes occasional on-camera appearances at the Weather Channel, discussing global warming as part of Carl Parker’s Earth Watch segments, and has also blogged about climate change.

“What I’ve communicated to viewers and users has required that I have a thick skin,” he said, “as I’ve gotten my share of negative reaction via flaming blog comments.”

Wanless said his audiences have grown more receptive in recent years as mounting evidence could no longer be ignored by the layman.

“Last year I was giving a talk to the downtown Rotary Club,” he said, “and that was the first time people didn’t stand up and rip what I was saying with nasty comments and questions.

“More recently when I give a talk, people hang around to see what they can do.”

A lot of people in Washington still need convincing, Wanless said. “Obama, like Clinton and Gore, understands global warming,” he said. “I took McCain out in the Everglades. He understands global warming.

“We looked at the different political groups and found they had plenty of information. But something went wrong in the last election and those are the people we have to reach. They can be the leaders in convincing other people.”

Tom Yulsman, co-director of the Center for Environmental Journalism at the University of Colorado, and a tour leader for Thursday’s drive event, said if journalists want to convince their readers to take action on climate change, they have to look past Washington and convince readers that the crisis is happening locally. “Nobody cares about global sea level rise,” Yulsman said. “What’s important is what’s going to happen in your town. What happens to debris along your shore and your drinking water? What’s being emptied into the ocean near you?”

In addition to covering those issues, Yulsman said, journalists have to look into how local officials are handling the issues of climate change and rising sea levels. “Are they thinking about it at all, and if they’re not, why not? Are there things that these planners could be doing that could armor a city against the effects of rising sea levels?”

“Maybe it would be a good idea to do something about the development pattern simply so you don’t get whacked by hurricanes,” he added.

Inland areas will not be immune to rising sea levels, Wanless said, pointing out that victims of global warming “will have to move to areas where there are already too many people.”

“Regardless of the causes of climate change,” Ostro said, “our weather is being affected now, not just 50 or 100 years from now, and given our vulnerability to climate change and to weather extremes we need to do our best to understand what’s going on and deal with it.” □



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American Forest Foundation

EPA *(continued from page 15)*

The complexity of EPA regulations and investigations needs explanation, she said, which would be easier to provide if the scientists involved could be freely interviewed.

“The politics in Washington are pretty toxic, and one of the issues deeply divided along partisan lines is doing something about climate change,” George said. “Every time there’s a disaster—whether it’s determining what’s in the air after the collapse of the Twin Towers or what was in the floodwaters of New Orleans—EPA’s findings have tremendous impact on the liability of businesses. So EPA is on the hot seat all the time.”

When it comes to general agency transparency, Sean Moulton, director of federal information policy for OMB Watch, gives EPA high marks.

George said she understands that EPA stories can be controversial, but practices like using minders in interviews are totally at odds with President Obama’s often stated desire for more government transparency. “It’s about visibility and bureaucratic culture,” George said. “Some agencies may be less in the eye of the storm. I understand the administration’s desire to shield the EPA and control news stories, but as a journalist, I don’t want to be controlled.”

EPA officials did not respond to requests for comment on this story. □

Next *(continued from page 21)*

new entity, perhaps a college or a school, will be created.”

This new entity, he said, “could wind up drawing together journalism, cross-platform storytelling, media studies, communications, advertising and design, some aspects of computer technology, digital media, film studies, and God knows what else—in short, it could wind up be a very cool, innovative, interdisciplinary unit that would both enrich, and be enriched by, journalism.”

Nadia White, associate professor of Environmental Science and Natural Resource Journalism at the University of Montana, said the current Montana program is “very new and small. We’ve completely retooled our program.”

White said she has also seen more non-traditional journalism students migrating to the environmental program.

“In addition to journalism students,” she said, “we’re seeing people with a hard science background who understand the importance of clearly communicating and sharing with a broader audience.”

Environmental journalism thrives at Montana in part, White said, because “everything that’s international about climate change ends up right here. We’re on the cusp of climate change debate, and we’re right at Glacier National Park, where you can see the glacier melting. We encourage students to come and live in the middle of it.”

Her journalism students “talk openly with scientists” at the school, she said.

“There are students and professors here who want the world to be interested in the challenge of translating [environmental issues] to a larger audience.” □



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Conference *(continued from page 12)*

environmental politics.

“Miami is a fascinating urban area with an ecosystem to match. I can’t recall a conference with the range of issues, locations and facilities SEJ is visiting this time around.”

A special event taking place Friday night is the first-ever South Florida Environmental Film Festival at the historic Colony Theater, being held in conjunction with the conference—complete with a VIP “green carpet” for conference attendees.

A Saturday highlight will be “A Night to Remember”—which combines the presentation of the SEJ 10th Annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment with a fashion event with an environmental theme. The event takes place at Miami’s Setai Hotel, in a setting that gives new meaning to “picturesque”—over the water, under the stars in an atrium.

“Fashion sets trends, and anytime you can get the masses to buy into a trend for a good cause, such as reducing the impact on the environment, that’s a good thing,” said Burnside. “It’s a strong story—the textile industry’s impact on the environment, and what leaders and trendsetters are doing to address that.”

Added Parke: “I see SEJ’s Miami conference as a major milestone



for SEJ in our growth, and our work to strengthen environmental journalism. We are 21; could the work of environmental journalists be more important to the 21st century? I don’t think so. SEJ’s Miami meeting is an investment in people who are doing a vital job, informing and engaging communities worldwide on environmental issues, and that means a lot.” □

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Water *(continued from page 13)*

marine mammals, as well as the effects of agricultural practices that dump pollutants into waterways, which eventually flow into the oceans.

Ken Weiss of the Los Angeles Times continues to report on the oceans after winning a Pulitzer Prize for a multipart, multimedia series he did in 2006 called “Altered Oceans.”

“I have had a fair amount of success calling attention to problems of over-fishing and pollution changing the chemistry of oceans,” said Weiss. “Greenhouse gases are changing migrations of fish, the distribution of diseases in marine animals, and the chemistry of oceans, making them more acidic. We should care because it affects every living creature with a shell made of calcium. They can’t form their shells properly—oysters, clams, mussels, even snails that everything from fish to whales eat. This is likely to cause serious trouble.”

“All the issues are under-reported within the context of the total amount of information,” said Charlotte Vick, curator of Explore the Ocean in Google Earth. “These are serious threats to the future of life on Earth, and the average person in this country couldn’t begin to define what they are. We have a very poor education system when it comes to the chemistry of life on Earth.”

“I think environmental stories should go beyond the problems by seeking out best practice or solution stories,” said Vick. “There are many people trying to solve problems, but too often their efforts are ignored. These people can articulate how what they are doing is reversing trends, model behavior and educate others if given the audience to do so.”

Robert McClure, co-founder of Investigate West and an SEJ board member who has spent much of his career working on water issues, also wants to see more coverage of problems and solutions. Living and working in the rainy Northwest, he sees water pollution as a huge issue, with simple solutions.

“Stormwater comes down and hits the pavement—it’s a nationwide problem getting attention in a few places, including the Puget Sound region, Southern California and Philadelphia,” he said. “The EPA keeps a list of polluted water bodies that violate the Clean Water Act. The most common

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NASA Earth Science



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(Continued from page 28)

The Mother Jones stories range from Harkinson's investigative piece on problems at the rig before the explosion and McClelland's stories on the BP cleanup—and cover-up—on the Louisiana beaches to the depression and abuse faced by fishermen's wives after the spill, to Sheppard's piece on the toxic dispersant Corexit applied to the spilled oil to prevent it from rising to the surface.

