

SEJ Journal

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The environment beat bounces back

The Washington Post fills the beat; others point to Bush for resurgence

By BUD WARD

California's electricity blackouts and the Bush Administration's controversial ventures into environmental policy are providing environmental coverage something of a bounce at the nation's leading national newspapers.

That was the consensus of leading environmental journalists at *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. Yet there are subtle but worthwhile differences in perspective among those interviewed, even within the same news organization.

No recent comprehensive study has

attempted to quantify the column inches and airtime devoted recently to environmental and natural resources. But even the casual reader should have noticed recently more front-page coverage of issues ranging from carbon dioxide and rejection of the Kyoto Protocol to drinking water standards for arsenic and oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The increased coverage is especially striking for those who grew concerned last year when *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* allowed the beat to go unattended for a time.

"I think interest in the issue has real-

ly come alive in the past few months, particularly as a result of the election," said Douglas Jehl, who covers environmental issues from the Washington, D.C., bureau of *The New York Times*. "We've seen the general theme" of President George W. Bush's environmental program, "and of course the policies seem to reverse, if not do reverse," those of President Clinton.

"But to be frank," Jehl continued, "there's been a great appetite ever since I took over the beat over a year ago, but the appetite now has changed. Editors used to want one story, but now they're

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Inside Story

Moyers: Did Ida Tarbell seek industry response? Controversial "Trade Secrets": just the first of more on the environment

By MIKE DUNNE

Few pieces of television environmental journalism have stirred the interest and debate as the broadcast of "Trade Secrets" by Bill Moyers on the Public Broadcasting Service in March.

The 90-minute documentary, followed by a 30-minute panel discussion that included chemical industry representatives, raised two interesting questions:

Did the chemical industry keep safety concerns about some of its products a secret from workers and the public? Did Moyers fairly treat the chemical industry when he chose to let documents speak for the past rather than inviting response from industry during the 90-minute documentary?

Moyers and independent producer Sherry Jones told the *SEJournal* that they believed once-hidden documents of

the chemical industry sufficiently told the story of how the industry operated 20-40 years ago. Memos calling for secrecy spoke for themselves. What could an industry public relations person speaking about events so long ago add to the story? Would allowing them to speak serve fairness or accuracy or the clarity of the story, they asked.

For some, those questions ended up being just as controversial as "Trade Secrets" itself.

The questions may linger as Moyers told *SEJournal* that he will focus several new documentaries on the environment, building on his most recent work, "Trade Secrets."

The first of his new series that he calls "Earth on Edge" will air June 19 on PBS stations. It will look at the Hudson

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Photo by DON PERDUE



Bill Moyers

Strategic plan will reflect member surveys

Before I got involved with the Society of Environmental Journalists on more than just a casual basis, my impression of life in the non-profit world was largely idyllic, and certainly idealistic.

For more years than I care to count, I've worked in the frenetic world of newspaper journalism, where I've rarely been able to guarantee that I could be home for dinner at a particular time, and where some boss can pull my string on a moment's notice. The non-profit world seemed more relaxed, humane, easier going, even absent from the pressures I've grown accustomed to in daily journalism.

I was laboring under a major misconception.

In my three-plus years on the SEJ board, I've come to understand that a whole different kind of daily pressure grips non-profit groups, including SEJ. For us, it's the pressure of doing what it takes to keep our doors open as well as to meet the high expectations of the membership. In other words, fulfilling our lofty mission of improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting, while continuing to create a supportive community for journalists toiling in our field.

Volunteers who help SEJ every day feel the extra pressure. So do board members, who have taken on an added measure of responsibility. But frankly, the ones who really feel it daily are the members of our staff, particularly Beth Parke, our executive director for the last nine years, and associate director Chris Rigel.

Which brings me to the subject of this column. In a phrase: navel gazing, though of the best sort.

In a recent conversation about the future of SEJ with Beth, she described the organization as "a swirling mass of urgencies." I couldn't agree more.

We want to do everything, and now. And we want to do more of it: A Web page that sings with new content daily; regional programs scattered from hither to yon; a book about environmental journalism; an annual conference that improves every year; training programs for journalists; outreach to editors; minority outreach; an annual contest; mentoring programs; *TipSheet*; a constantly improving *SEJournal*; guides to help journalists in other beats cover complicated environ-

mental topics. Our "to do list," combined with our "wish list," seems endless.

It's a strength that we're not short of ideas. As we move through our 11th year, we can say proudly that we've accomplished an incredible amount. But every now and then, an organization needs to take a step back and ask some important questions about the challenges it faces.

That's one of the things that Beth and the SEJ board are doing this year.

We're going back to the flip charts to come up with a rewrite of our strategic plan, first approved by the board in 1995 and tweaked in 1998. It will cover the

Report from the Society's President

By
**James
Bruggers**



years 2002 through 2005.

It will not be just a document that will sit on the shelf and collect dust.

SEJ board and staff will use the strategic plan to guide our efforts over the coming years. It's a road map. It will help us navigate that swirling mass of urgencies and stay focused on what's important. When new ideas come along, we can always put them to the strategic plan test.

Our process has been basic but true.

We reviewed our current strategic plan. We surveyed SEJ members, and I have to thank so many of you for responding. A remarkable 26 percent of active members responded. With associates, the response rate was 24 percent; 19 percent of academic members. (Look for the results on the members-only section of our Web site).

Your insights were helpful and inspiring. Here are a few things I took from the survey:

- Members like all our programs and see them as fairly effective. The annual conference scored particularly high, which

was not a surprise. Interestingly, the list-serv, regional activities and SEJ Web site stood out as being ranked more important than they are effective (though our Web site has improved since the hire of another full-time staff member in February).

- Nearly 90 percent of overall membership is either satisfied or highly satisfied with our membership eligibility requirements. Of course associate members, who are more likely to be on the edge of qualification, are less satisfied than active members.

- We continue to have different opinions about appropriate sources of funding.

- A large majority of us across all categories have not considered canceling our memberships, and in general, the members expressed their support for the leadership of the SEJ.

We do have some issues, though, that require attention. Associate and academic members tended to believe, more than active members, that their membership status affects their perceived role within SEJ.

Members were generally positive about expanding programs into Canada and Mexico, but there was some concern about spreading ourselves too thin.

While nearly everyone is in favor of trying to increase diversity within SEJ, the survey indicates that most of us are challenged when it comes to outlining specific strategies and actions that would be most effective. In that sense, environmental journalism is no different than any other segment of the news business.

It should be noted that a recent annual survey of newsrooms by the American Society of Newspaper Editors reports that the number of minority journalists working at daily newspapers fell from 11.85 percent to 11.64 percent in the past year. The main reason, the survey concluded, is that an unusually large number of minority journalists left the news business entirely.

One of our members in our survey put it another way. "The problem is not SEJ. It is the future of media in general to attract minorities, owing to low pay and often abusive conditions."

In March, board and staff also met with two consultants who are helping us develop our strategic plan. They ran us

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The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)3 organization. The mission of the organization is to advance public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting. We envision an informed society through excellence in environmental journalism. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,000 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's national conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly SEJournal.

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SEJournal submission deadlines

Summer '01August 1, 2001
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Editor's note

It's a great honor to be taking over as editor of *SEJournal*.

This issue, you'll see a new feature, "Inside Story," in which each quarter we'll interview the author of an outstanding story. We hope that interview will delve into the story, detail how it was developed and reveal what techniques, both writing and reporting, were useful in producing it.

Since I'm new at this, I'm looking anew at everything in

the journal. I'd like to encourage readers to contact me in coming weeks about what features they enjoy, as well as suggestions for improvement and other feedback. Please send your comments to me at mmansur@kcstar.com.

I hope the *SEJournal*, if it isn't already, becomes a must-read for every environmental journalist. And every one of them would be honored to have a byline within it.

Thanks,
Mike Mansur

Regional conference

Ohio journalists look at forest management, health

The Society of Environmental Journalist's April 27-28 regional conference on forestry began with a slideshow of the Appalachian forests from Vermont to Alabama, narrated by a photojournalist.

By the close of Saturday's hay wagon ride in sunny, perfect spring weather, the conference attendees had heard varying views on the best forest management options and whether air pollution is linked to forest health.

The conference began with an informal reception Friday evening at Ohio University's Scripps School of Journalism. Photojournalist Jenny Hager of Alpine Images of Boulder, Colo., narrated a one-hour slideshow. She shared her images and knowledge of the mixed-hardwoods forests. Hager had worked three years to photograph the forests.

The images she showed are captured in "An Appalachian Tragedy: Air Pollution and Tree Death in the Eastern Forests of North America" (1998). Hager was the photographer and co-editor of the 200-page book. The other editors are SEJ member Charles Little and Harvard Ayers, professor of anthropology and sustainable development, Appalachian State University.

Hager told an audience of reporters, Ohio University journalism and environmental science students about the effects of nitrogen oxides and ozone on deciduous trees. She explained how she worked with scientists to properly identify various environmental problems in her photos.

Hager showed photos of trees that had multiple leafings, branch or crown dieback, acidic soils, altered metabolism, mottled leaves, leaves that had "yellow up," and leaves that failed to decompose on the

ground. She also showed photos of various fungi and trees that had "snapped" in half because they were weak from poor nutrition triggered by air pollution.

Hager said she learned about forest health issues by reading on her own. A physical education graduate from the University of New Hampshire, Hager said her work as a professional photographer evolved from her years of work in adventure travel and as a survival skills instructor.

During Hager's slide show, Joe Aliff, a naturalist and private landowner from West Virginia, offered observations from decades of walking in the woods. He brought tree limbs to illustrate problems that Hager discussed.

Trees were snapping due to "plugged plumbing," Aliff said, meaning that changes in the soil chemistry had hampered the tree's ability to absorb nutrients and weakened the tree. While air pollutants harm the overall health of a tree, "it's usually a bug that does the last blow," Aliff said.

These soil chemistry changes, Aliff added, also harmed nearby waterways. Aliff said he had observed a significant reduction in crayfish, certain salamanders and the Eastern box turtle in recent years.

On Saturday, speakers focused on forest management practices in the Vinton Furnace Experimental Forest, owned by the Mead Corp. and co-managed by Mead and the U.S. Forest Service.

Wayne Lashbrook, stewardship manager for Mead Woodlands, and Dan Yaussy, a Forest Service researcher, described various demonstration plots as the SEJ conference-goers rode through the forest on a hay wagon. At various points on the tour, the group would get out and walk through a specific plot.

Using the 15-page Vinton Forest Management Plan, Lashbrook and Yaussy pointed out examples of clear cuts, cuts of trees with a diameter of 12 inches at the stump, among other examples of management options.

John Dorka, chief deputy of the Forestry Division in the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, talked about the state's effort to monitor, inventory and assemble data on forests in Ohio. This is a slow, expensive process, he said.

During the morning tour, Pete Woyar, an instructor at Hocking College, led the group to areas where forest managers



Photo by SARA THURIN ROLLIN



Photojournalist Jenny Hager



are attempting to protect stream water quality during timber harvests.

After a picnic bag lunch, Dave Bubser, a regional manager for Smartwood, discussed forest product certification programs. Bubser called these programs “responsible forest management” targeted at ensuring a “long-term supply” of forest products. Smartwood is one of 10 organizations that certify that the proper management practices are really being followed by landowners.

Unfortunately, only 5 percent of non-industrial private forests have a formal forest management plan like the one illustrated by the Vinton Furnace Experimental Forest, he said. What’s more, a large amount of private forests change owners every seven years, Bubser said. That often results in owners ignoring the advice of foresters, he said.

Mead Corp.’s Lashbrook spoke about the paper and forest-products industry’s sustainable forestry initiative. Top executives in the mid-1990s wanted to find a way to get credit for the good job they were doing, Lashbrook said.

A second panel of Woyer; Jim Lee, executive director of the Ohio Forestry Association (OFA); and Susan Heitker, campaign coordinator for the Buckeye Forest Council, discussed the efforts to train certified loggers in “best management practices.”

Woyer, who trains about 200 loggers per year, said he has seen improvements due, in part, to the retiring of one generation. They’re being replaced by younger loggers who are more receptive to cutting in a sustainable manner.

The forestry association’s Lee said that Ohio’s certified

logging program, which is voluntary, came about due to the insertion of a single word (silviculture) into a piece of agriculture legislation in 1989. He described OFA’s efforts at recording loggers’ certification status and those that fail to meet continuing education requirements.

Buckeye Forest Council’s Heitker challenged the voluntary certified logging program as being too lenient. Also, the “best management practices” are not necessarily “good management practices,” she said.

Heitker, who has completed the Ohio certified logging program, said the state also has trouble enforcing the voluntary program. She described a complaint her group filed against logging on a particular site. Although loggers had not followed the “best management practices,” local officials decided they still had done enough to protect water quality.

Woyar responded that loggers do not want to receive dictates from Columbus, Ohio, about how they should manage their lands.

The day at Vinton ended with one last tour on the hay wagon to see the effects of controlled burns. U.S. Forest Service’s Yaussy pointed out several plots where controlled burns had taken place, one 10 days earlier. These burns are being studied to determine how well they help regenerate oak tress, he said.

A grant from the Gund Foundation helped make the event possible. The event was organized by SEJ member Randy Edwards with assistance from the SEJ staff.

—Sara Thurin Rollin

SEJ members speak at NABJ regional event

Two SEJ members spoke about covering environmental justice at the National Association of Black Journalists’ Region III conference in Norfolk, Va., April 7.

The NABJ regional conference, “Three on Three: A Conference for Print, Television and Radio Broadcasters,” drew about 40 reporters, editors and students from Norfolk State University, which hosted the April 6-7 event in Norfolk, Va.

Cathy Jackson, NSU faculty and conference organizer, said the conference was designed to help reporters cover environmental racism and justice issues better. Three panels addressed this issue, she said. One addressed the basics of environmental racism, another panel focused on the “how-tos” of covering these types of stories, and the third was a discussion between activists and reporters about what stories get covered and why.

NABJ invited SEJ member Cheryl Hogue to participate in the panel on covering environmental justice stories.

Hogue, a senior reporter for weekly news magazine *Chemical and Engineering News* in Washington, D.C., spoke about the status of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s environmental justice policy under the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Also on the panel was SEJ member Ron Nixon, director of the Campaign Finance Information Center at the Missouri School of Journalism. Nixon spoke about computer-assisted journalism and its application to stories on environmental justice.