SEJ judges noted: "The Mother Jones team gave us the basic science we need to know, along with vivid reporting on the emotions of people who live in the Louisiana communities affected by the BP spill—all of it combined to give the public a comprehensive picture of one of the worst environmental disasters of our times."

Second place went to "Chicago Beat Reporting" by Michael Hawthorne, environmental reporter, Chicago Tribune, and third place was awarded to "Environmental Reports" by Jeb Sharp, senior producer; Asma Khalid, freelance reporter/producer; Marina Giovannelli, Metcalf Environmental reporting fellow; Alex Gallafent, reporter; and Ari Daniel Shapiro, independent producer; for PRI's "The World."

SMALL MARKET BEAT REPORTING

First Place

When the first reports came in on April 20, 2010, that BP Oil's Deepwater Horizon oil rig had exploded, The Times-Picayune in New Orleans sent city reporter David Hammer to cover the story.

"Our environmental reporter was out of town," Hammer said, "and in any case, at first it was not so much an environmental story as a news story. We had a situation where you had 10 people incinerated right away at the point of the explosion."

Another victim died later. Hammer said he reported on the news aspect first, "and two days later came the spill."

"Reporting on the BP Oil Spill" by Hammer and Dan Shea, The Times-Picayune, is the first-place winner in the SEJ Awards' Outstanding Beat Reporting, Small Market category.

Hammer said there were "mixed messages coming in from the Coast Guard and BP as to what had actually happened in the explosion," adding that he "jumped in with very little experience or institutional background in this kind of thing."



DAVID HAMMER

"I had some contacts in the local community, and knew some petroleum engineers. That's where being local really helps, to be able to jump on it right away."

Once Hammer jumped, however, he found the same problem everyone else seemed to be facing: "We were at the mercy of BP Oil to explain what was

happening," he said.

Dan Shea, one of two managing news editors at The Times-Picayune, said he started "picking up the chatter of people blogging [about the incident] from offshore."

"There were a lot of experts spouting off, trying to determine what went wrong. It was challenging because we don't have a full-time oil reporter anymore and we had a lot of other news to cover."

Shea said he "called friends who used to run rigs" and

communicated with people writing blogs "who revealed themselves as oil people."

"But we were starting from zero in terms of expertise."

He decided to send Hammer, he said, because "he's a bright kid who learns quickly."

Hammer said he spent about 150 hours in hearings, "mostly in New Orleans and Houston, and mostly run by the Coast Guard and the Bureau of Ocean Management. "Doing the leg work that I did initially, to familiarize myself with details, let me focus and understand what was going on in the hearings," Hammer said, "and I made it my mission to report as much as I could on it."



DAN SHEA

He also went out on a couple of rigs. "Just finding out what it was like to be out there—with iron grating all around and heavy protective equipment that restricted people's movements, and all the noise and high wind they had to deal with—if you don't have a feel for that and you're covering these hearings, you're going to miss out on something or misunderstand what's meant by a lost-time incident or deficiency reports," Hammer said.

Because many of Hammer's discoveries were highly technical in nature, he and Shea drafted the Picayune's graphic artist, Emmett Mayer III, to provide illustrations of the rig and what went wrong. "No matter how well I said something," Hammer said, "seeing those graphics made it a hundred times clearer to the reader."

And there was still the matter of getting people to talk.

"Because this is a highly mitigated matter involving billions of dollars, you get a lot of resistance from the principals involved," he said. "Even people who suffered because of this accident were not eager to talk on the record, because BP and the other companies had a lot of power. So many people are reliant on this company for their livelihood."

Only a few people understood what had really happened in the explosion, Hammer said, and "of those who understood, the fear of getting yourself worked out of a job by exposing problems or the fear of retribution" was pretty strong.

"There are people who are deeply motivated to uncover wrongdoing," he said. "With BP and the Deepwater explosion, people kind of went into a shell and the normal sources dried up—especially the people affected by the spill."

The bottom line, Hammer said, is that "you don't let yourself get stopped by those difficulties."

Second place in the small market category went to "Environmental Reporting in Montreal" by Michelle Lalonde, environment reporter at the Montreal Gazette. The third-place prize was awarded to "Science Skeptics, Corporate Lobbyists and the Assault on Maine's Environment" by Susan Sharon, deputy news director for Maine Public Broadcasting.

OUTSTANDING SINGLE STORY

First Place

When Fred de Sam Lazaro and his "PBS NewsHour" crew do a

continued on page 42

Evolving *(continued from page 10)*

sites, which have found some sponsorship support from pharmaceutical companies and insurers eager to get their message out, “Most corporations are not especially interested in funding the kind of reports that environmental reporters do.”

Students continue to flock to the specialization, though, and those with strong multimedia skills are landing jobs, Fagin said, mostly in niche media. “Specialized knowledge is very much valued in a Web-centric world,” he said.

Because the need for good environmental journalists “is not going to go away,” particularly as the world wrestles with the impact of climate change, Allen said, his teaching includes “internal politics”: “As a reporter how do you play the politics in the newsroom to get the stories you want?”

Moore and his colleagues got their series in the paper in part because of good timing.

“In a way I almost can’t believe we got the time and resources to do this thing,” Moore said. He had been covering issues involving Barnegat Bay “piecemeal for years,” as clamming jobs that brought money to the local economy dwindled due to pollution caused by overdevelopment. But two things happened to push the issue to the forefront: The bay started to become unswimmable because of a stubborn jellyfish outbreak and politicians on both sides of the aisle, including Republican Chris Christie, who was running for the governor’s office, began to address the subject.

Moore said that he and his co-writer, Todd Bates, “went to our

editors and said that, ‘If there’s ever a time to carpet-bomb the story, now’s the time.’” The editors agreed and even the lead-up stories to the weeklong series provoked, he said, “a serious response from



KIRK MOORE

people. I’ve never seen anything quite like it, that level of engagement from the public,” from website clicks to people calling in with story suggestions. A large infographic—the kind that papers used to routinely create until resources disappeared—ran on the first day of the series and has been a popular reprint request for schools.

“From a business standpoint I don’t understand why news organizations are abandoning things like local environmental stories or education stories,” the areas “where people’s bread and butter concerns are,” Moore said. The public response to his series, he said, is what keeps the paper willing to invest the time and resources in such stories.