“It’s exciting to help build a bridge between two profes-



Photo by SARA THURIN ROLLIN

Nixon and Hogue discuss covering environmental justice

sional journalism societies,” Hogue said. “NABJ deals with a broad range of issues from helping African-Americans enter and move ahead in newsrooms to balanced coverage of the black community. I think it’s important that SEJ share its specialized expertise in environmental coverage with this sister journalism organization. Meanwhile, I hope we can attract more African-American journalists to cover environmental issues and to join SEJ.”

—Sara Thurin Rollin



Persistence paid off for **Ilsa Setziol**. The former public radio morning producer at KPCC in Pasadena, Calif., told management that she “wanted to get paid to hike and hang out with biologists.” They relented and appointed her full-time environmental reporter. In a five-person news room, that is quite a commitment to the enviro beat. Setziol is most interested in examining the impacts of sprawl on endangered species.

Another in-house move finds that **Kevin Carmody** has taken over as the environment writer for the *Austin (Texas) American-Statesman*. Carmody had been a general assignment reporter covering some growth stories, some occupational health stories and some environmental stories. Now, he looks forward to reporting environmental issues in-depth instead of covering “every turn of the screw in the bureaucratic process.”

Carmody fills the shoes of **Ralph Haurwitz**, the new special projects writer at the paper. After covering the environmental beat for eight years at the *Austin American-Statesman* (and 13 before that at *The Pittsburgh Press*), he says “it was time for a change. I’ll miss having my finger on the daily pulse of environmental issues, but it’ll be nice having more time to go in depth.”

Former *SEJournal* editor **Noel Grove** interrupted his non-fiction book examining the life of the perfect Kansas kid who turned killer to take on a project for *National Geographic* entitled “Earth’s Last Great Places.” Some of those places include a remote Chinese mountain village, which he had to reach by donkey and he describes as “cut off from time.” He also prospected around Mayan ruins in Guatemala. “They were covered with vines, the temples had trees growing out of them, and the few holes I was able to enter were filled with bats and creepy-crawlies. The sense of discovery was exhilarating and the true fragility of great civilizations was almost palpable. As I wrote in the book, (I imagined) some future explorers coming upon Denver and finding sagebrush growing out of cracks in the pavement and vultures roosting in the broken windows of the U.S. Mint.” Noel’s adventures will be available to Geographic members in October and to book stores in April 2002.

Also traveling for a recently completed book project was **David Helvarg**. “Blue Frontier—Saving America’s Living Seas” came out in April. On Helvarg’s tourist itinerary were oil platforms off Louisiana, swamps in Georgia, an underwater habitat off Key Largo (where he dove with sharks), New England in the autumn and California beaches in the summer. “It was hard convincing people I was actually working.” (See the review of Helvarg’s new book on page 18.) One previous trip to Antarctica in 1999 spawned a mystery novel, featuring a bottom-of-the-world crime with links to the environment and politics including climate change, overfishing, species extinction, cold-war nuclear weapons and the 1973 Coup in Chile. No publication date yet on this adventure.

Freelancer **Orna Izakson** has taken a half-time environmental and investigative reporting job at the *Eugene (Oregon)*

Weekly. She plans to keep freelancing. Izakson has written recently for *E: The Environmental Magazine*, *Pacific Fishing*, *Mountainfreak* and *Cascadia Times*.

Mitch Tobin has time-shifted his life. After a year and a half at the *Tucson Citizen*, the city’s afternoon paper, he is the new water and environment reporter at the *Arizona Daily Star*, the morning publication. Tobin called in from Yuma where he was digging into the Colorado River Delta, drained almost dry by upstream users, and how the lack of water is impacting the ecosystem.

After graduating from the Michigan School of Journalism, **Ivona Lerman** has become the environment writer at the *Daytona Beach (Florida) News Journal*. The Croatian-born journalist, who has a degree in marine biology, will be focusing on the health of reporting on aquatic life such as manatees and sea turtles.

Writing, writing, writing—that most basic of journalism

Media on the Move

Compiled by George Homsy

skills will be the most important part of the curriculum at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul when **Mark Neuzil** takes over as chair. The associate professor, SEJ

academic board member and this journal’s editorial board chair will oversee a program 400 majors, nine full-time and 22 adjunct faculty.

Taking advantage of a short but intense educational opportunity was Canadian freelancer **Stephen Leahy**. He motored down to the University of Maryland to attend a four-day seminar called the CASE Media Fellowship on Global Climate Change. Leahy praises the high expert-to-student ratio (15:4) which “allowed for lots of interaction with no deadlines to meet, no scrums to fight through.” Leahy has been focusing on climate change lately for online publications such as *ENN*, magazines like *Conservation Voices* as well as Canadian newspapers and agricultural publications.

Cameron M. Burns, who wrote six mountaineering guidebooks and one collection of adventure stories, has taken over as editor and writer for the Rocky Mountain Institute, an energy policy and environmental think tank in Colorado. Burns, a former SEJ member, has published thousands of stories and photographs in newspapers and magazines around the world.

An old fashioned hyperlink: jump to page 7 for a story about changes in SEJ’s leadership, including **Sara Thurin Rollin** leaving BNA after 13 years and stepping down from the SEJ board to work on SEJ’s staff as our group’s journalism programs manager. And as you’ll also read, **Mike Mansur** left the SEJ board and has become the *SEJournal*’s new editor with this issue.

If you are on the move, let your colleagues know. Send news of your new job, new book, new fellowship or new computer to George Homsy at ghomsy@world.std.com or fax to (603) 947-9622.



Event focuses on Canadian response to global warming

A diverse group of 20 people from around the Toronto metropolitan area heard about Canada's response to global warming from local and national government officials and an environmental activist. The event took place on March 31.

Three speakers offered sharp criticisms and noted some successful policies aimed at addressing concerns about global warming and a cascade of related environmental problems.

The Saturday afternoon event was held at a downtown Toronto public library and was organized by SEJ member Brian McAndrew of the *Toronto Star*, with assistance from SEJ members Saul Chernos, Stephen Leahy and board member Peter Fairley.

The audience was a mixed group of journalists and others, organizers said. There were reporters, editors, students, corporate officials and activists. Sierra Club's John Bennett and scientist Henry Hengeveld both talked about ongoing international efforts at curbing emissions that are thought to lead to global warming. Bennett said he was concerned about the lack of leadership from Canadian officials at the recent negotiation in The Hague.

Hengeveld argued that implementing the Kyoto Protocol globally was faltering because it had become a trade issue rather than an environmental issue.

Hengeveld, a senior scientist and policy advisor for Environment Canada, also talked about the latest modeling

Implementing
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results of historical temperature changes and weather indicators. He said there is compelling evidence that greenhouse gases are responsible for the 0.3 degree C warming observed over the past 50 years. As evidence of the impact humans have had on world climate, he cited the increasing concentration of carbon dioxide observed in sea ice today compared to levels that are detected in ice cores dating back 400,000 years. This increase stems from use of fossil fuels.

Sierra Club's Bennett, who is director of atmosphere and energy programs, said Canada needs to resume its role as "an international broker in diplomatic disputes" because it is now just part of the U.S. block.

"There is no country working both sides to act as a go-between" and this contributed to the failure of the talks in The Hague in November 2000, Bennett said. "The Canadian negotiators didn't realize how far they were from a deal with the Europeans," he said.

Toronto City Councillor Jack Layton told how the city poured \$20 million of surplus cash into a Toronto Atmospheric Fund back in the late 1980s, long before cities were acknowledging or dealing with this issue. Layton is president of the expanded Toronto fund, which is now worth \$27 million and has stimulated energy efficiency improvements worth over \$150 million.

The special fund pays for energy efficiency upgrades like better lighting systems. That reduces emissions linked to global warming, Layton said. When cost savings are realized in lower energy bills, the fund is paid back through savings collected from a building owner's energy bill, Layton explained.

A larger fund has now been established at the national level. While Layton said he is pleased that 70 cities have joined the fund, he said that he is appalled by the federal government's lack of resolve with multinational petroleum producers. "The feds don't have the will to take down the carbon giant," he told the SEJ gathering.

—Sara Thurin Rollin

SEJ leadership undergoes changes in recent months

Several changes in SEJ's board of directors occurred over the past five months.

Mike Mansur, treasurer, former president and seven-year board member, resigned from SEJ's board of directors in early April and has assumed the post of editor of the *SEJournal*. Mansur is the environment reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. The *SEJournal* editor post carries a small honorarium for each publication. SEJ's bylaws prohibit its volunteer board of directors from receiving income from SEJ.

Carolyn Whetzel, California staff correspondent for the Bureau of National Affairs Inc., was appointed March 25th by the board to fill Mansur's board post until regular elections are held at the annual meeting in October.

The board in March also elected Kevin Carmody, environment reporter for the *Austin-American Statesmen* and past SEJ president, to serve as treasurer pending the October elections.

The March meeting also yielded a new editorial board chair, Mark Neuzil, chair of the department of journalism and mass

communications at St. Thomas University.

In February, Earle Holland, director of science communications at Ohio State University, resigned his post as board representative of associate members. Holland told the board he could no longer represent the associate members because he disagrees with the SEJ's membership eligibility policies.

The board called for candidates on April 18 in an effort to secure a temporary representative for associate members until the next board election in the fall. Responding was Philip Bailey of earthsystems.org, whom the board will appoint to the temporary position at its July 21 meeting in St. Paul, Minn.

Also stepping down from the board after five years of service was former treasurer Sara Thurin Rollin, who resigned to take the staff position of SEJ's journalism programs manager in February.



Carolyn Whetzel.



Strategic plan...(from page 2)

through an exercise to identify some of SEJ's most critical issues and trends, both internal and external. In the next three years, SEJ needs to be aware of these and respond accordingly.

These are some that stood out to me:

- The change in administrations in Washington, D.C., has already vaulted environmental stories back into the forefront.
- Environmental journalism is rising worldwide as the beat grows in other countries. It all seems to be tied to increasing globalization of the economy.
- With the convergence of different media, journalists of all stripes, including those that cover the environment, will need to learn new skills.
- The downturn in the economy is bringing about cutbacks in newsrooms. This could affect environmental journalists directly if they're reassigned to other beats that may be deemed more essential, and as travel budgets for both news-gathering and professional training are cut back.
- The economic downturn could threaten SEJ's funding base and force retrenchment on staff and programs.
- TV drives public perception of the world, and we all know there's been a decline of environmental coverage on television.
- And there's also been a growing blur of the once much brighter line that separated journalism and public relations.

One key element of the plan will be the identification of five categories of critical issues for SEJ. It doesn't look like these general goal areas, first adopted in 1995, will change, reflecting, I believe, our collective clarity of purpose and self-awareness:

- Stability of financial resources
- Membership development
- Improved programs and services
- Integrity of operating principals and values
- Stature and significance.

Some thoughts on each:

Money: The biggest challenge facing SEJ is finding acceptable long-term sources of funding that will allow this organization to be around for the next generation of environmental journalists. I expect to see considerable energy devoted to this question during the next three years as the board explores the possibility of fundraising for an endowment.

Membership: Beth calls this one "the big Magilla." We're stable, and that's good, but we know we need to improve our membership outreach and retention. We want to be a more diverse group: more minorities, more journalists from related beats, more editors. You'll see us working harder to reach these potential members, but you'll also see us working to keep members through a variety of means, including regularly reviewing programs to make sure they're relevant to our members.

Another thought on membership: It's safe to say that the survey showed us to be a very lively, articulate, opinionated and demanding group, and that we care deeply about journalism and SEJ. This is a great strength when we're able to tap into the collective volunteer muscle. I have to say, however, that I believe our very, shall I say effervescent, nature can be weakness when we deal with divisions within our organization.

The leaders of SEJ need to find better ways to communi-

cate with members, and we also need to find more ways to bring volunteers together with other members who can use help. I'd like members to feel they have a sense of ownership in SEJ, and not just by voting for their representatives on the board.

Programs and Services: In the past, the board has been good at proposing new programs, and helping to carry them out. We've not been so vigilant in conducting periodic reviews. We're going to start this summer. One question we need to ask: If we want to add a new program, do we need to cut back someplace else due to the realities of our budget and staff time?

Integrity: SEJ'S greatest asset is its credibility and unambiguous status as an independent journalism organization. We're not a communications organization. We're not a public relations organization. We're not an environmental organization.

Stature: SEJ has worked hard to not only get a seat at the table with other professional journalism organizations, but it has actually become a role model for new J-groups. Reputation matters. It's built day-by-day, year-by-year and relationship-by-relationship. Nobody's going to forget that.

Again, we should be proud of what we've accomplished, and we should be excited about our future. Thank you again for all your efforts on behalf of SEJ. It's my job, and yours, to protect and build on the good works of SEJ. ❖

In case you didn't know...

In June, SEJ's elections committee will call for candidates to run for board positions this fall. Seats will open in active, associate and academic categories. For more information, please contact SEJ at sej@sej.org or (215) 884-8174.

Are you missing any of these SEJ membership benefits?

- SEJournal
- Online members-only directory for easy networking
- Discounts to annual conferences
- SEJ Web site with links, information and tips you don't want to miss
- Voluntary listservs such as

TipSheet, weekly emailing of environmental news tips listing sources and their contact information

SEJ-Beat, where you can post your stories and read about environmental coverage across the continent

SEJ-Talk, a discussion list where members can debate issues or ask for information or sources for a topic

SEJ-Mail, a paid press release distribution service that often carries useful information or job offers

SEJ-Español, for Spanish-language discussions

Corrections:

- Last issue's lead story, "George W. tilts to incentives, voluntarism" lost three words at the end of page 1. The sentence should have read: "But the plan was blocked in November by European negotiators at the international negotiations in The Hague."

- Jay Letto was incorrectly identified as a board member in the photo caption on page 4. Letto is on SEJ staff as annual conference manager.

Focus on human story brings history alive

By SHERRY DEVLIN

I almost missed the little rock cairn and cross. The rain was relentless. My tennis shoes were full of water; my rain jacket had long since given up its intended purpose.

The Forest Service ranger splashed to a stop behind me. Looking at the grave, he started to tell the story of the railroad workers who were trapped by a great fire—they called it “The Big Blowup”—on Aug. 20, 1910.

By the time a rescue train had collected all 1,000 workers, the trestles between them and safety were on fire. The engineers kept going, knowing they would eventually reach a tunnel—No. 22—long enough to fit the train inside.

But one worker, an immigrant from Montenegro whose name no one knew, became so frightened that he jumped off the train and was killed. The others waited inside the tunnel for six days until the fire and smoke subsided. They buried the immigrant on the other side of No. 22; railroad workers and retirees still tend his grave marked with the rock cairn.