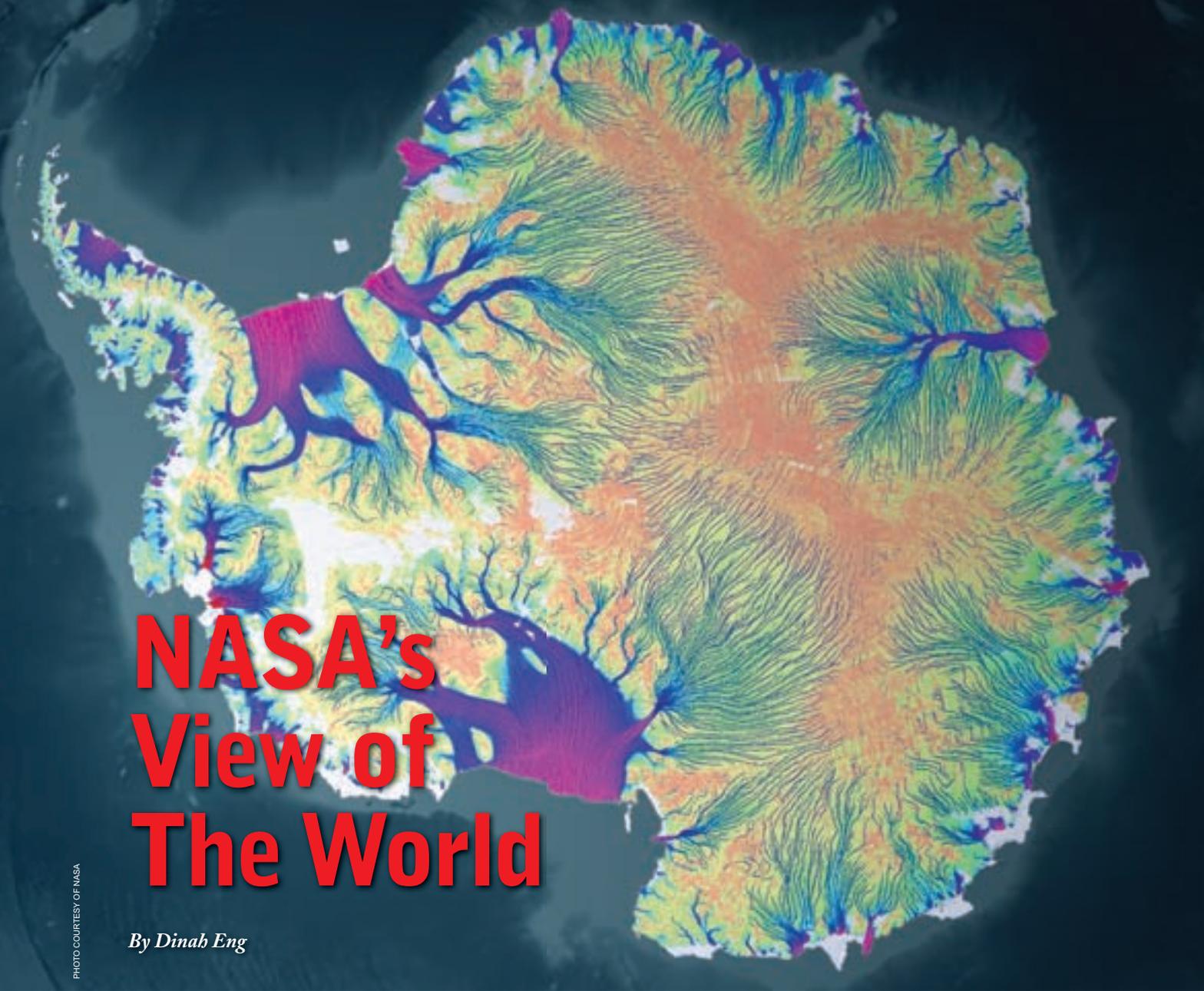
He added: “I think the thing is, you make it accessible enough, you find something that will really affect people in their daily lives. That’s what happened with the bay story. For years the people doing the complaining were the fisherman and clambers. Now it’s with these damn jellyfish; nobody can go out there and have a good time even if they’re down there for two weeks in the summer.” □



Congratulations Fred de Sam Lazaro, Nicole See, Patti Parson and the  PBS NEWSHOUR Foreign Affairs team.

Winners of the Society of Environmental Journalism’s Outstanding Single Story award for their report on a Middle East coalition’s efforts to ease tensions over water resources.





NASA's View of The World

By Dinah Eng

PHOTO COURTESY OF NASA

AN IMAGE FROM NASA'S EARTH OBSERVATORY REVEALS THE MOVEMENT OF ICE IN ANTARCTICA, WHICH RESEMBLES THE FLOW OF RIVERS TO THE SEA. NASA SAYS THIS NEWLY AVAILABLE VIEW WILL HELP TRACK FUTURE CHANGES IN ICE LEVELS.

The space shuttle program may be grounded, but NASA is moving to increase its visibility on the earth sciences front with the hire of a prominent meteorologist who is making it easier for TV weather forecasters to incorporate science stories in their broadcasts.

Joe Witte, formerly chief meteorologist with NBC, retired from his position as weathercaster at News Channel 8 in Washington last December and began work on a Ph.D in climate science communication at George Mason University.

When NASA's Education and Outreach Department learned that GMU's Center for Climate Change Communication was surveying weather forecasters around the country about their interest in covering science stories, NASA offered Witte a part-time job with Goddard Space Flight Center to be its outreach liaison to forecasters.

"I may call forecasters about a story and ask if they want to do a live shot on it," Witte says. "NASA can roll videos within seconds, and all the station needs to do is connect with NASA. NASA can provide a satellite video, or special animation. Budgets in news-

rooms are down, and with this, stations can cover the stories cheaply and efficiently. They have little to do, and the forecaster can choose whatever questions they want to ask."

Witte notes that in many cases, meteorologists are the only journalists at local stations who have a science background, but with the fast pace of local newscasts, there's little time to research and air science pieces along with the daily forecast. So he works with NASA's communications department to develop story ideas that stations may want to use.

Through this new outreach effort, which is just ramping up, Witte will aim to deliver content on broadband to stations, providing the video, suggested script, and sources to contact, much like an AP feed. The goal is to produce 30-second sidebars on earth science or climate science that forecasters can download into their show or use on station websites.

"TV forecasters spend about 15 percent of their time talking to students in schools," he says. "It would be easy to transport and play these videos in those talks. A lot of people watch TV news for

continued on page 40

SEJ Survey *(continued from page 6)*

“Journalism has drastically changed. Several of the regular outlets and organizations that I worked for went out of business, were bought up, or lost their editors. Essentially the salary I make from other activities (making speeches, doing workshops, grant programs, online education, and other unrelated activities) dwarfs financially what I can make from environmental journalism. That’s a recent phenomenon.”

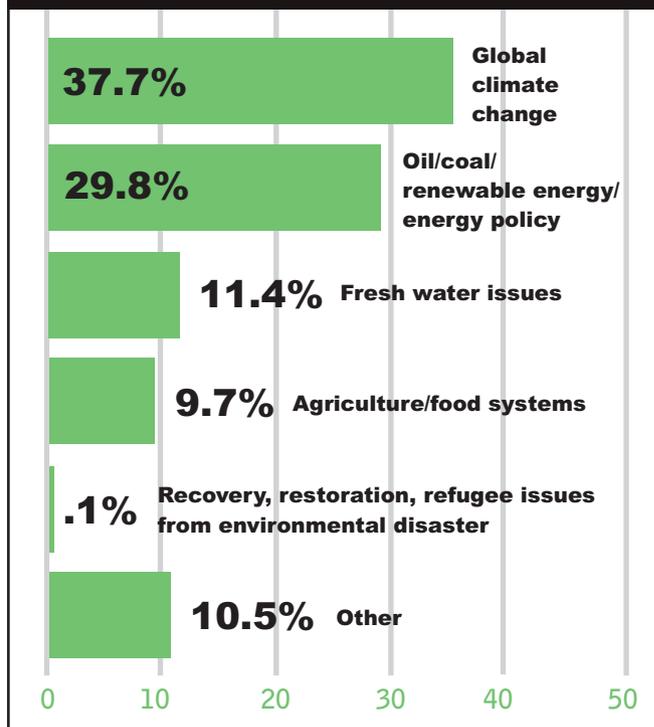
Added another respondent, the big challenge is “finding the ultra-local angle on these stories.”