While I was on the trail that rainy afternoon in May 1998 to write an outdoors story, I made a mental note to find out more about “The Big Blowup” before the fire’s 90th anniversary in 2000.

That little cairn and cross led to two discoveries for me: One, of men and women diving into creeks and hiding in mine tunnels to escape the flames. The other: a largely untold story of how one calamitous, 3-million-acre forest fire ignited a debate over national forests and led to the American people declaring war on wildfires.

By the time the resulting series ran in the *Missoulian* on the fire’s anniversary, Aug. 20-22, 2000, nature was biting back. A million acres were on fire in Montana alone.

“We have reached the limits of our ability to suppress fire,” said Jerry Williams, who has since been promoted to be the Forest Service’s national director of fire and aviation. “Everything we fear about fire is coming to rest on our doorstep right now.”

In reporting and writing about the 1910 fire and its aftermath, I looked first for stories of the people who were in the forests and towns overrun by the flames. I needed to know why one fire had such an impact on the Forest Service and its management of fires and forests.

Several sources were essential, beginning with author and historian Stephen Pyne of Arizona State University, likely the expert on the history of fire worldwide. His “Fire in America” should be in every newsroom in the West. (Soft cover, \$24.95, University of Washington Press) You’ll also want “America’s Fires,” written by Pyne and published by the Forest History Society in Durham, N.C. (Look for its Web site at

www.lib.duke.edu/forest/).

The Forest Service’s Northern Region archives in Missoula hold a thick collection of reports, files and personal accounts of “The Big Blowup.” Archives for newspapers in Missoula, Spokane and Seattle also were helpful.

Most surprising to me were the memos and journal articles tucked away in the Forest Service files showing the political fallout from the 1910 fires. The agency was in its infancy and Congress (along with several timber companies) was determined to protect the nation’s great forest reserves.

When Teddy Roosevelt relinquished the presidency to William Howard Taft, a donnybrook over forest management ensued. Taft fired Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot, and both Pinchot and his rangers (known as “little G.P.s”) were traumatized. When word came that 3 million acres had burned in Montana and northern Idaho, Pinchot literally ran to *The New York Times* with an opinion piece arguing that all fires must be fought—forever, without quarter.

“The gauntlet was thrown,” Pyne said. “It was light it or fight it. There was no neutral ground. There never has been with fire.”

No less compelling is the history of firefighting and fire science in the years after 1910. Again, there is a wealth of documentation and scientific articles in the Forest Service’s regional and national archives. Retired fire ecologist Steve Arno, who lives outside Stevensville, Mont., is an excellent source. He has collected the writings of scientists who warned for virtually all of the past 90 years of the consequences of excluding fire from forests. And he has done his own research through the agency’s Fire Sciences Lab in Missoula (another wonderful resource for reporters).

Also try the Forest Service’s retired “war horses” who love to tell about the evolution of firefighting. Bud Moore, who lives in Condon, Mont., was the agency’s top firefighter for years and approved the first trials of a let-it-burn policy.

Bob Mutch, also retired and in Missoula, was the scientist and fire manager who tended the first “prescribed natural fires”—over the curses of firefighters.

Orville Daniels, retired supervisor of Lolo National Forest in Missoula, was with Mutch from the start. He was the line officer responsible when one of the let-it-burn fires escaped on a 180,000-acre run during the 1988 fire season into the Scapegoat Wilderness and the Rocky Mountain Front of Montana.

In every case, I found stories of real live human beings and used them to show how wildland firefighting was born, how it changed the landscape and what that means for the Westerners who now live “amongst the trees.” Yes, it is a story of fire and trees. But it is also, importantly, a story of people.



“We have reached the limits of our ability to suppress fire.”

—Jerry Williams
Forest Service

Sherry Devlin covers natural resources and the environment for the Missoulian in Missoula, Montana. She won the Scripps-Howard Foundation’s 2000 National Journalism Award for environmental reporting at newspapers under 100,000 circulation for her series of stories on the 1910 fire.

Using the Web to report far, far away

By HEATHER DEWAR

Environmental projects take a lot of legwork. When *The Sun's* environmental team tackled a series about worldwide nitrogen pollution ("Nitrogen's Deadly Harvest," Sept. 24-28, 2000), the Internet gave us long legs.

Sun environmental columnist Tom Horton and I were lucky to work for editors who were willing to spend money on overseas travel. Surfing the Web helped us make good use of those precious travel days. And we learned some tricks that can add international sweep on the cheap, in an era when newsroom travel budgets are nearly non-existent. In the project's early stages, we used the 'net like a vacuum cleaner, sucking up information about nitrogen's impact on coastal waters around the world. We searched Lexis-Nexis, "Science," "Nature," the World Bank, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization and international environmental groups. We also did long interviews with the top U.S. experts on coastal eutrophication.

Soon we were convinced that no other newspaper had done what we wanted to do—a worldwide examination of the post-World War II boom in the use of nitrogen fertilizers and the way fertilizers and fossil fuels have changed the basic chemistry of the earth. We knew there was enough scientific research out there to make it doable, and we had a list of affected places: the Baltic, the Gulf of Mexico, the China coast and the Great Barrier Reef, among others.

Having sold the project to our editors, we used the Web to refine our travel plans. For example, I tracked down a USDA online map showing which Midwestern counties used the most nitrogen fertilizer. The map sent me to Iowa's Raccoon River, the most nitrate-laden of the rivers flowing into the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico "Dead Zone."

We set up an electronic "tickle file" using three Lexis-Nexis searches: nitrogen and water pollution, harmful algae

blooms and aquaculture (we had anecdotal reports from Asia that convinced us this was a big, under-reported source of nitrogen pollution). I set up the searches to run daily and dump the results into my e-mail.

Each day I skimmed about 20 stories from English-language newspapers all over the world. These gave us leads on sources and kept us up to date on every thing from marine mammal die-offs in California to toxic algae blooms threatening salmon farms in Scotland. We also learned about experiments—some promising, some goofy—to control nitrogen runoff.

After the U.S. accidentally bombed China's embassy in Yugoslavia, the Chinese government denied our visa application. Frank Langfitt, *The Sun's* Beijing bureau chief, was drafted onto the nitrogen team. Frank had no trouble finding toxic tides and dead zones along the Chinese coast. But to pin down the cause, we needed scientific research, which was scanty. The Chinese government's penchant for classifying virtually all scientific research papers as state secrets complicated matters.

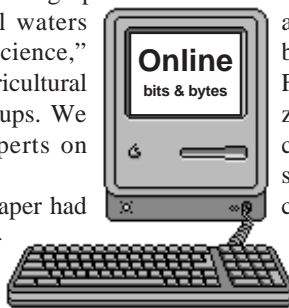
The 'net helped us get around government censors. In Baltimore, I worked scientific and online sources to track down Chinese scientists, whom Frank interviewed. He was routinely denied access to their research, but he got the names of friends and collaborators in the West. I used the Internet to find these researchers in the United States, Germany, Holland and Australia, and they e-mailed me copies of the forbidden works.

We used other Web sites to help fill in the details of the big picture. The Australian Institute of Marine Science has a great site on the worldwide decline of coral reefs. The US Geological Survey had information on nitrate contamination in U.S. drinking water wells. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization's country-by-country, year-by-year database of food production and consumption helped us document the surge in meat consumption in developing countries, especially Asia. And we found an information-packed Web site (<http://heed.unh.edu>), funded by NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), that summed up a variety of ecological upsets in oceans around the world.

Finally, the Internet brought us some of our best photos. We found our Day One display art, a vivid red tide shot, through the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute's Web site on harmful algal blooms. And when we found we lacked a crucial shot of a Chinese peasant spreading fertilizer, I found an online photo archive posted by a former Cornell post-doctoral fellow who'd done fieldwork in China.

The young geographer had just the right shot—and coincidentally, he'd just landed his first job, at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He swapped the picture for 25 series reprints and a mention in his hometown paper. Thanks to the Internet, we got the art we needed, and he got a free text for his spring seminar.

Heather Dewar is environmental reporter for The (Baltimore) Sun.



Excerpt...

Before the "green revolution" came to China, it took roughly 6 tons of river mud to fertilize a rice paddy small enough to fit in the corner of a football field. Hua carried the mud on his back, 130 pounds at a time, in bamboo baskets lashed to a wooden pole.

Now 58-year-old Hua spends about a week each planting season sprinkling his field with hundreds of pounds of chemical fertilizer, leaving plenty of time for playing mah-jong or fishing in a nearby river.

Except there aren't any fish in the river anymore. Nor turtles, prawns or water fit to drink.

Downstream from Hua's paddy is the mighty Yangtze, the third-longest river in the world and the last stronghold of an endangered sturgeon with a 50-million-year lineage. The Yangtze is so tainted with factory waste and fertilizer runoff from more than 300 million villagers' fields that it can't even come close to meeting relatively lax Chinese standards for industrial rivers.

A little arsenic in your water?

By CHERYL HOGUE

Quick, a word association: What goes with arsenic?

Most people will probably answer “old lace” rather than “drinking water.” But arsenic in drinking water is grabbing national and local headlines this year and attracting the attention of Congress and many interest groups.

The issue isn't the big, lethal doses that the elderly ladies in the play and movie “Arsenic and Old Lace” serve up in elderberry wine to knock off lonely gentlemen guests. It is rather what low level of arsenic should the Environmental Protection Agency allow in the public's drinking water.

Wells—mainly in the western United States—are the focus of this policy since arsenic is almost never a problem for communities that draw their water from rivers and lakes. In some areas, arsenic occurs in rocks and ends up in ground water. Part of what sets the concern about arsenic in drinking water apart from other environmental issues is that the contamination is natural and not from industry.

Arsenic is an element, number 33 on the periodic table. By itself, arsenic can accurately be described in stories as a substance, chemical or element but not as a compound or mineral. (However, there are minerals and synthetic compounds, including some pesticides, that contain arsenic.) Because arsenic is a basic building block of matter, it generally cannot be destroyed. Technology exists to strip it out of water, though it can be expensive, especially for small water systems.

Cardiovascular disease linked to exposure to arsenic through drinking water prompted the U.S. Public Health Service in 1942 to set a drinking water standard for the element of 50 parts per billion (ppb). This national standard remains in effect today and now falls in the bailiwick of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Arsenic timeline

1942 – Public Health Service sets a drinking water standard of 50 ppb based on cardiovascular effects.

1975 – EPA adopts 50 ppb interim standard for arsenic (this remains in effect).

1986 – Through the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) amendments, Congress requires EPA to set a new arsenic standard by 1989.

1989 – EPA misses the deadline.

1996 – Through SDWA amendments, Congress sets a new deadline of Jan. 1, 2001.

2000 – Congress extends the deadline to June 22, 2001.

January 2001 – Carol Browner, President Clinton's EPA administrator, issues new arsenic standard of 10 ppb.

March 2001 – Christine Todd Whitman, President Bush's EPA administrator, withdraws the standard three days before it was to take effect.

April 2001 – Whitman announces EPA will issue a new standard by Feb. 22, 2002, that will take effect in 2006.

In the last quarter century, scientists have determined that arsenic in drinking water is also a human carcinogen, associated with cancer of the bladder, skin, lung and prostate. It can also lead to diabetes and anemia. The World Health Organization, a United Nations Agency, recommends a maximum allowable level of 10 ppb for arsenic in drinking water.

The National Research Council in 1999 concluded that the U.S. standard of 50 ppb standard for arsenic was too high—but it did not recommend a new level. The Clinton Administration issued a new arsenic standard of 10 ppb in January. The Bush Administration withdrew it in March, citing the need for more study. EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman says the

agency will consider two new scientific papers, issued since January, and will conduct further analysis of the rule's cost before determining a new standard.

One of those scientific papers, published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, concluded that arsenic interferes with the action of hormones, making

it an endocrine disrupter. Researchers at Dartmouth Medical School found that very low concentrations of arsenic suppress the action of cell receptors for glucocorticoids, hormones that help regulate embryo development, blood glucose levels, blood vessel functions and the development of lungs and skin.

A second paper by Taiwanese researchers, published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, is the newest study linking bladder cancer to ingestion of water containing arsenic at concentrations between 10 and 50 ppb.

Whitman is asking the National Academy of Sciences to conduct an expedited review of a range of 3 ppb to 20 ppb for a possible new standard. She said in April that EPA will issue a new arsenic standard in 2002, though the regulation would not take effect until 2006.



Cheryl Hogue is a reporter for Chemical & Engineering News.

Useful resources

- U.S. Geological Survey map of arsenic in ground water: <http://co.water.usgs.gov/trace/arsenic/>
- Natural Resources Defense Council list of public water systems reporting arsenic levels: <http://www.nrdc.org/water/drinking/arsenic/appa.asp>
- Press release on Dartmouth Medical School study: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~news/releases/feb01/arsenic.html>
- World Health Organization fact sheet on arsenic in drinking water: <http://www.who.int/inf-fs/en/fact210.html>
- Congressional Research Service report detailing the development of U.S. policy on arsenic in drinking water: <http://www.cnire.org/nle/h2o-40.html>

Environment beat...(from page 1)

voracious for many, many more.”

Jehl and his counterparts at the other leading national newspapers said their editors’ interest in environmental and natural resources stories has increased “across the board.”

“The stories that are rooted very much in the debate in Washington,” Jehl said, “are the ones that we find most compelling right now.”

What if California goes ‘belly up’?

Veteran *Wall Street Journal* reporter John Fialka, also reporting from Washington, agreed that controversies surrounding new Bush initiatives, as well as prospects of rolling electricity blackouts in California and elsewhere, are fueling increased interest among editors in environment and energy stories. But he cautioned that “you just can’t cover environment qua environment.”

“There really isn’t a beat there, because the issues are raised in the context of other things. If you’re wedded just to sources on the environment, there’s a lot of theology there,” Fialka said, especially with air quality and water pollution issues.

While California’s electricity supply problems have fueled increased coverage, coverage will expand still more if California “goes belly-up” this summer or if brownouts and blackouts spread to other states, Fialka said.

Those developments “will raise a whole different realm of issues from clean coal and politics to more enterprise stories, not just stories covering ANWR [the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge],” Fialka said.

Jehl added: “Conflict is always a valuable item in journalism. It’s easier to tell a story when there’s conflict than when there’s not. The general consensus that existed between environmentalists and the Clinton Administration has dried up now. I don’t expect the situation to change in this Administration.”

Jehl and Fialka also agreed that political developments in Washington rather than science news are more likely to spur increased coverage of environmental and energy issues.

“At least for now, it is a Washington story,” said *The Times*’ Jehl, but it’s one still best told from the ground, meaning outside the Beltway. He said he regrets that his own reporting, driven by Bush Administration initiatives, has become “more Washington-centric” than it previously had been.

The Journal’s fondness for infrastructure and regulatory issues, Fialka said, has focused coverage on issues such as clean air and clean water. Acknowledging his own Eastern bias, he added that the paper may lean more toward the U.S. EPA than Interior Department issues.

From Fialka’s perspective, the increased political heat in Washington on environmental regulatory matters isn’t all pluses. “The downside of having a hot issue is that it traps you in Washington,” he lamented.

Before the Bush Administration, interest in the beat wasn’t as high, and Fialka said he had “more time to pick my shots.”

Fialka agreed with Jehl that it’s important to have time to get out of Washington to tell the stories on this beat.

“It’s different to cover the politics of something and then cover ‘the something,’” Fialka said. “You really do need to get

out of D.C.”

Signs of increased interest in stories?

Among indicators suggesting an uptick in editors’ interest in covering environmental and natural resources issues:

- *The Washington Post*, after going nearly two years without a full-time daily beat reporter, has assigned veteran Capitol Hill budget, tax and appropriations correspondent Eric Pianin to the environmental beat. Pianin points to “an enormous appetite among my editors and my readers” for environmental news, largely as a result of the new Bush Administration taking “a very different approach, one bent on challenging and reversing” Clinton Administration initiatives.

- *The Post*, in an internal announcement, said that “after a long hiatus,” environment would become a daily beat. “There are few subjects right now of more immense importance to readers, and with the beginning of a new Administration, the tug of war between environmental and energy policy issues promises to be a lively one” the memo stated.

- The *Los Angeles Times*, while still in transition from its sale to the Tribune Company, has named former Capitol Hill reporter Elizabeth Shogren to cover environmental issues from the paper’s Washington, D.C., bureau. The *Times* bureau long had treated environment as “kind of an occasional beat,” but she said top management in Los Angeles now “think this is a really important beat.”

Don’t be mistaken into thinking that environmental and natural resources stories necessarily are now an easy ticket to above-the-fold page-one real estate. None of the reporters interviewed for this article argued that environmental stories are a quick ticket to Page One, the way some said that health and even science stories are.

If it were Gore...still a newsroom ‘sleeper’?

Acknowledging increased interest in the beat, driven in part by the new Bush Administration, *New York Times* science writer Sandra Blakeslee said, “I guess if Gore had been elected, I think it would still have been a sleeper” in *The Times* news room.

“What’s really new?” Blakeslee asked rhetorically. “It’s not like science, where you can have a new particle discovered or stem cells, or such.”

Blakeslee said a key to covering environmental issues effectively lies in having expert reporters knowledgeable on both the science and the policy and politics of the issues.

“It’s hard to cover both. It’s almost two different fields, and it’s a real luxury to have reporters doing both,” she said.

Environmental and science reporter Andrew Revkin, who in June 2000 switched from metro reporting to global issues, taking over the beat of the retired William K. Stevens, said he’s still adjusting to the global environmental beat.

“While with Metro,” Revkin said, “editors were always hungry, and I had an easy time getting good play. Doing enterprise stories and the regional environmental slot, there was a lot going on, and they were always hungry for stories.”

“Since the switch to international, there really is not a great hunger for it right now,” Revkin said.

There's also a bit of the MEGO (my eyes glaze over), and it's not uncommon to hear: "It's all incremental, haven't we already done that?" he said.

It's easier to get pieces into *The Times'* well-respected Science Times section, Revkin said. "Getting stuff out front, and larger projects, that's been more challenging," he added. Getting there, he said, too often requires the story to be "unusual or dramatic."

"It's hard to get a pure science issue that relates to the environment the attention I sometimes think it deserves," Revkin continued. "Even the quantum physics stuff sometimes tends to just walk onto page one."

The Science Times section can be a "safe haven" for environmental science stories, "kind of a backup for us," Revkin said. Over time, he sees stories about private companies increasingly assuming greater environmental stewardship responsibilities as another boost to coverage.

The Post: From 'taking a pass' to 'a real interest'

At *The Washington Post*, newly ensconced environmental beat reporter Eric Pianin acknowledged "a fairly steep learning curve" for a journalist whose previous environmental coverage was limited largely to "the traditional legislative rider on hard rock mining and so forth."

He said *The Post* "by and large took a pass on the full-time daily environment beat" for a while in the face of what he calls "one fascinating and compelling story after another" in the political arena. The newspaper's "bread and butter" election

coverage, the Clinton impeachment and scandals stories, and other breaking news for an extended time crowded out environmental coverage, notwithstanding occasional stories by reporters Joby Warrick, now on the paper's national investigative team, energy reporter Peter Behr and others.

In his first several months on the beat, however, Pianin said he has found "a real interest" among the editors.

"Getting space is not a big problem," he said.

He sees issues involving energy exploration and development, public lands and "the politics of the environment" as the driving forces on the beat in coming months.

Environment vs. AIDS in Africa ?

Health and science group editor Michael Waldholz of *The Wall Street Journal* said he thinks the environmental beat "tends to wax and wane" more than many other beats at the paper because "beats in general tend to be split by companies.

"Health care is a huge business, and the environment is not," he teased. "The *Journal* looks at the general world through the lens of capitalism and commercialism. It's a great newspaper for those areas in which there are industries that really pull the strings."

Waldholz pointed to competition from other, sometimes related beats as a common impediment to increasing environmental coverage.

"Health issues are just so pressing right now," he said. "It's a priority issue."

(Continued next page)

Meanwhile, at the television networks ...

Environmental coverage may be experiencing something of a rebound at leading national newspapers, but it's far from clear that broadcasters have yet to pick up on the trend.

"It breaks my heart to read the daily newspapers," lamented a Washington, D.C., bureau correspondent for one of the three major networks, speaking on condition of anonymity. "There's very little appetite, even though there are major issues on the burner right now. Weekends, yes, but weeknights, no.

"I could do a story almost daily nowadays, but it's virtually as hard as it's ever been," this reporter continued. "The opening news part is dominated by the 'news of the day,' and the rest is pre-programmed, ordered up in advance. That doesn't leave much room for other things, and it all falls into predictable categories, primarily medicine and health."

"All the network newscasts are going the way we're going—the top block is top breaking news, and the rest is pre-programmed." The situation is particularly frustrating, the reporter said, because of all the changes in the Bush Administration, including the appointment of new EPA, Interior and Energy chiefs.

For years, CNN boasted that it had the best environmental coverage. But since AOL Time-Warner acquired it, the weekly "Earth Matters" show and the nature section of the CNN.com web site have been eliminated.

Some people wailed in protest, but not enough apparently, and certainly not enough by TV audience ratings standards.

CNN's Peter Dykstra, executive producer for science, technology and environment said the network's 1:30 p.m. Saturday Science and Technology Week does about half of the stories "Earth Matters" used to carry.

"We could have lost twice as much and still be doing more than anybody else on TV," Dykstra said.

But, Dykstra acknowledged: "Losing the weekend show was a big blow. ... It's hard to avoid a conclusion when both the show and the separate web page disappear at the same time.

"The concern is that this is a time when at least at the political end the story is as hot as it's been since (Newt Gingrich's) Contract with America," Dykstra added. "That makes it impossible to make the case that nothing has changed."

Along with "Earth Matters" and the Web site, another immediate victim of the AOL Time-Warner/CNN merger was the "Turner Environment Division" or "TED," often considered one of CNN founder Ted Turner's pet projects.

Among those let go was CNN's controversial vice president for environment, Barbara Pyle, whose two-sided business card reflected her political environmentalist activism on one side and her role in broadcast journalism on the other.

Pyle, who worked on the animated series "Captain Planet" and who produced occasional documentaries for Turner Broadcasting, was among a "TED" staff of 10 getting pink slips along with some 500 other Atlanta-based Turner Broadcasting and CNN News Group employees.

"There's still interest in covering the environment" at CNN, Dykstra said, climate change issues in particular. "But it's hard not to draw the conclusion that it's a loss."

Cover Story

"Would I like to have a reporter doing just environment right now? Yeah, I'd love to. But I need two reporters doing other things right now too, I've got so many other things that we're also not covering well now. I mean, who is doing a good enough job covering AIDS in Africa?"

The Los Angeles Times: re-energizing coverage

Across the country at the *Los Angeles Times*, reporters and editors see the beat "in transition," as environmental specialist Marla Cone said. It's a transition that could make the beat more timely. For several years, she acknowledged, the paper "was always getting beat on national stories" because it had no dedicated beat reporter in its Washington, D.C., bureau.

Times editors "now recognize they were being beat, so they've re-energized coverage" with Shogren in D.C. and with the assignment of Frank Clifford, who previously covered government, land use, and urban affairs for the *Times*, as environmental editor in Los Angeles.

Cone, now on an 18-month sabbatical, pointed to a new coastal beat and fisheries reporter, Ken Weiss, as boosting coverage. Also, the state's roving reporter, Bettina Boxall, frequently writes on Sierra Nevada issues. At the same time, she worries that health-related issues, such as endocrine disrupters, an issue she has written on extensively, will go uncovered.

Another worry, Cone said, is some top editors might begin accepting the Los Angeles basin's notorious smog as "normal" and, therefore, less newsworthy.

Despite some of the improvements in Los Angeles, Cone predicted environmental journalists will continue to need to convince editors of the importance of environmental stories and of readers' appetite for them.

What's more, the energy story might also threaten to crowd out other environment stories, Cone said. There appears to be "some sense now that if you're not writing on energy, it doesn't go," she said.

New L.A. Times editor brings strong background

Frank Clifford, the new environment and science editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, recently returned to the newspaper after an Alicia Patterson Foundation sabbatical. He found a newspaper in midst of an ownership transition—from Times-Mirror to the Tribune Company—and a paper that no longer has the

seemingly boundless staff and column inches long associated with it.

But he acknowledged that the paper's environmental coverage declined in recent years as space was devoted more to issues ranging from the O.J. Simpson trial to the state's economy, earthquakes and fires.

"I don't think environmental coverage was as prominent as it might be," Clifford said, despite the "good intentions" of editors.

Clifford pointed, for instance, to a former Washington, D.C., bureau reporter who long prepared to travel overseas to cover the Kyoto Protocol negotiations in the 1990s, but editors canceled the plan at the last minute. "That sort of thing won't happen under the Tribune folks," he said.

Known among his colleagues as a rich source of story ideas (he is known to read the *High Country News* from front to back), Clifford vowed to tread lightly in pushing his own ideas on journalists reporting to him.

It won't take too much to improve on recent coverage by major news organizations, Clifford said. "My feeling is that environmental coverage during this past election was as bad as I've ever seen it, and as nonexistent as I've ever seen it," he said.

The new president's approach toward environmental issues shouldn't be a surprise, given Bush's record as governor in Texas, Clifford said.

"The failure of the media to cover those issues on somebody who thinks himself a westerner, from *The New York Times* on down," according to Clifford, "has left people now dropping their jaws" in surprise.

"I have a difficult time faulting the *Los Angeles Times* for missing those stories when I see it across the board," Clifford said.

Since he first joined the newspaper in 1982, Clifford said he's seen the newspaper develop "more of an intersection between science and environmental coverage." He hopes excellent science coverage can clarify issues on which public consensus may be elusive, such as global warming.

"Politics are going to rule here for a while," said Clifford. But he hopes the increased intersection between good science and environmental coverage wins out in the end.

Bud Ward is executive director of the National Safety Council's Environmental Health Center.

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Moyers...(from page 1)

River. As the series progresses, Moyers will try to assess the state of the world's environment by looking at some of the problems highlighted in a United Nations millennial ecosystem report, he said.

Most of Moyers' work has focused on how special interest money influences government decision-making and policy. The environment and efforts to change it merges nicely into that long-standing interest, Moyers said.

"Trade Secrets" was the product of the converging interests of two independent journalists who have collaborated on other projects focusing on how money taints the political process in America and shifts the balance of power.

Jones said she brought the essence of "Trade Secrets" to Moyers.

"I learned about the existence of this archive of documents more than two years ago from the people at the Environmental Working Group," she said.

The "archive" was a house full of documents gathered through the discovery process by a Lake Charles, La., lawyer who brought a damages suit against the makers of vinyl chloride.

Reporter Jim Morris told that story in the *Houston Chronicle* in 1998, but Jones felt there would be much more to tell. "There were more than a million pages of documents," she said. "For an environmental reporter, or any kind of reporter, that is pretty intriguing," she said.

She raised some money from foundations to look into the documents. She and her staff spent six to eight months combing through the archive. "When we really began to realize we had something potentially larger on our hands was when we began to look beyond the vinyl chloride, when we began to look at the minutes of meetings of the board of directors and various committees" of the Chemical Manufacturers Association, the former name of today's American Chemical Council, Jones said.

When Jones told Moyers what she found in the records, "I knew it was a story," Moyers said.

"The best stories are those that connect the dots," taking smaller, isolated incidents and events and putting together a larger picture or pattern, Moyers said.

"I had been perplexed for years as to why these Right-To-Know initiatives had been going down," he said of ballot referendums designed to provide the public with more information about chemicals in their communities. Such efforts had failed in such states as California and Ohio.

He watched with interest as a campaign finance reform effort was defeated in Massachusetts and "the chemical industry was a big player in that," he said.

Moyers also made note of the chemical industry's political campaign contributions, but said he was unsure of what it was attempting to accomplish.

"So when Sherry talked about efforts years ago to keep the workers and the public from knowing about the first research into toxic chemicals" which questioned the safety of some products like vinyl chloride, the dots began to form a picture, he said.

"It's like the aha!" Moyers said. "There is something in the documents of the past that connect to the lights on Times Square right now."

Jones said "one of the ahas ... was the first time we saw

political action committees mentioned in the board of directors minutes. And then the exhortation to the companies that this was a new method in creating a Congress that would listen more to their arguments and that sort of thing."

Moyers said, "as an old government hand, I realized—although I didn't realize the reason why, per se—that we had a regulatory system that is shaped more to the industry's liking and to the industry's interest than to the public's interest."

But he said he was not interested in doing "a story that was historical in nature." He wanted a story with parallels to today's "tragic transformation of American politics into an arms race of money. ... The winner is the guy who can spend the most."

But how could he tell that story? The evidence of the story's premise—that industry withheld damaging information—were documents. And paper trails do not make dramatic television.