Looking at the big picture, SEJ executive director Beth Parke concurred with the findings. “The biggest challenge for SEJ members would have to be the loss of well-paid staff jobs covering environment-related issues. Over the past five years, more and more journalists, working in every type of media, have been going freelance, or leave the field altogether,” Parke said. “People who still have a job are uncertain how long their luck will hold. Regular assignments from viable or prosperous news organizations are tough to cultivate or maintain. It’s no surprise that jobs issues are central for journalists right now, as they are for pretty much everyone else.”

In answering the question “What do you view as the most important environmental story over the next several years?” 37.7% said global climate change, 29.8% went with renewable energy and energy policy and 11.4% said fresh water issues.

Some commented that the question is a difficult one because nearly all of the answers are interconnected. “They’re all so deeply
continued on page 46

What do you view as the most important environmental story over the next several years?



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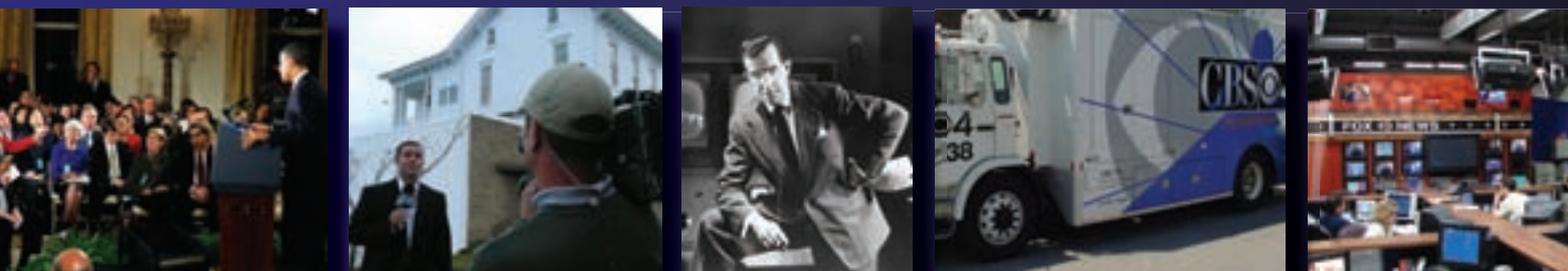
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Earth's Underwater Secrets

'Blue Holes' Hold Keys to the Planet's Past—and Future

By Jarre Fees

For journalists covering the environment, it's not always obvious where to look for stories—it's not all about unusual weather behavior, melting ice caps and rising sea levels.

Journalists, like educators and scientists, benefit from recognizing that there's more to the story than meets the eye, says one researcher who lives by that philosophy. Kenny Broad, director of the University of Miami's Leonard and Jayne Abess Center for Ecosystem Science and Policy, has searched in some unusual places to find the secrets of the Earth's past and possible clues to its future.

"We can't just focus on the very giant, charismatic indicators of climate change," said Broad, an environmental anthropologist who recently led a National Geographic expedition to explore deep underwater caves, known as blue holes, in the Bahamas.

"We're studying to understand when previous climate change occurred and what were the drivers of climate change," Broad said. In the blue holes and elsewhere underwater, he said, "There are a lot of invisible problems going on."

The expedition was filmed for PBS's "NOVA" for a special, "Extreme Cave Diving."

Broad, who this year received National Geographic's first Explorer of the Year award along with the late conservationist, filmmaker and explorer Wes Skiles, said the caves are actually freshwater reservoirs. "Most of the world's fresh water, with the exception of what's locked up in ice caps, is ground water," he said. "And just from a selfish human use perspective, it's critical that we understand that."

Broad said the scientists already knew the blue holes held "novel microbial life that would teach us a lot about what early forms of life might have been on the planet when the world was primordial soup, 3½ billion years ago when the first life was forming."

But the caves also held some surprises.

"We didn't realize the extent or

the importance of stalagmites in these kinds of caves," Broad said. "They're an excellent recorder of environmental history."

Of particular importance, Broad said, is "what the stalagmite layers will tell us about abrupt climate change—how quickly it had changed in the past in a region that's crucial for global climate, particularly the North Atlantic."

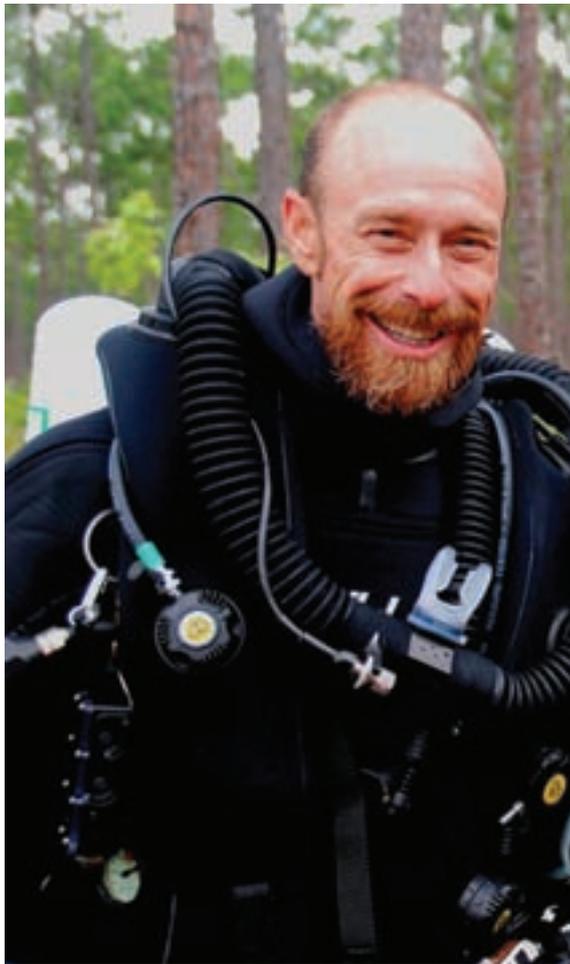
Another surprise, Broad said, was how much desert the team found underwater. "There were major quantities of Saharan dust down there," Broad said. "We're getting preliminary information that the global movement of dust has played a larger and different role than we previously thought."

"Dust was always considered more of an effect of drying," Broad said, "but it may have preceded cooling and warming in abrupt climate change. That has big implications for how we model climate change today."

The scientists also realized the "inhospitable nature of blue holes is analogous to what life might be like on other planets," Broad said, and that has implications for astrobiologists as well as those who study "analogous chemistries for what ancient seas might have been like."

Joining Broad for the "NOVA" expedition were University of Miami geochemist Peter Swart; Penn State microbiologist Jennifer Macalady; explorer Brian Kakuk; marine biologist Tom Illife of Texas A&M; paleontologist Dave Steadman; cave diver Michael Pateman, paleontologist Nancy Albury and historian and educator Keith Tinker, all from the National Museum of the Bahamas; and Skiles, who later died in a separate diving incident.

Broad said he was impressed by the amount of information preserved in the underwater caves. "The water acts as a preservative because there's no oxygen," he said. "The blue holes are important because they give us a thorough record." □



KENNY BROAD

NASA *(continued from page 36)*

the weather forecast, and are probably paying more attention to the forecaster, who then gets the role of science educator.”

The program’s first “test offering” will be a 30-second story about the launch of the new NPP satellite, NASA’s next Earth-observing research satellite, scheduled for October 25.

At a time when many federal agencies are responding to a White House request to improve their scientific integrity policies, NASA officials say their communications policy allows all NASA personnel to talk to the media, if requested.

“The recommendation is to coordinate media requests with the public affairs office, but it is not a requirement,” says Bob Jacobs, deputy associate administrator in NASA’s Office of Communications in Washington. “Accusations were made during the Bush administration of political considerations being part of the release of scientific and technical information. So the director of NASA put together a working group of scientists and communications officials to draw up a policy in 2006. This policy has undergone two GAO [General Accountability Office] reviews, and is held up as a model for other agencies.”