"Television is meant to be experienced, not read. That is why it is really hard to do these document-driven stories," Moyers said. "You have to imagine the audience at home not reading the story, but hearing the story," Moyers said.

One way to make the documents come alive was to make them a character in the story, a decision that ended up being at the center of the controversy sparked by "Trade Secrets."

"The documents are the heart of the story," Jones said. "They are there and they speak for themselves."

The "documents were never meant to be heard by the public," Jones said.

Moyers agreed. While the two managed to track down some of the people who wrote the documents, none would speak about them. Moyers decided that having a public relations person who had no firsthand knowledge of the information would not be useful.

The documents had to take on a persona of their own, Moyers said. That's why an announcer, not Moyers, read the documents. "This is what the documents would say if they were anthropomorphic," Moyers said.

Television journalism—and much of journalism as a whole—achieves its best results when it tells stories in human terms. So injured workers and their families were used to highlight the impact of the story.

"You have to talk to the human beings," Jones said.

Elaine Ross, whose lawsuit filed over the death of her husband started the archive, was easy to find.

But there were workers who suffered injury who were not involved in a lawsuit or easy to find, like former B.F. Goodrich worker Bernie Skaggs of Louisville, Ky. Skaggs' x-rays showed the bones in his fingertips disappearing after he began working with vinyl chloride.



Photo by DON PERDUE

Moyers' continuing series on environment, "Earth on Edge," begins on the prairies of Kansas with farmer Charlie Melander.

Jones said they found Skaggs by simply going through the phone book until they found the correct Skaggs. “Part of this was old gumshoe reporting,” Jones said.

Skaggs had never known how the chemical affected him—or that the company had known of the problem—until Moyers showed him documents Jones had uncovered. The moment Moyers showed Skaggs the documents, Jones and Moyers knew they had a unique story.

“There is no story until there is a storyteller to tell his own lived experience,” Moyers said. “We needed the voice of a real person.”

Skaggs also provided another important element, Moyers said. The workers trusted the companies and “if the company said it wasn’t dangerous, you believed it was not dangerous... . The sad reality is it is the real and ordinary people who are abused by authority.”

As they did in other segments of the story, Moyers and Jones attempted to contact the doctors and other officials who wrote the memos and made the decisions. “They declined to talk to us. I suspect both of those doctors might have had some interesting things to say.”

Journalism once “took a point of view and pushed it” and Moyers sees “Trade Secrets” as a legacy of that journalistic style. “Ida Tarbell didn’t go to the public relations person at the oil company ... You just get propaganda and not information.”

Moyers also wanted to stay away from the “one the-one-hand, one the-other-hand” journalism which often confuses viewers and readers and does not necessarily end up serving “fairness and total accuracy,” he said.

The American Chemical Council spent most of its time at the end of the program responding to Moyers’ allegations. The council today says the story Moyers told was an old one and is not representative of today’s industry.

The council went on the offensive before the special was aired. It followed up with a pointed critique. “The facts are that the chemical industry itself identified two of the problems featured on the program, identified their causes, published the information in widely read journals, and solved the problems 20 or 30 years ago,” the council said.

“The stories they tell are tragic and if a person were to believe that they represent the whole picture, he couldn’t help but be moved and upset,” the council said.

But that response, Moyers and Jones said, does not answer why so many documents directed that the contents be kept secret, like one memo from B.F. Goodrich to other vinyl chloride producers:

“Gentlemen: There is no question but that skin lesions, absorption of bone of the terminal joints of the hands and circulatory changes can occur in workers associated with the polymerization of PVC.

“Of course the confidentiality of this data is exceedingly important.”

As he begins a lengthy series on the environment, Moyers said he has begun to think more deeply about the future, prompted by a grandchild’s question: “How will the world look when I am as old as you?”

“What will the world look like in 2058?” he wondered. His mental image was not the prettiest of pictures.

“Most of the blunders human beings make they have the capacity to repair. The environment is one of the things we can’t repair,” Moyers said. “I think we only have 30 years to reverse the trend.”

Mike Dunne is environment reporter at The (Baton Rouge) Advocate.

Does ‘truth’ trump fairness?

By **TIM WHEELER**

This is one journalist who found it painful to watch “Trade Secrets.”

Painful because it hit home, literally. When Bill Moyers talked about how American chemical industry executives agreed to keep quiet about European research linking vinyl chloride with a rare liver cancer, the signature on the “secrecy agreement” displayed on the TV screen was my father’s.

The story Moyers tells in the first 90 minutes of the two-hour show is of how chemical companies kept workers, the government and the public in the dark for decades about the health hazards of some of their products. The documentary focuses on three chemicals, but most of the story deals with vinyl chloride, a gas used in making a widely used plastic (and at one time used in aerosol products like hair spray).

Relying on an archive of internal industry documents obtained in a dead worker’s lawsuit, it’s a powerful story Moyers tells—as evidenced by the outpouring of viewers’ outrage against chemical companies left on PBS’s on-line bulletin boards.

As a long-time environmental journalist, I can’t disagree with many of the points made in “Trade Secrets.” But I do take

issue with the decision of Moyers and colleague Sherry Jones not to interview anyone from the industry while putting their story together. I may lack objectivity here, given my family connection, but they violated what for me is a cardinal rule of journalism—to seek the truth by collecting information from all parties involved, then sorting it out for the readers or audience.

Moyers’ narrative covered the essence of the story accurately enough. Industry officials had reason to suspect as early as the late 1950s that vinyl chloride could be harmful at levels to which chemical workers were routinely exposed at the time. They did not have firm scientific evidence until much later. But it is clear, especially in hindsight, that the industry did not respond quickly or openly enough to the early warnings about vinyl chloride’s toxicity.

It is a story that was widely reported 25 years ago, including existence of the so-called secrecy agreement. What gives Moyers’ report its punch are the previously unpublicized internal memos and minutes of industry group meetings stamped “confidential.” PBS posted some of them on its Web site, and many more have been archived on-line by the Environmental Working Group.

(Continued next page)

My father is a chemical engineer who worked his entire career for Union Carbide. He helped produce polyvinyl chloride, a widely used plastic made from vinyl chloride; he also was a member of an industry group that tracked the health research and helped formulate the industry's response.

In those documents, chemical company executives, including my father, discuss the growing scientific evidence that vinyl chloride could harm workers and the public. A pair of historians who reviewed the documents for law firms representing dead or dying chemical workers say in "Trade Secrets" that the papers demonstrate an industry conspiracy to cover up evidence of vinyl chloride's hazards.

That is certainly one way to read the internal documents. Going through them myself, I am struck by how often the executives expressed fear that their industry could be shut down by public panic, "irresponsible" lawsuits and an overreaction by the newly created federal occupational health and environmental agencies.

Yet at least a few of the memos do argue for prompt public disclosure and contain expressions of concern for workers' health or public safety. One, written by my father in 1966 about research linking vinyl chloride to a degenerative skin and bone condition, bluntly reports that there is a "definite health problem" and "our people" must be told and that the industry must spend more on health and safety to reduce the hazard.

Was there a coverup? American chemical manufacturers did agree in late 1972 not to disclose an Italian researcher's preliminary findings that rats get an extremely rare cancer, angiosarcoma of the liver, from vinyl chloride exposures similar to what U.S. factory workers were experiencing.

The documents don't give the context of that agreement, nor does "Trade Secrets." Here's what my father—who's retired, but still very much around to interview—said: European chemical manufacturers were financing the Italian research, but wanted to prevent premature release of the as-yet unpublished study. American companies desperately wanted to know what the study showed so they could respond as quickly as possible, but could only get briefed if they agreed not to divulge the information. "They had us over a barrel," my father said.

Getting a heads-up on the Italian study prompted American companies to begin canvassing their employee files for workers who might have died of the extremely rare cancer. B.F. Goodrich turned up three cases and reported them to the government in January 1974, a little over a year after the secrecy pact was signed.

That year's delay in disclosure is what prompted continuing allegations of an industry coverup—that and the failure of the U.S. manufacturers to promptly report those preliminary results to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Whether because of the confidentiality agreement or their own fear of being shut down, industry executives were not forthcoming with government scientists when they met with them in July 1973. Industry executives claim they mentioned a study finding tumors at levels below the government-sanctioned safe worker exposure. But they did not explicitly inform officials

about the Italian study.

Once the worker deaths were disclosed by the industry, the federal government moved to curb vinyl chloride exposure. Although industry complained at first that the costs of meeting the strict new limit would put it out of business, it quickly complied, shutting down older plants in the process.

What this sad episode in history says to me is how horrible decisions can be made by good and decent people whose judgment is compromised by an organization mentality. The corporations let their fear of lawsuits and costly government regulation cloud their judgment about how forthcoming they should be. In the end, the industry has survived, though it continues to be plagued by lawsuits and a credibility problem, as "Trade Secrets" and its follow-up panel discussion shows.

My father was no whistleblower, no "Insider." Even now, in his 70s, all it takes to get him grumbling is the mention of Carol Browner's name. But he was not indifferent to the safety and health concerns about vinyl chloride. As a plant production manager, he was exposed himself, and for years went in for regular checkups.

In retirement, he has been deposed repeatedly for some of the lawsuits filed by dead or dying workers, including the case Moyers focused on. My father was certainly around to interview had the PBS team wanted to understand the context of those documents they were reading. Yet the story Moyers tells, relying almost exclusively on the plaintiff's lawyers, demonizes all industry engineers, executives, doctors and scientists.

You are shaped by your background in ways you often don't understand. My own passion for environmental journalism stems, I've come to realize, from my upbringing in a West Virginia chemical-factory town that later earned the nickname "Cancer Valley." I guess it's my way of dealing with the legacy of the industry that gave me a good life while causing harm to the environment and to some people's health. I see that as the story of our society's Faustian bargain with technology.

I don't want to come off as an industry apologist. Over the years, I've covered occupational health controversies and pulled no punches—reporting just last year on a lawsuit by former tire factory workers suffering cancers and other health problems they related to exposure to toxic substances at the plant. But I've also made sure I give everyone—including industry people—a chance to explain their actions and positions.

I'm also not arguing for a false "balance" in reporting controversies. Let the facts take you where they will. But you don't know how important fairness is until you or someone close to you is the subject of an investigation. And you can't really be sure you have the whole story until you make the effort to talk to everyone—including your "target." It's not a collaboration—it's called seeking the truth. That's the problem I have with this report by Bill Moyers, a journalist and thinker for whom I otherwise have great respect.

Tim Wheeler is a reporter for The Sun in Baltimore who covered environment for 10 years there and still writes environmental stories from time to time.

Viewpoints
is a regular feature offering a forum to those who deal with environmental issues in the media. Opposing viewpoints are welcome.

Blue Frontier: Saving America's Living Seas

By David Helvarg
W.H. Freeman, 320 pp, 2001.

If it's possible to wax poetic about the way offshore oil rigs attract fish while still remaining a staunch environmentalist, then author David Helvarg has succeeded.

Aboard a helicopter, he writes, "We circle around the flat-topped platform called Pompano. Owned by BP-Amoco, it is the second tallest bottom-fixed structure in the world, drilling into the ocean floor 1,310 feet below the surface. About 700 feet wide at its base, it is taller than the Empire State Building."

Another platform, Amberjack, is described as "the ultimate Tinkertoy. An active drilling rig, it towers 272 feet from the waterline to the top of its bottle-shaped derrick. Its density of utilized space is a structural salute to human ingenuity."

Author of "The War Against the Greens," Helvarg, in "Blue Frontier," delivers in-depth reporting on subjects such as ocean mining, reef management, oil exploration, over-fishing and government ineptitude when it comes to formulating sound environmental policy. The author clearly has divided his time between research libraries and the field. He has visited the underwater living quarters of scientists off the coast of Key West, climbed the towering oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and gone diving off Monterey where Californians keep sharp lookout for white sharks, all with the intention to see up close what's going on.

At the start of the chapter on offshore petroleum drilling, Helvarg quotes an oil company spokesman recalling the Huntington Beach oil spill of 1990. The spokesman says, "Then this Hollywood star pulls up in his limo, must have been half a block long, wanting to know what we've done to his beach. And I'm thinking, hey that limo of yours doesn't run on sunbeams you know."

Helvarg has been beneath the surface of the sea to examine precisely the rampant devastation of fragile ecosystems, the destruction of coral reefs by disease, human waste, phosphate blanketing and sheer overuse, particularly of dive boats that anchor rather than use fixed moorings.

Although the Alaskan coast dominates the news in 2001 whenever discussion turns to offshore drilling, Helvarg noted, "There are some 4,000 platforms operating in the Gulf of Mexico today. Offshore drilling accounts for 20 percent of U.S.

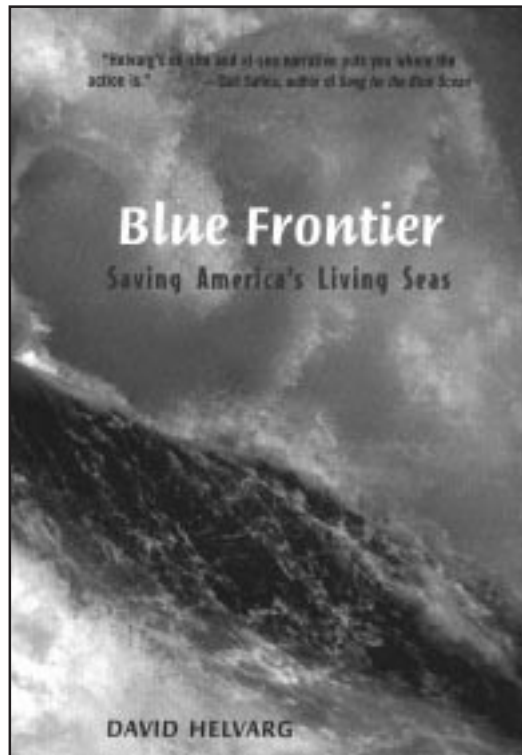
**Member
Author**

oil production and 27 percent of its natural gas. Despite heated debate over drilling off California, Florida, Alaska and North Carolina, 93 percent of all present offshore production takes place in the gulf." He found that many of those expensive rigs are run by disciplined crews who produce lucrative returns for investors.

Helvarg has meticulously and colorfully described how the oil industry was created in North America and included a brief review of the movie industry and the media impact it produced. For example, he cited the 1953 film "Thunder Bay" starring Jimmy Stewart as an oil geologist confronting suspicious shrimp fishermen in Louisiana's bayou. As Helvarg put it, the film reflects the dominant view of the time when progress and industry were thought to be synonymous, while today, an oil gusher would be viewed as an ecological disaster.