Jacobs says many science reporters have established good working relationships with various communications officers across the agency at NASA’s 10 field centers, and NASA issued about 1,200 press releases last year, resulting in nearly 12,000 stories across all media, about twice as many as other agencies that deal with scientific information.

He says NASA was designed to be an open, transparent agency by the 1958 Space Act that created the agency under the Eisenhower administration, taking a different approach from the Soviet space program, which was run by the military and was known for being closed. Information about scientific research was to be openly

and broadly disseminated by NASA.

“A lot of times, the communications office was perceived as a middleman between the project directors and the research scientists,” Jacobs notes, “but we never want to interject ourselves into the process until those folks are ready to release information. Some people referred to [accusations of agency censorship in 2006] as misplaced patriotism, as the complete top management layer was made up of political appointees.”

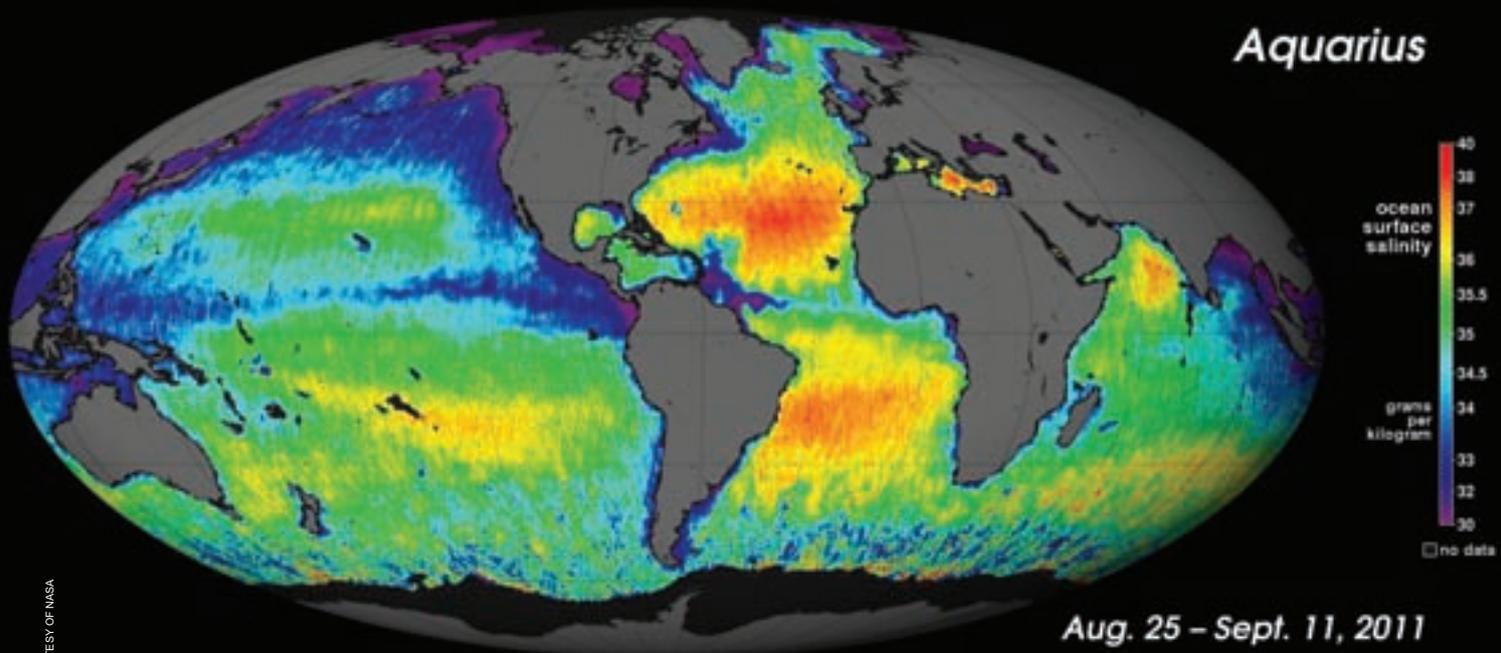
While the space shuttle program and manned space flight have received most of the media’s attention over the years, NASA officials point out that the agency has been working on earth science and its various applications for a long time.

With budget cutbacks and shifting priorities, NASA stories are more likely to deal with earth science for the foreseeable future. Steve Cole, public affairs specialist at NASA Headquarters in Washington, says the agency works on three general areas, including:

- Inventing new ways of seeing the Earth, such as developing new instruments and satellites;
- Facilitating research on how the Earth acts, and what it does on a global basis, such as tracking global warming data; and
- Creating new tools and services for managing the planet and improving people’s lives, such as weather forecasting and monitoring air quality.

“When a large volcano erupts, such as the one in Iceland that disrupted air traffic last year, our satellites can be used to see where the plume is heading, so predications can be made about where planes shouldn’t fly,” Cole says. “We’ve been promoting a number of stories about earth science and its applications over the long term, and expect that to continue.” □

NASA’S NEW AQUARIUS INSTRUMENT PRODUCES COLORFUL IMAGES DEPICTING THE SALINITY OF THE EARTH’S OCEANS—A PROJECT THAT’S EMBLEMATIC OF THE AGENCY’S SHIFT IN FOCUS TOWARD THE EARTH SCIENCES AND STUDYING THE PLANET MORE AS SPACE ACTIVITY WINDS DOWN.





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(Continued from page 34)

story in the Middle East, there's never a moment to lose. Each trip is well-researched and well-planned, and they try to get in and out before anything goes wrong.

"In Middle East, Coalition Aims to Ease Tension Over Water Resources," an 8-minute, 42-second "PBS NewsHour" segment by de Sam Lazaro, producer/editor Nicole See, videographer Tom Adair and managing producer Patti Parson, is the result of one such trip and tells the story of three nationalities—Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians—working together to try to resolve a water rights dispute.

The report is this year's winner as Outstanding Single Story in the SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment.

De Sam Lazaro and his crew spent a week in the region talking to members of the coalition, he said, and also "did some other stories while we were there. It was a very crunched and focused location shoot."

There was a practical reason for getting those other stories while they were in the area, Parson said in an email interview. "We try to do as much as possible in one location, as we can't afford downtime for the crew."

"We hire local 'fixers,'" de Sam Lazaro said, "people who come from the ranks of local journalists. They know who the principal players are and how to track them down, provide interpretation and make arrangements so we can meet.

"They will take us to places, and the people will talk to us because we're reporting on what they're doing."

The logistics of the shoot were "complicated by the tension that pervades the whole region," de Sam Lazaro said. "So much of the reporting about conflict anywhere involves a political take and political strategizing, but when you really boil it down and look at what's at the core, it goes hand-in-hand with the real estate.

"It's an interesting prism from which to view the Middle East conflict," he said. "It's one of the most parched parts of the world—water is at a premium, and obviously water rights are critical. It's a timely and important subject."

While members of the coalition were willing to talk to de Sam Lazaro, it wasn't always easy to get everyone in one location.

"They can't just call a meeting," de Sam Lazaro said. "Half the people have to get a visa, even though [the meeting] is a very short distance away."

Aside from the physical challenges of de Sam Lazaro's location, there is always the challenge of funding, Parson said. "And there's the challenge of telling the story in a way that gets across the complexity of the issue while being straightforward enough to be grasped in a TV segment.

"There also is the challenge of getting people to see the Middle East in a new light, not to just turn away because they think they know what is happening there."

One of the most fulfilling aspects of doing the story, for de Sam Lazaro, was the discovery of the coalition itself. The journalist said he is "solutions-oriented," and always looking for someone "who's doing something that offers a ray of hope."

"Always in the most desperate conflict zones you find people who persevere," de Sam Lazaro said. "It sounds corny, but if you can find

people with a certain energy, that propels the story forward. You need a good story with a good narrative.

"We found a good cast of characters, and all we had to do was piggyback on their eloquence."

"Oklahoma's Dirty Secret" by investigative reporter Jennifer Loren and photojournalist Michael Woods, for KOTV/KWTV/News6.com/News9.com, took second-place honors in the category.

An honorable mention was awarded to "Renegade Refiner" by Jim Morris, senior reporter at the Center for Public Integrity; and M. B. Pell, staff writer at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

RACHEL CARSON ENVIRONMENT BOOK AWARD

First Place

"Shell Games: Rogues, Smugglers, and the Hunt for Nature's Bounty," by Craig Welch (William Morrow, New York, 2010), is this year's winner of the Rachel Carson Environment Book Award.

The book "started as a piece I wrote for The Seattle Times," Welch said in an email interview. Welch took first prize in last year's SEJ Awards for outstanding beat reporting, print division; that award included his reporting on the demise of the local shellfish industry. Welch found out several people had been arrested for "poaching \$3 million worth of fist-size geoduck (pronounced "gooey duck") clams from Washington state's Puget Sound."

Welch discovered detectives had been tracking the thieves for years. "At the center of the story," he said, "was one cop and one larger-than-life informant who had worked undercover as a snitch for federal agents."

Welch's story involved the smuggling of these weird creatures over the border to Canada, where they were shipped by the tens of thousands to Asia. "It seemed that if I could gather enough material I could write a decent nonfiction police procedural about one of the



CRAIG WELCH

country's strangest wildlife trafficking sagas," he said. "If I was lucky, the true-crime element might draw a new audience to read about environmental issues."

Welch continued to document the poaching, gathering documents and talking to people and expanding his work, he said, into "a hard-boiled detective story about wildlife smugglers, complete with snitches, hit men, a would-be Vegas gangster,

undercover operations, double-crosses and chase scenes."

The SEJ judges noted that "Shell Games" might easily have been "reported as a local story, but Welch expands it into an international one, making clear to readers who live outside the Pacific Northwest why the issue matters."

Second place in the book category goes to Judy Pasternak's "Yellow Dirt: An American Story of a Poisoned Land and a People Betrayed," Free Press (New York, 2010).

Third-place honors go to "Keeping the Bees: Why All Bees Are at Risk and What We Can Do to Save Them," by Laurence Packer, HarperCollins (Toronto) 2010. □

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Cousteaus *(continued from page 16)*

used today.

His first underwater film was made in 1943, and in 1950 he founded the French Oceanographic Campaigns and leased a ship, the Calypso, outfitting it as a mobile lab for filming underwater expeditions. He continued his work for five decades. “The impossible missions are the only ones that succeed,” he once said.

Images from his films and television series, beginning in the 1960s, taught the public about the mysteries of an underwater world, until then virtually inaccessible. Cousteau’s work gave rise to a global awareness of the fragility of the marine environment, and his family has continued his mission to motivate people to feel a responsibility to respect and protect the environment.

CAPKIN VAN ALPHEN FOR CAUSECENTRIC PRODUCTIONS



CÉLINE COUSTEAU

“One of the most important things is to share information and engage the audience to take action,” said Céline Cousteau. “It’s a challenge for journalists and documentarians, what happens once you deliver the content. That’s something I’m hoping to discuss.”

Céline Cousteau created “Ocean Inspiration” last year as a tribute to her grandfather—a celebration and call to action to understand, protect and preserve the world’s oceans, incorporating film, music, dance and art. A two-day event in held in Washington, it featured an evening gala, music and dance performances and panel discussions. One of the highlights was a contest choosing the best 100-second video tributes, which had two winners—one an animation and the other featuring stunning underwater cinematography.

“We shouldn’t underestimate the power of the arts to motivate people to take action,” said Cousteau.

She is currently creating a series of short documentaries on people implementing solutions, under the banner CauseCentric Productions. “One action a viewer can take is supporting the organizations who do the work,” Cousteau said. “Whatever your passion is—a species, an ecosystem—you can dedicate time to help

someone solve issues. If you can’t get on a plane and volunteer personally, there are other ways of supporting, and it’s easy to find something to get involved in.”

Philippe Cousteau Jr. said he’s excited about the conference and the opportunity to discuss the work the family is doing. “I want to be able to recognize my father and have him be part of it. He passed away [in a flying boat crash] six months before I was born. It was a terrible tragedy but I was lucky in some ways,” Cousteau said. “I had the opportunity to be inspired by his work, and credit my mother, who kept alive the spirit of what he was about: stewardship, sustainability, giving hope to the world and helping understand the connection between people and the environment.”



PHILIPPE COUSTEAU JR.

COURTESY DARREN BULL, CNN

With his organization EarthEcho, founded with his sister and mother, he focuses on empowering young people to exert their influence on peers, parents and teachers to change the status quo. He recently co-authored a book for teens, “Going Blue,” and is working on a similar one for elementary school children.

In addition to being a special correspondent for CNN International, where he hosts documentaries focusing on environmental and humanitarian issues, Philippe Cousteau Jr. also co-founded Azure Worldwide, a strategic environmental design, development and marketing company. It recently won the contract to design the U.S. pavilion at the World Expo next year in South Korea, where the theme will be oceans and coastlines.

He is also working to launch the Global Echo Exchange Traded Fund on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE: GIVE) by year end, from which a portion of the management fees will benefit the new Global Echo Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) on which he serves as co-founder and chairman.

“It was born of my frustration in raising money, and the desire to innovate in financial markets,” he said. “When I apply for a grant, someone else doesn’t get it.”

The Global Echo Foundation will provide resources to address challenges facing the world community, such as empowering women in developing countries to get access to clean water and further their educations, environmental conservation and supporting social entrepreneurship. □

Water *(continued from page 33)*

reason is because of stormwater. This stuff is really nasty.”

McClure said the solutions are not difficult—collecting rainwater, planting more trees and gardens, using fewer pesticides, cleaning up animal waste. But these issues need more media attention so the word gets out, he said. He is optimistic that the 40th anniversary of the Clean Water Act next year will engender a lot of coverage.

“Reporters can go out and see exactly how it’s being implemented in their area—or not,” he said. “The CWA requires plans be drawn up—but not implemented. So in any community you can find cleanup plans sitting on the shelf. People should do it; I’m planning to do it.”

No matter what angles they cover, environmental journalists are pleased to see when their work brings change for the better. But that work is never done.

As Weiss summed up: “Our challenge is now to protect the environment to save our own skins. We rely on free things the Earth provides: fresh water and clean air, fertile soils to grow food and timber to build houses. We’ve taken away enough of that so that we are facing shortages of water, including oceans that don’t have enough fish that people rely on for food. I think it’s important to look at long-term trends and what it means not just for bears, but for us.” □

If 2010 was the year of the oil spill, 2011 is shaping up as the year of extreme natural disasters.

CARRIER/NATIONAL SEVERE STORMS LABORATORY (NSSL)

A Year of Extremes *(continued from page 5)*

watchdog reporting, as short-staffed news organizations pick and choose what to cover.