Key Largo off Southern Florida epitomizes another dilemma. In Helvarg's words, "Branching corals that once grew here remain only as skeletal sticks in bleached rubble fields. Many of the abundant rock corals are being eaten away by diseases that have spread in an epidemic wave throughout the Florida Keys. The names of the diseases tell the story: black band, white band, white plague and aspergillus, a fungus normally found in terrestrial soil that can shred fan corals like moths shred Irish lace."

Through interviews and an exhaustive search for truth, Helvarg has broken new ground. He has managed to explain in a clear and straightforward writing style such issues as beach closings, oil spills, collapsing fish stocks, killer algae, pollution, reckless development and the failure of



the U.S. government to protect what may be its final frontier—the Blue Frontier.

Most important, he has found reason to remain optimistic. Consider his closing remarks: "Our oceans remain full of strange wonders and grand experiences that will thrill generations yet unborn. Despite all the problems and challenges we face fighting for America's living seas, that is still enough to give one hope. After all, it is not every great nation, forged by its earliest frontier experiences, that gets a second chance."

David Liscio is the environmental reporter for The Daily Evening Item in Lynn, Mass., and the SEJ Beat correspondent for Massachusetts.

These and other books are available for purchase at <http://www.sej.org>

**Powder Burn:
Arson, Money, and Mystery on Vail Mountain**

By Daniel Glick
Public Affairs, 269 pp., 2001

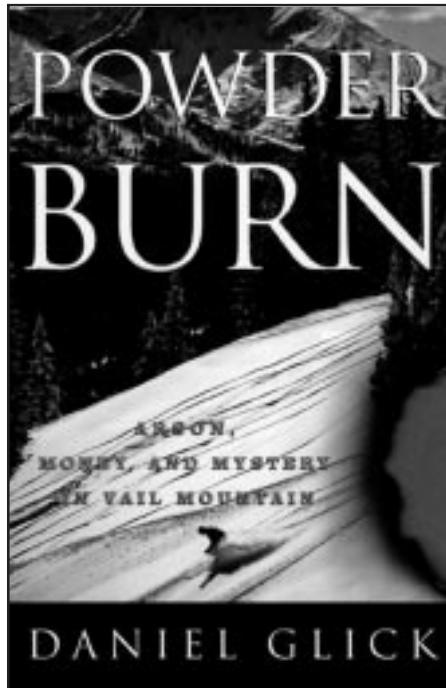
Let's see....the list of suspects includes environmentalists, disgruntled former employees, disgruntled townspeople, disgruntled next door townspeople, ski bums, the government and the victim itself.

Dan Glick's new book on the 1998 arson on Vail Mountain reads like a pot-boiler. "Powder Burn: Arson, Money, and Mystery on Vail Mountain" details the events preceding and following the fire, which destroyed five ski lifts and four buildings and was never solved. Billed as the costliest act of ecoterrorism in the United States at the time, the irony is it may not have been ecoterrorism at all. "Who couldn't have done this?" a local law enforcement official tells the feds. The list of people pissed off at [Vail's owners] is pretty long."

Glick, a Colorado-based correspondent for *Newsweek* who gained national visibility as a commentator on the JonBenet Ramsey case for Larry King and other shows, talks to all the main characters in weaving his story. Much of the tension lies not with the enviros but with locals and longtime neighbors who are disgusted with the Wall Street financiers and former junk bonders who take control of the mountain, America's largest ski

resort.

"As I continued to dig," Glick writes, "I discovered that I was right about one thing: People who weren't talking to law enforcement wanted to talk with me but not about who lit the match."



About the only thing we learn for certain is that the fires were set with a diesel fuel-gasoline mixture, probably by more than one person, and the damage reached \$12 million. We also know that Earth Liberation Front, which claimed responsibility for the arson "on behalf of the lynx" were never conclusively linked to the case beyond that claim. And Vail Resorts Inc. rebuilt the damaged structures bigger and better than before. And, looking like the victim, Vail Resorts received the go-ahead for a controversial expansion.

More than the story of one night of fires, "Powder Burn" examines many of the basic conflicts of the New West, including Spanish-speaking service workers living a dozen to a trailer, serving \$10 beers and \$7 lattes to folks whose clothes cost more than their cars.

Sometimes the weirdness of the characters and the situation overwhelms the story; other times the story is disturbing, but not in its telling. Given the more recent arsons in Arizona, Indiana, Michigan, California, Oregon, Washington and New York, perhaps we have not yet read the last chapter.

—Mark Neuzil, SEJournal Bookshelf Editor

'A passionate voice, stilled'

John B. Oakes, a longtime *New York Times* editor and one of the first champions of environmental journalism, died in April. He was 87.

For 15 years, Oakes led *The Times* editorial page from 1961 to 1976, pushed successfully for creation of the Op-Ed page at *The Times* and for many years wrote an environmental column for that page.

Oakes was widely praised by his colleagues for his integrity and for his defenses of civil liberties, human rights, opposition to the war in Vietnam and environmental protection.

Oakes, in his retirement, created the John B. Oakes Award for Environmental Journalism, which is administered by the Natural Resources Defense Council in New York.

"He was not only a brilliant and thoughtful journalist but a great gentleman and one of the kindest humans I have known," said Phil Shabecoff, who covered environmental issues at *The Times*.

In a tribute to Oakes, NRDC President John Adams said that Oakes was instrumental in his organization's start. At that time, Adams wrote, Oakes was the leading environmental journalist in the nation, known across the nation for protection of

public lands, the Arctic and national parks.

When Oakes agreed to join the new organization's board, it was tremendous lift, Adams said. "His name on the letterhead instantly affirmed our national stature," Adams wrote in his tribute. "For him it was an act of courage and principle to join his reputation to this small group of environmental lawyers."

Oakes was a founder of the group's magazine, *The Amicus Journal*, and the first chair of its editorial board.

The Oakes Award was created to reward distinguished coverage of environmental issues. Its judges include Tom Winship, former editor of the *Boston Globe*, and E.O. Wilson, noted Harvard scientist and two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize.

In a *New York Times* editorial on his death, "A Passionate Voice, Stilled," the newspaper stated that Oakes' strong views often placed him in conflict with policy makers and his own bosses.

The Times lamented:

"Whether in opposition to his government or his boss, John Oakes always stood on what he believed."

Shortly before his death, Oakes received a George Polk Award for his career accomplishments. ❖



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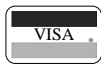
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New Mexico—See Arizona

New York—Erik Nelson, *Long Island Voice*, 516-744-5161

Nevada—Mary Manning, *Las Vegas Sun*, 702-259-4065

North Carolina—James Eli Shiffer, *The News & Observer*, 919-836-5701

North Dakota—See Minnesota

Ohio—Andrew Conte, *Cincinnati Post*, 513-352-2714

Oklahoma—vacant

Oregon—Orna Izakson, Freelancer, 541-726-1578

Pennsylvania

West—John Bartlett, *Erie Daily Times*, 814-437-6397

East—Chris Rigel, SEJ, 215-884-8177

Puerto Rico/Caribbean Islands—Vacant

Rhode Island—See Connecticut

South Carolina—Bob Montgomery, *The Greenville News*, 864-298-4295

South Dakota—See Minnesota

Tennessee—See North Georgia

Texas :

North Texas—Neil Strassman, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, 817-390-7657

Central and West Texas—Robert

Bryce, *The Austin Chronicle*, 512-454-5766

East and Coastal Texas—Bill Dawson, *The Houston Chronicle*, 713-220-7171

Utah—Brent Israelsen, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 801-237-2045

Vermont—Nancy Bazilchuk, *The Burlington Free Press*, 802-660-1873

Virginia—Jeff South, Virginia Commonwealth University, 804-827-0253

Washington—Michelle Nijuis, *High Country News*, 303-527-4898

West Virginia—Ken Ward, *Charleston Gazette*, 304-348-1702

Wisconsin—Chuck Quirmbach, Wisconsin Public Radio, 414-271-8686 or 608-263-7985

Wyoming—See Washington

Canada—Shawn Thompson, University College of the Cariboo, 250-371-5516

Mexico—Susana Guzman, *To2 Mexico*, 52-56-31-83-83

ARIZONA

► **Gray whales:** *The Phoenix New Times* alternative weekly chain started a yearlong series on the plight of the gray whale. Article 1 by David Holthouse reported on how Siberian Eskimos are fighting off starvation by restoring the lost whale-hunting tradition, but that the Eastern Pacific whales they hunt now appear to be threatened by starvation and possibly poisonings. Article 2 by John Dougherty reported that Western Pacific gray whales, already declining in numbers, are jeopardized by environmental negligence by oil companies working under a Russian-American oil development pact and lax oversight by Russian and American government agencies. Contact Holthouse at 303-672-1261 or david.holthouse@newtimes.com. Contact Dougherty at john.dougherty@newtimes.com

► **Federal land swaps:** *The New Times* reported on government studies that concluded that former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt's administration had cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars in flawed land trades, swaps that largely benefited developers at the expense of the environment and public treasury. Contact Amy Silverman at

amy.silverman@newtimes.com or 602-229-8443.

► **Air bag emissions:** *The New Times* wrote about neighbors blaming emissions from a nearby TRW air bag plant in Mesa for human illness, sick and dying trees and animals, foul smells and strange clouds. The neighbors finger sodium oxide, a chemical used to inflate the air bags, and hydrazoic acid, formed when the chemical mixes with water. TRW has told neighbors repeatedly that its emissions are not harmful because chemical changes make these toxins harmless before they enter the air. Contact Laura Laughlin at laura.laughlin@newtimes.com

► **Central Arizona Project:** The *Arizona Daily Star* ran a five-part series on the reintroduction of Colorado River water into Tucson's water system, seven years after the city turned off the Central Arizona Project after receiving widespread complaints about brown, smelly and dirty water coming into peoples' taps. This time, city officials say they'll avoid those problems, which stemmed from corrosion of aging water mains, by slowly adding the water into the system and blending it with ground water instead of the immediate, total changeover from ground water to CAP as was done in the early 1990s. Contact Mitch Tobin at 520-573-4142 or mtobin@azstarnet.com, and Maureen O'Connell, at 520-573-4240 or oconnell@azstarnet.com

► **Sonoran Desert plan:** The *Star* has covered Pima County officials' efforts to defend their pioneering Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, a proposed million-acre biological reserve that would, if approved and funded, be on the scale of Grand Canyon National Park. Developers, Gov. Jane Hull and her State Land Department and state legislators have all tried, so far unsuccessfully, to chip away at the plan, devised by a former county-road-builder turned county administrator and conservationist. Contact Tony Davis at 520-573-4240 or at tdavis789@yahoo.com

► **Sonora shrimp:** *The Star* published "Shrimped Out in Sonora," on how overharvesting of Sea of Cortez

shrimp has devastated its population and threatens the \$220-million-a year shrimping industry in the Mexican state of Sonora. Contact Ignacio Ibarra at 520-432-2766 or at nacho@primenet.com

► **Power plants:** The *Star*, the *New Times* and the *Arizona Republic* have reported on plans to build 18 new, mostly natural gas-fired power plants in Arizona. Since an unknown amount of the power might go to energy-starved California, critics have dubbed Arizona a "power farm." Contact Mitch Tobin at the *Star*, Robert Nelson at the *New Times* at robertnelson@newtimes.com and Lukas Velush at Palm Springs, Calif.'s *Desert Sun*, whose article appeared in the *Republic* as part of a series on the West's power crunch published by the *Republic* and other western, Gannett-owned newspapers. Velush can be reached at lukas.velush@thedesert-sun.com or 760-778-4625.

► **Asthma grows:** The *Republic* published a five-part series on Arizona's growing problems with asthma, an irony given that the state was once considered a haven for those with breathing problems. One report ranks Arizona's asthma rate as the country's fourth-highest, and the paper pins the problem on pollution, suburban sprawl and non-native landscaping that immigrants from the East and Midwest planted to make their desert surroundings look more like back home. Contact Mary Jo Pitzl at maryjopitzl@arizonarepublic.com and Karina Bland at karinabland@arizonarepublic.com.

► **Houseboat emissions:** The *Republic's* fall 2000 exposé on the problems of houseboats' carbon monoxide emissions, based on a federal report linking the emissions to seven deaths and 74 serious injuries at Lake Powell on the Arizona-Utah border in 10 years, got some results. Federal investigators found that nearly a quarter of 3,000 houseboats on the lake contained a potentially fatal flaw, a notch below the swim platform where the generator vented the deadly, odorless gas into the water where people swim. The U.S. Coast Guard first got a voluntary recall by six houseboat manufacturers, including the two largest, Summerset Custom Houseboats and

Stardust Cruisers. Eventually, the Coast Guard made the recall mandatory. Contact Maureen West at 602-444-8167 or maureen.west@arizonarepublic.com, or Judd Slivka at 602-444-8097 or juddslivka@arizonarepublic.com.

► **Planned community problems:** The *Arizona Daily Star's* Macario Juarez wrote a takeout on the travails at Civano, a planned community long hailed as a national model in the New Urbanism, in which jobs are located near homes and in which water consumption and disposal of garbage is far less than in conventional subdivisions. While Civano's private planners once envisioned 2,700 homes, only 1,300 to 2,000 homes now are likely, and the goal of one job for every two homes seems far off. Only 142 households are occupied today, 15 years after then-Gov. Bruce Babbitt first proposed a solar home showcase at Civano's eventual far Southeast Side location. While the project is clearly drawing public interest, some of its original backers say it has strayed too far from its original ideal of a village of solar-powered homes. Contact Juarez at 520-573-4663 or at mjuarez@azstarnet.com

CALIFORNIA

► **Blackout blues:** When blackouts roll across California in the coming months—as captains of the crippled electricity grid say they surely will—tens of thousands of miniature powerhouses will whine, cough and rumble to the rescue. These backup plants will ignite the same fuel that powers locomotives, ships and 18-wheel trucks. And they'll be spewing the same pollution—only more so, because most are old, with little or no emissions controls. They are diesel-powered generators, the dirtiest of internal combustion engines. And unlike trucks and other vehicles, they've largely escaped 30 years of air pollution restrictions because they were intended only for emergencies, as when a storm or earthquake knocks out power. But, now, as a season of multiple planned blackouts appears imminent, many California businesses are expected to fire up the old stogies more often than was ever imagined. The story by Chris Bowman and Stuart Leavenworth ran in the *Sacramento Bee*.