In mid-September, the Los Angeles Times broke the story of how the local Central Basin Municipal Water District had paid close to \$200,000 to Coghlan Consulting Group, which was hired to publish promotional stories touting the public agency's work on a fake news site with which it was affiliated, called News Hawks Review. Until the Los Angeles Times exposed the set-up, anyone who went online to search for news reports about the agency was directed by Google to the site, which Google classified as "news."

Google News delisted the site after the L.A. Times report. But had the Times, its competitor The Orange County Register and other local papers been economically healthier, noted Dan Fagin, associate professor and academic director of New York University's Science, Health and Environmental Reporting Program, "they would have been sitting in on water district meetings for months," and would have known about the arrangement earlier.

"There's a lot of accountability journalism that isn't happening at the local level, and it's very disturbing," Fagin said.

Other topics that are getting pushed aside, particularly as climate change dominates the beat, include biodiversity and endangered species, Kloor noted. "Climate change sucked up all the oxygen," he said.

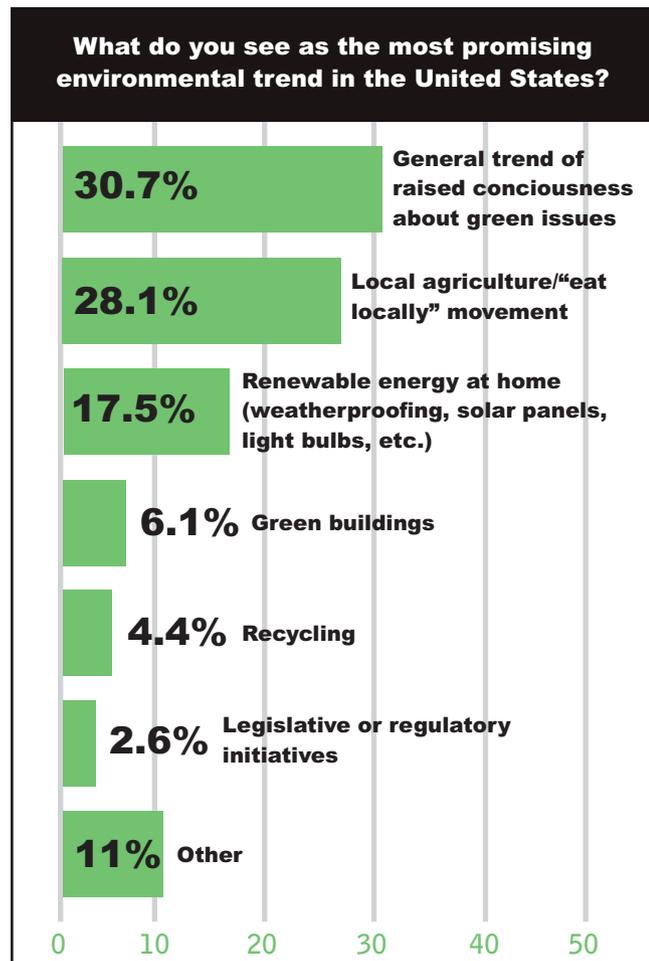
On the positive side, Parke said international connections among environmental reporters are growing. And for many observers, technology and social media hold strong potential for environmental journalism going forward.

"Crowd-sourcing is a promising tool for the future," offering the possibility of gathering large amounts of data from citizen journalists, said Ward.

Parke agreed, citing last year's effort in the Gulf of Mexico, where citizen journalists put together a digital-image mosaic of the BP oil spill. New digital tools, she said, from DocumentCloud to Google Earth: Ocean, are "the future of this kind of reporting." □

SEJ Survey *(continued from page 37)*

tied with one another,” said one environmental journalist. “And that’s the story, that our environment, the way our world works, is an incredibly complex, interconnected system. As journalists, therefore, the most important story might be the interconnections between different topics, and the relationships—and impacts—these different topics have on the rest of our lives.”

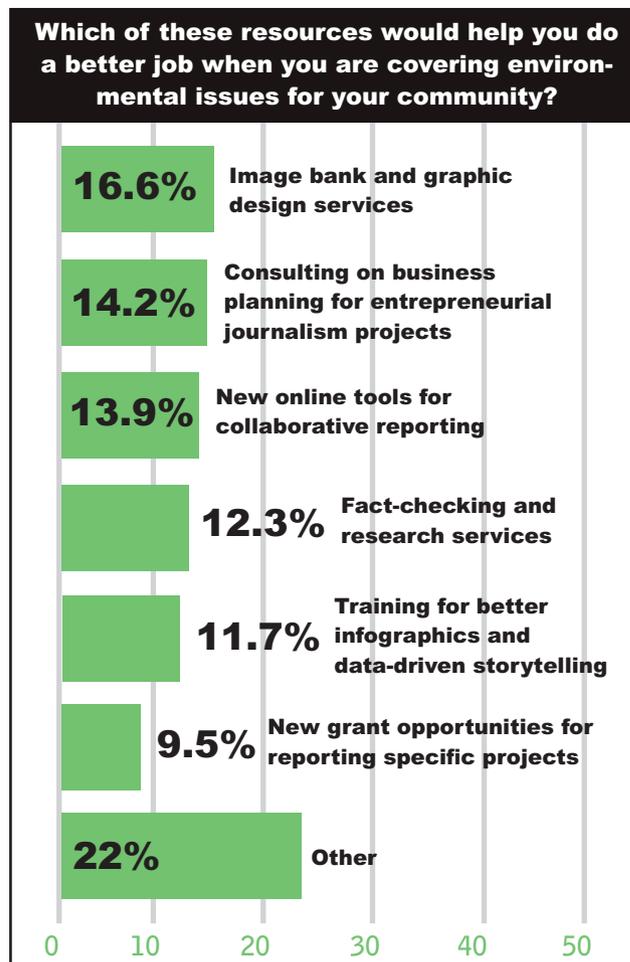
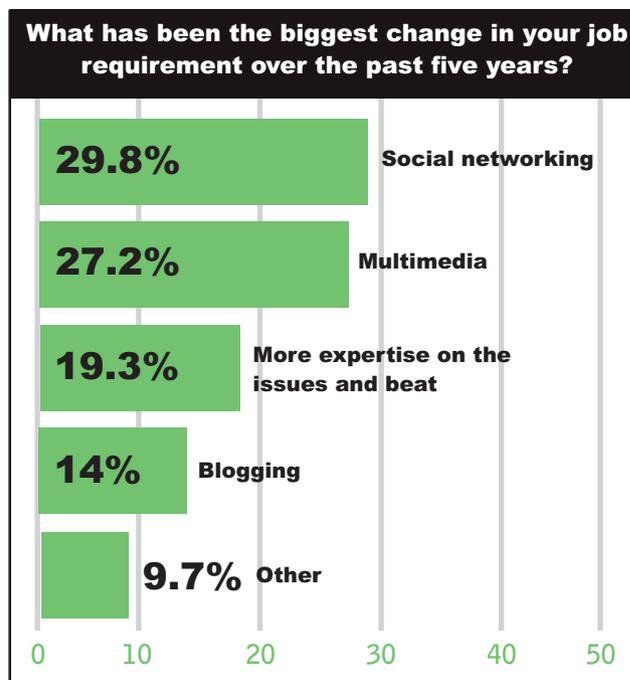


On the question of what journalists think are the most promising environmental trends in the United States, 30.7% said that it is the general raised consciousness about green issues, 28.1% indicated it is the “eat locally” movement and 17.5% said it is the use of renewable energy sources at home, such as solar panels, weatherproofing and energy-efficient light bulbs.

Asked about the biggest change in their job requirements over the past five years, 29.8% singled out social networking, 27.2% indicated proficiency in multimedia, 19.3% picked the need for more expertise on the issues and the beat and 14% said blogging.

On the topics of which resources would help journalists do a better job and what would help increase the amount of environmental coverage they produced every year, the largest percentage of respondents to each of those two questions said “other.” That answer led to some re-examination of the parameters of the survey.

“These last two questions were intended to help us reflect on what new services or strategies we might try and provide,” said Parke. “The rankings were helpful to us that way, but the comments that came in as ‘other’ were equally helpful, in a different way. They gave more



context and insight on how people in our primary constituency view the challenges they face and what they need most. Many mentioned time and money—something SEJ can’t exactly provide to everyone.

continued on page 48



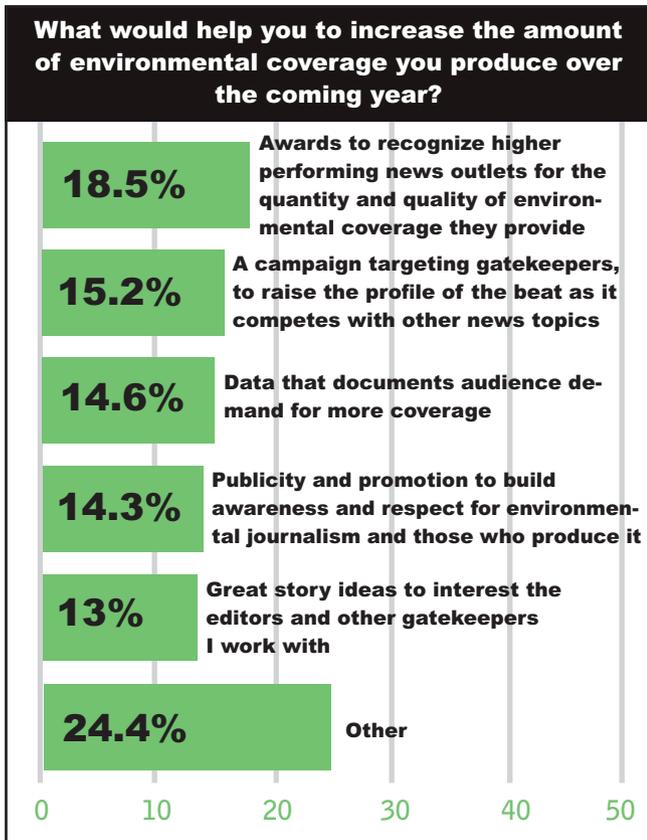
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But others mentioned attitudes of editors, assistance with graphics, travel fellowships—things we might be able to work on in different ways.”

With SEJ membership and leadership united in the goal of providing even more environmental coverage, Parke said it would help if more people demanded it of the news outlets they rely on, and were willing to spend some of their own money to get it.

Global climate change and energy policy will be the two biggest stories for environmental journalists in the next few years.

“We need investment by philanthropies and businesses of all kinds in support of independent journalism in public media and other nonprofit outlets,” she said. “Better prospects for the economy in general would take care of a lot of it.” □

INTERNET (continued from page 20)



AMANDA HICKMAN

bring the documents to DocumentCloud and we give you the tools to share those stories, or parts of those stories, with readers and other reporters.”

Hickman said the site “helps journalists make government and scientific research documents available to their readers. People frequently want to know where you’re seeing the numbers

you’re seeing. You can embed an entire document into your story, or you can take the significant things from your research and embed just those parts. It lets you distill dense research documents for an audience that wants to get the gist of things and find out what’s significant in this report.

“It’s an opportunity to open yourself up to fact-checking and invite the reader to look back at where you got your information. You can point back at that original report and say, “This is the data I found and this is the conclusion drawn by the scientist who researched it.” □



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Where Do Reporters Fit in the New Media World?

Role of Journalists Has Become Even More Critical

By Peter Dykstra

One of the challenges of being in fast-moving professions like journalism or communications is that it's hard to catch your breath and take the time to take a look back at how far we've traveled.

Then again, maybe we don't look back because we're afraid of what we might see—or which direction we're traveling.

So let's reminisce about the heady days of 1990, around the time of SEJ's founding: Cable TV was established and maturing, newspapers and network news broadcasts were contracting a bit but stable, and the Internet was mostly a dream.

MTV showed music videos. The Weather Channel told you what the forecast was. CNN's Headline News served up half-hour newscasts 48 times a day, 365 days a year.

Today, MTV's ditched the music in favor of a mix of soap opera and tattooed Caligula. The Weather Channel gives up part of its prime time to tell you what the weather was 45 years ago during a big storm. And Headline News—now HLN—has dropped most of its newscasts in favor of a lineup that has included, at times, Glenn Beck, Nancy Grace and Joy Behar.

Add to that the fact that two shows dedicated to ridiculing TV news, "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report," offer "fake news" that the shows' fans find a better source of information than the news that is still presented with a straight face.

But my favorite icon of the changing media landscape has to be TLC. Christened in 1980 as The Learning Channel, it proudly bore the slogan "A Place for Learning Minds." It featured genuinely educational daytime programming for students and toddlers, and "Captain's Log," a curiously popular series about boating safety. As the channel matured, it launched prime-time science fare like "Paleoworld," an acclaimed documentary series on prehistoric times.

Today, shows like "Paleoworld" no longer roam your living room. TLC's big hits are reality shows on food, fashion, psychological disorders like hoarding, and a particularly noxious show called "Toddlers & Tiaras," which follows preschoolers flashing their spray-tanned skin on the pageant circuit. "A Place for Learning Minds" indeed.

I'm bringing up all of this to make a simple point: Cable TV, the Web, and the Information Age have opened up a world of choices for consumers, and when the consumers unsurprisingly opt to be

amused rather than informed, the media is usually more than happy to provide the content.

Our work as environmental journalists doesn't fit well into this sad dynamic, but it in fact makes our work, and SEJ's mission, more important. Unlike "Reality TV" hits like "Keeping Up With the Kardashians" and "Celebrity Wife Swap," what we do actually has something to do with reality. At a time when our profession, our national government, our environment and our economy are in varying degrees of dysfunction, honest and accurate reporting on our environmental challenges has never been more crucial.



As SEJ enters its second generation, its mission is changing.

Large news organizations have scaled back across the board, and seasoned reporters with the essential institutional memory on science and environment issues are often among the first to disappear.

Environmental journalism has been around long enough to have its own history, and its own reputation. We can be proud of both. SEJ has now been around for a generation: rock-solid in a shifting

landscape. Some of its veterans have retired—by choice or not—from active reporting, but the organization has provided infrastructure for a vital reporting specialty.

As SEJ enters its second generation, its mission is changing. The veterans are becoming mentors and role models for new journalists working in new media. For better or worse, we certainly don't lack for stories waiting to be told: the immense challenges of vanishing habitats and climate change, but also the push for solutions.

When I ran CNN's science and environment operations, I used to tell my team that a good story is one that looks smart on the day we broadcast it, and even smarter 20 years later. The stories done by SEJ's charter members two decades ago look pretty smart today. And even if so much of the news we cover lacks amusement value, the best service we can perform is to hold that same standard. □

Peter Dykstra is a former SEJ board member and the publisher of Environmental Health News and The Daily Climate.

This was a mine.



Reclaimed coal mine in
Breathitt County, Kentucky.
Photo: Kentucky Coal Association

In fact, it was a mountaintop coal mine in Kentucky.

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