The Beat

Chris Bowman can be reached at 916-321-1069 or cbowman@sacbee.com. Stuart Leavenworth can be reached at 916-321-1185 or sleavenworth@sacbee.com. Visit <http://www.sacbee.com/news/special/powder/indexapril2001.html> to see the story.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

► **Whitman profile:** EPA Administrator Christie Whitman was profiled in *The Washington Post's* Style section April 23, Page C1. Reporter Lynne Duke describes Whitman's "wealthy and well-connected" family background and traces the EPA chief's political path from post-college days at the Republican National Committee to governor of New Jersey. Contact Duke at 202-334-7535.

FLORIDA

► **Toxic Pollution (From SEJ-BEAT):** The *Pensacola News Journal* in a series of stories running Feb. 18 through March 4 reports a growing concern among health professionals that the large amount of toxic pollution in Northwest Florida may be making people sick. Escambia County ranked No. 22 out of more than 3,300 counties nationwide in the total amount of toxic chemicals released into the air, water, land and underground in 1998, the latest year for which federal statistics are available. The 41.4 million pounds is more than the total toxic releases in the state of New Jersey, as well as the totals of 18 other states. The county also ranked No. 38 nationwide in the amount of reported releases of neurological and developmental toxins. Reaction to the stories has been swift. Federal and state elected leaders have vowed to find money to study the problem. Local state lawmakers are forming a task force to study the problem and other health-care concerns. And the leaders of the area's three major hospitals want to hold a health-care summit to address the issue. Contact Scott Streater at 850-435-8547 or ScottStreater@PensacolaNewsJournal.com.

GEORGIA

► **Water woes:** Fearing that metro Atlanta's phenomenal growth could be curtailed by inadequate water supply and

a lack of places to dispose of wastewater, Georgia Gov. Roy Barnes asked for and got legislation to create an 18-county Metropolitan North Georgia Water District. It sets up a regional board of directors to come up with plans for managing stormwater, wastewater and water supply. But environmentalists have criticized the plan because it doesn't take a watershed approach. The mountain counties that drain into Lake Lanier, the 38,000-acre reservoir from which Atlanta gets its water, aren't included in the district. Others have criticized the "Atlanta-centric" perspective, arguing that Georgia—now suffering through a fourth year of drought—needs a statewide water management plan. Debbie Gilbert wrote about the plan Feb. 7 in *The Times of Gainesville*. She can be contacted at 770-532-1234, ext. 254, or dgilbert@gainesvilletimes.com.

► **Burning ban:** Because Atlanta still hasn't been able to get its ozone problem under control, this year a five-month ban on open burning has been expanded to cover a much larger area. Between May 1 and Sept. 30, outdoor burning is prohibited in 45 Georgia counties—up from just 13 counties last year. Rural communities, where burning has been the traditional method for getting rid of yard waste and land-clearing debris, are scrambling to find other disposal options. Debbie Gilbert reported this story in *The Times* April 28. Contact her at dgilbert@gainesvilletimes.com or 770-532-1234, ext. 254.

HAWAII

► **Magic Isle traffic:** Maui is the Magic Isle, if you believe the Maui Visitors Bureau. But to those who live and work on the island, it's become congested. Growth on the island has been phenomenal over the last decade, but roads and highways have not kept pace. Driving from the resorts to the airport can take hours, and that's without a tunnel closure or wildfire or major accident. In a weeklong series, a team of reporters from *The Maui News* examined the state of traffic in all regions of Maui. Contact reporter Brian Perry or Valerie Monson of *The Maui News*, 1-800-827-0347, or visit <http://www.maui.net/~mauinews/>

zlnews0a.htm for the full story.

IOWA

► **Phosphorus problems:** A new study by Iowa State University shows that one of Iowa's most popular glacial lakes is in far worse shape than it was several decades ago, *The Des Moines Register* reported April 27. The main culprit is phosphorus, most of which comes from farm fertilizers. A surprising 31 percent of the lake's load is coming from the rain, said lead researcher John Downing. The lake has lost many plant and fish species as algae cloud the waters and rob oxygen. The problems are typical of many Midwestern lakes subject to heavy soil and farm-chemical runoff. Contact Perry Beeman, beemanp@news.dmreg.com or 515-284-8538.

► **Nitrate health links:** A University of Iowa study published in the May edition of *Epidemiology* found that women who drank even small amounts of nitrates for more than 10 years had a higher than usual risk of bladder cancer, *The Des Moines Register* reported April 16. The study compared estimates of how much nitrate 21,977 Iowa women drank in tap water with data on the incidence of bladder cancer between 1986 and 1998. The women were between the ages of 55 and 69 when the study began in 1986 and were from 400 communities. Lead researcher Peter Weyer said the women were part of a broader study of health issues in Iowa. Though males and younger females weren't included in the study, the health effects aren't expected to vary between the genders, Weyer said. Call Perry Beeman, 515-284-8538 or beemanp@news.dmreg.com

► **Nutrient overloads:** Iowa's list of 157 impaired waterways could grow by 1,000 or more because of EPA's proposed nutrient guidelines, *The Des Moines Register* reported March 12. The state will set the limits on nitrogen and phosphorus in Iowa waterways, but officials said they won't be able to vary much from EPA's limits. Iowa waterways far exceed EPA's guidelines for the common ingredients in farm fertilizers. In fact, researchers at Iowa State University found the state's waters would have

exceeded the limits decades ago. Addressing the problem will be a multi-million dollar task, one many farm states will face. Contact Perry Beeman, 515-284-8538 or beemanp@news.dmreg.com.

KENTUCKY

► **Railroad solvents toxic (from SEJ-Beat):** A 10-month investigation by *The Courier-Journal* has found that more than 600 railroaders from Maryland to Kentucky to Montana have been diagnosed with brain damage from their long-term exposure to toxic degreasing solvents. Thousands more may be ill and not realize why. Over the past 15 years, railroad companies, particularly CSX Transportation Inc., have paid tens of millions of dollars to settle workers' solvent lawsuits, while denying any link between exposure and brain damage. But it's not only railroaders who are getting sick. Millions of Americans are exposed to some of these same solvents and other related chemicals daily in such occupations as dry cleaning and industrial painting, others through common household products, such as paint thinners. Some other workers also have been diagnosed with the same ailment as the railroaders: toxic encephalopathy. The newspaper also found that even though the federal government is charged with protecting the public against toxic exposure to chemicals, it is handcuffed by ineffective laws, tight budgets and the sheer volume of new chemicals entering the marketplace each year. The series was reported and written by Jim Bruggers and Sara Shipley and edited by John Mura. Reach the reporters via e-mail at jbruggers@courier-journal.com and sshipley@courier-journal.com. Visit <http://www.courier-journal.com/cjextra/csx/index.html> to see the story.

► **Coal miner shortage (from SEJ-BEAT):** Despite the deaths of two uncles and a friend in coal-mining accidents, David Lee Jones turned 20 believing he would become a miner. But after completing his first phase of training, Jones realized he wanted his life to go in a different direction. "I'm afraid to go in the mines," said Jones, now 22. "I don't want to be under rocks all day. I'll do odd jobs until I find an indoor job." Jones and

many other young workers, well aware of the dangers and grimy nature of mine work, are opting for careers outside coal. Industry officials say the trend is contributing to a shortage of qualified miners that has reached near-crisis proportions. "The situation is pretty bad," said Bill Caylor, president of the Kentucky Coal Association, an organization of coal company operators. "Coal companies have equipment, but not enough people." Reporter Alan Maimon can be reached at 606-439-3781. The article can be found at <http://www.courier-journal.com/local/news/2001/04/16/ke041601s12532.htm>

LOUISIANA

► **Water policy lacking:** *The (Baton Rouge) Advocate* looked at the lack of a state water policy as the Louisiana Legislature considered how to control pumping of groundwater. The three-part series looked at the problems, users and proposed solutions. Contact Mike Dunne, *The Advocate*, 225-388-0301 or mdunne@theadvocate.com.

MARYLAND

► **Pfiesteria mystery deepens:** *The (Baltimore) Sun* reported April 4 that Maryland medical officials have documented five cases of people who might have been sickened by Pfiesteria during the past three years, though no confirmed fish kills have been attributed to the toxic microorganism in the state since 1997. The finding raises the possibility that Pfiesteria may make people sick—with symptoms such as short-term memory loss—at levels too low to cause fish kills. Dead fish are the main cue officials have used in deciding whether to place waterways off-limits to the public. Contact Heather Dewar at 410-268-2638 or heather.dewar@baltsun.com.

► **Crabbing crackdown:** Maryland's Gov. Parris N. Glendening moved in April to limit the workday of commercial watermen and shorten their harvest season, saying Chesapeake Bay's most valuable fishery is on the verge of collapse, *The (Baltimore) Sun* reported April 28. The governor's action came soon after state legislators rejected similar restrictions because watermen complained the

limits were unnecessary and would drive them out of business. The crackdown came in response to recommendations from scientists for a 15 percent reduction in recreational and commercial harvest to avoid a population crash. Contact Joel McCord at 410-332-6465 or joel.mccord@baltsun.com.

NEVADA

► **Leukemia cluster:** Nevada newspapers as well as national media such as *USA Today* and the *New York Daily News* covered Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's visit to Fallon, a military and farming town 60 miles east of Reno, Nevada, as she listened to the latest information about a childhood leukemia cluster. There have been 13 confirmed cases of Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia in children ranging in age from 3 to 19 years. Their only link is that they all lived in Fallon, a town of 8,300 people, during their lives. Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., scheduled the field hearing of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on April 12 in Fallon, inviting Clinton to attend. *The Reno Gazette-Journal*, the *Lahontan Valley News*, the *Las Vegas Review Journal* and the *Las Vegas Sun* sent reporters to cover the hearing. Contacts include: *Las Vegas Review Journal*, Keith Rogers at 702-383-0211 or visit www.lasvegas.com; *Las Vegas Sun*, Mary Manning at 702-259-4065 or manning@lasvegassun.com; or the *Reno Gazette-Journal* Web site at www.rgj.com.

► **Nuclear waste:** A Department of Energy Inspector General's report on April 23 found no bias in a two-page memorandum and a 60-page report on a proposed repository for commercial spent nuclear fuel and defense wastes at Yucca Mountain that the *Las Vegas Sun* published on Dec. 1. However, the office warned the DOE that some of the language in the report could be understood as indicating a possible bias. The Department of Energy released four reports on May 4 covering science, engineering, supplemental environmental impacts and cost analyses on the proposed repository at Yucca Mountain. So far, DOE officials said, there are no major roadblocks to building a repository to contain 77,000 tons of high-level

nuclear waste for at least 10,000 years. However, the DOE needs \$7 billion in the next seven years to design such a repository for licensing. Contact Mary Manning, *Las Vegas Sun*, 702-259-4065 or manning@lasvegassun.com.

NEW MEXICO

► **Fate of the minnow:** The fate of the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow was back in the hands of courts last spring, after all parties to a federal lawsuit over the minnow abandoned efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. Environmentalists, federal water managers, the state and city of Albuquerque governments and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District cited irreconcilable differences, saying that each party firmly believes that it can make no more concessions "without severe harm to the interests they represent," the parties said in a joint motion in late March. A court hearing and decision in the case were expected by the end of June. The Fish and Wildlife Service was working separately to produce a new critical habitat designation for the minnow after the courts threw out an earlier plan in a separate lawsuit. Meanwhile, the minnows themselves, whose habitat is down to 170 miles of the middle Rio Grande, were scheduled to participate in a spring 2001 study in which they were to try to swim upstream against the river current to show how much stamina and speed they can rev up. The purpose: help scientists create some kind of structure to let minnows swim past dams on the river. Contact Tania Soussan of the *Albuquerque Journal*, 505-823-3833 or tsoussan@abqjournal.com.

► **Pueblo problems:** The U.S. Interior Department in the last hours of the Clinton Administration issued a legal opinion putting the Sandia Indian Pueblo's eastern boundary at the 10,600 foot tall crest of Sandia Mountain east of Albuquerque. The opinion angered a coalition of non-Indian residents living near the mountain, along with New Mexico Sen. Pete Domenici and U.S. Rep. Heather Wilson, who have asked new Interior Secretary Gale Norton to overturn the last-second ruling by outgoing Secretary Bruce Babbitt. Ex-Interior

Solicitor John Leshy pegged his new ruling on his view that the current eastern pueblo boundary, at the Sandia Mountain foothills, was mistakenly set by a federal survey in 1859 that carried out terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Contact the *Albuquerque Journal's* Leslie Linthicum at 505-823-3914 or llinthicum@abqjournal.com.

► **Historic road widening:** *The Albuquerque Tribune's* Nancy Salem wrote an affectionate profile of Isleta Boulevard, a road known several hundred years ago as El Camino Real, the trade route from Santa Fe to Mexico City that later became an early version of U.S. 66, then N.M. 1, then U.S. 85. Today, Isleta is the heart of Albuquerque's semi-rural South Valley, and a debate has flared among business people and residents over whether the road should be widened from two to five lanes or to various sections of three and five lanes to carry traffic now reaching levels normally seen on six-lane roads. The road is dangerous and congested and no one disputes the need for some widening. Contact Salem at 505-823-3675.

► **Tree-thinning:** The federal government is planning major tree-thinning projects in the national forests around Santa Fe and Las Vegas in hopes of preventing fires that could damage the rivers that serve the two cities with drinking water. While the Forest Service must first evaluate the projects' environmental effects, the federal government has already given New Mexico and Arizona some good news: a promise of \$23 million to the two states for hazardous fuels reduction and \$19 million for rehabilitation of areas burned in last year's blazes, including the Cerro Grande fire that wiped out more than 200 Los Alamos buildings. Contact Ben Neary at the *New Mexican* at 505-986-3036.

► **Power to log:** The State Legislature passed a bill giving New Mexico counties power to take over and log national forests despite warnings from federal officials that such a bill might not be legal. Reporter Jennifer McKee also reported that Los Alamos National Laboratory, whose efforts to get tree-thinning funds often ran aground in

the past, has pledged to spend \$10 million over the next three years to clear small trees as a result of last year's Cerro Grande blaze. Contact McKee of the *Journal* at jmckee@abqjournal.com or 505-988-8881.

► **Santa Fe water:** Trace residues of a prescription anti-depressant have turned up in treated effluent from the Santa Fe sewage treatment plant, according to the New Mexico Environment Department, the *Journal's* McKee reported. It marks the latest in a series of findings of very low levels of drugs from sewage effluent that has turned up in sewage contaminated ground water in northern New Mexico since last year. The amounts are too low to cause harm to humans, but the effects on fish and other aquatic life remain unknown, the department said. Among the substances found in rivers and effluent: traces of estrogen-type drugs, painkillers, anti-seizure medication, caffeine and an anti-convulsant drug.

Santa Fe in February downgraded its water-use restrictions that had been in place since the summer of 2000's drought, which allows residents to plant gardens and landscaping but not new grass or sod. Residents can again wash vehicles at home, and hotels are free of a ban on washing bedding more often than once every four nights for guests staying multiple nights. The reason for the downgrading is that heavy winter snows are expected to send 150 percent of a normal year's runoff into the Santa Fe River basin. But the long-term water outlook for Santa Fe isn't good. A new water planning report from a regional council warns that a nearly threefold increase in Santa Fe County's population to 360,000 over 60 years will leave the area 19,000 acre-feet a year short of the water it needs. Contact Jonathan McDonald, *New Mexican*, at 505-986-3066 or jmcdonald@sfnewmexican.com, and his colleague Ben Neary, 505-986-3036 or bneary@sfnewmexican.com.

NEW YORK

► **Superfund broke:** New York state's Superfund program officially went bankrupt April 1, halting work on hundreds of hazardous-waste cleanups

around the state and highlighting an ongoing legislative stalemate in Albany over whether the state's strict cleanup standards should be eased to promote redevelopment of contaminated properties. This comprehensive story, which appeared in *Newsday* March 30, guided readers through the complex policy issues and mixed in the voices of neighborhood activists disgusted by the political stalemate. The article explained how, despite strict language in New York law, state environmental officials have been legally granting developers wide latitude on cleanups for many years. Contact Dan Fagin at dfagin@newsday.com or 631-843-3658.

► **Potting soil pollution:** EPA is investigating 60 sites around the United States for possible contamination by a particular form of vermiculite. The substance, mined by W.R. Grace in Libby, Mont., contains a "particularly toxic form of naturally-occurring asbestos called tremolite-actinolite," according to the EPA fact sheet. The information is being distributed to neighbors near a former insulation factory in Weedsport, N.Y., one of the 60 sites of concern. The site was declared clean in 1990 when the factory shut down. But Max Appleby, who lives nearby, found what he thinks is a large mound of vermiculite that was left behind. Contamination has already spread beyond the boundary of the old factory. Vermiculite is the sparkling stuff you see in potting soil. Appleby says when it was stored for use at the factory, farmers would buy it and plow it into their fields. The Libby Mine closed in 1990. When it was operating, it produced 80 percent of the world's supply of vermiculite. Contact Jean Kessner WIXT, Syracuse, 315-446-9999 or email jkessner@Ackerley.com.

► **War against West Nile changing:** Calling the West Nile virus "a genie out of a bottle," the New York state Health Department has recommended that communities not spray pesticides to control mosquitoes carrying the disease unless human health is threatened. The new directive represents a significant switch in policy from last year, wrote Dina Cappiello in an article that appeared in the *Times Union* (Albany) on April 6. In

2000, many communities in New York sprayed an insecticide to kill adult mosquitoes to halt the virus' spread. But by the end of the summer, the virus was detected in crows in 61 of the state's 62 counties, and now the state's focus is preventing a human outbreak. For more information, contact Dina Cappiello at dcappiello@timesunion.com, or 518-454-5465.

NORTH CAROLINA

► **David vs. Goliath:** A Raleigh, N.C.-based garbage company sued a tiny eastern North Carolina town that was trying to block a regional landfill in its backyard. The lawsuit by Waste Industries Inc. and three landowners has already forced the town of Calypso (population 525) to spend about 13 times its \$600 annual legal budget defending its zoning authority. That's compared to a company with \$242 million in revenue last year. The face-off has some in Calypso calling it a David vs. Goliath fight. The story ran March 17. Contact James Eli Shiffer, *The News & Observer*, jshiffer@nando.com or 919-836-5701.

RHODE ISLAND

► **Lead paint lawsuits (from SEJ-BEAT):** In an effort to force the state of Rhode Island to reconsider its damage suit against the nation's largest paint companies, an arm of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently filed a massive request for records about lead paint poisonings with the city of Providence and the state of Rhode Island. The chamber used the same tactic last year against the city of Milwaukee, forcing the city to undertake a monumental records search. Milwaukee officials insist they plan to proceed with their suit anyway, looking to recover damages from the paint companies for producing the lead paints that now poison children across the nation. Contact Peter Lord, plord@projo.com or 401-277-8036. See the story at: <http://projo.com/cgi-bin/story.pl/news/05210691.htm>.

TENNESSEE

► **Waste workers sickened:** Health

officials are still mystified about what sickened workers at the Pollution Control Industries plant north of Memphis. The plant accepts hazardous wastes and processes them for disposal or for reuse as fuel. In mid-January, 28 of the 110 employees became ill with vomiting, diarrhea and dizziness. Blood tests on 90 workers showed that 40 of them showed signs of liver injury or inflammation—an extraordinarily high percentage. Numerous state and federal agencies have investigated the incident, yet a specific cause of the outbreak has not been pinpointed. Tom Charlier reported this story in *The Commercial Appeal* March 4. He can be contacted at 901-529-2572, or charlier@gomemphis.com.

► **Scenic rivers:** When Tennessee passed its Scenic Rivers Act in 1968, it was one of the first states to do so, and its law was one of the models used in drafting the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Yet more than three decades later, portions of only 11 rivers and creeks are included in the system. Many stream segments initially included were later removed due to strong opposition from landowners about property rights. Now, state legislators have introduced an amendment that would require notarized consent from landowners before establishing scenic river boundaries. The bill is supported by both property-rights advocates and environmentalists—who feel it could help revive a program that's been dead in the water. Tom Charlier reported this in *The Commercial Appeal* April 2. (See contacts above.)

VIRGINIA

► **Restoring the Chesapeake Bay** would cost \$8.5 billion over the next decade, Rex Springston of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported April 14, citing an analysis by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. The goal is realistic, considering that \$7.8 billion is being spent to restore Florida's Everglades, said Mike Hirshfield, a Bay Foundation vice president. The bay, North America's biggest estuary, is fed by waters from a basin covering 64,000 square miles in six states. Contact Springston at (804) 649-6453 or rspringston@timesdispatch.com.

► **Chesapeake Bay pollution reduction:** In a related story, Scott Harper of *The Virginian-Pilot* reported March 12 that the Chesapeake Bay states had failed to meet their goals to reduce pollution. In 1987, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia and the federal government agreed to reduce nutrients entering the bay by 40 percent by the end of 2000. Now, the results are in: There was a 16 percent reduction in nitrogen and a 27 percent reduction in phosphorus, according to federal statistics. Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania missed their targets, despite spending hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade sewage treatment plants, curb urban runoff, fix leaky septic systems and help farmers contain soil and fertilizers. For more information, contact Harper at (800) 446-2004, ext. 2340, or sharper@pilotonline.com.

► **The Atlantic sturgeon**, a bone-plated behemoth that once kept company with dinosaurs, is clinging to life in the James River, Rex Springston of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported March 25. The menacing-looking but harmless fish, which can exceed 10 feet in length, is so rare some experts say it's extinct in Virginia. In recent years, however, scientists have found hundreds of young sturgeons, and a handful of 6- to 8-foot adults. Michael Odom, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, concludes that the sturgeon, against long odds, has maintained a small breeding population in the lower James. For more information, contact Springston at (804) 649-6453 or rspringston@timesdispatch.com.

► **Porcelain reef:** Virginia plans to use old toilets, bathtubs and sinks to create artificial oyster reefs in the lower Chesapeake Bay, Scott Harper of *The Virginian-Pilot* reported April 15. Officials are collecting the porcelain fixtures and will smash them to bits, scatter the pieces on the bottom of the Back River in Hampton and plant baby oysters on top. The officials hope that in salty waters at the edge of a runway at Langley Air Force Base the babies will attach themselves and multiply. The "Porcelain Project" will be the state's newest—and most unusual—artificial oyster reef. The project involves the state

government, the city of Hampton, Waste Management Inc., the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Langley. Contact Harper at (800) 446-2004, extension 2340, or sharper@pilotonline.com.

► **New power plant plans:** Abundant water, large tracts of land, a potential natural gas pipeline and access to a power grid have made Wythe County in western Virginia an attractive setting for a gas-fired power plant, Lois Caliri of *The Roanoke Times* reported on April 22. Duke Energy North America wants that infrastructure to build a plant that would generate 620 megawatts of electricity, which would be sold on the wholesale market. In March, the company asked Virginia for permission to build the \$250 million plant, which would go online in June 2003. For more information, contact Caliri at (540) 981-3117 or loisc@roanoke.com.

► **Asbestos deaths:** For nearly 40 years, the asbestos industry and the government kept a lethal secret from shipyard workers: Exposure to asbestos could kill them. It has claimed thousands of lives in Hampton Roads. And it will take 30 more years for the epidemic to run its course. *The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot* ran a series of stories May 6-10, "Shipbuilding's Deadly Legacy," looking at the problems created by the use of asbestos in the ship-building industry. Not only did the shipbuilders suffer, they carried the asbestos home, threw dust-covered clothes in the hamper, held their wives and kids with gritty hands, and carried the disease to another generation.

What's different about this story is the magnitude of its effect in a community. Thousands of deaths is no exaggeration; it seems like everyone here knows a family that lost someone to an asbestos-related disease. Their series can be read online at: <http://www.pilotonline.com/special/asbestos/index.html>. Reporter Bill Burke can be contacted at bburke@pilotonline.com.

WYOMING

► **Ski ban:** The recent Park Service decision banning snowmobiles from Grand Teton and Yellowstone also pro-

posed to kick backcountry skiers out of popular powder spots in the Tetons. The ski ban is intended to protect bighorn sheep in the mountain range, but disgruntled skiers call the proposal "high-handed." Rachel Odell reported on this story in the March 26 edition of *High Country News*. For more information, call HCN at 970-527-4898, send email to editor@hcn.org, or find the story at www.hcn.org.

► **New forest supervisor:** Kniffy Hamilton, the new forest supervisor on northwest Wyoming's Bridger-Teton National Forest, is already making waves. In December, she announced that she does not plan to allow oil and gas drilling on nearly 370,000 acres near the Gros Ventre Wilderness, southwest of Jackson Hole. Bridger-Teton officials are reviewing public comments and expect to have a final decision this summer. The Bush administration's reaction to the decision remains to be seen. Rachel Odell reported on this story in the March 26 edition of *High Country News*. For more information, call HCN at 970-527-4898, send email to editor@hcn.org, or find the story at www.hcn.org.

WASHINGTON

► **Timber vs. salmon:** When Washington state's timber industry negotiated an agreement with state and federal agencies to protect and restore endangered salmon on commercial forest lands, the resulting "Forests and Fish" plan was hailed as a breakthrough. Now, it appears that many federal scientists thought all along that the plan allowed too much cutting near salmon streams, but their opinions were ignored and suppressed. Tim McNulty reported on this story in the April 23 edition of *High Country News*. For more information, call HCN at 970-527-4898, send email to editor@hcn.org, or find the story at www.hcn.org.

► **Irrigation vs. salmon:** The Methow Valley in north-central Washington has become a test case for how communities along salmon-bearing rivers and streams will cope with endangered species regulations. In April 1999,

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the National Marine Fisheries Service shut down some irrigation ditches to protect salmon, infuriating many farmers and ranchers. The Fisheries Service is working with irrigation districts to create Habitat Conservation Plans, giving irrigators the right to keep operating in return for taking less water from the creeks. But no irrigation districts have yet signed up and Methow residents are hardly enthusiastic. Ken Olsen reported the story on Feb. 26 in *High Country News*. Contact HCN at 970-527-4898 or rebecca@hcn.org, or find the story at www.hcn.org.

► **Land preserved:** For 30 years, a ferocious land-use battle between conservationists and would-be ski and golf resort developers has been waged on 1,020 acres on the banks of Washington's Methow River. Now, an end appears to be in sight. In January, the Trust for Public Land purchased the property known as Arrowleaf or Early Winters from the R.D. Merrill Corp., after the timber company failed to obtain the water rights it needed to develop a 565-lot resort. Sandra Tassel reported the story Feb. 26 in *High Country News*. Contact HCN at 970-527-4898 or rebecca@hcn.org, or find the story at www.hcn.org.

WEST VIRGINIA

► **More railroad lawsuits (from SEJ-BEAT):** After the 10-month

investigation by *The Courier-Journal* exposing the connection between toxic degreasing solvents and hundreds of railroaders diagnosed with brain damage, 18 former railroad workers in Marshall County, W.Va., filed a lawsuit against CSX Transportation, saying they were exposed to hazardous solvents but not diagnosed with brain damage or other illnesses linked to the chemicals. (See related story, page 23.)

MEXICO

► **Forest, water protection:** The new Mexican government is going all out to protect the country's dwindling forest and water reserves—even threatening to use the armed forces. To create awareness of the importance of forests and water, Mexican President Vicente Fox launched the National Crusade for Forests and Water in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán. In the view of this administration, conservation of forests is related to the security of the country. Forest devastation costs the equivalent of 12 percent of Mexico's gross national product, estimated to be U.S. \$38 billion dollars each year. Alberto Cardenas, ex-governor of Jalisco state, will be the director of the new Forest Commission, the counterpart of the existing National Water Commission. Contact Susana Guzman at sguzman3@hotmail.com. Visit [http://ens.lycos.com/ens/mar2001/2001L-03-](http://ens.lycos.com/ens/mar2001/2001L-03-07-02.html)

[07-02.html](http://ens.lycos.com/ens/mar2001/2001L-03-07-02.html) for the story.

INTERNATIONAL

► **Marketing mercury (from SEJ-BEAT):** Because of environmental and health problems Western nations are slowly phasing out use of mercury in products and manufacturing. But mercury traders in these countries are increasingly looking to the developing world for buyers of surplus mercury.

Mercury, despite its toxicity and ability to easily move within the biosphere, is treated like any other commodity by the U.S. government, and its sale is unregulated. So while EPA plans to require coal-fired power plants to install equipment to remove mercury from flue gas at a cost of \$15,000 to \$50,000 per pound of removed mercury, traders are selling mercury on the international market for a few dollars a pound.

This may change as activists in India and the United States, for instance, have recently blocked a mercury shipment bound for Bombay from a closed U.S. chemical plant. Chlor-alkali chemical manufacturers are the world's largest users of mercury. For more information, contact Jeff Johnson, *Chemical and Engineering News*, at 202-872-6072 or e-mail j_johnson@acs.org. Visit <http://pubs.acs.org/email/cen/html/021401111155.html> for the complete story.

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