



SEJournal

Spring 2012, Vol. 22 No. 1

Four decades later, is our water cleaner?

- **Campaign '12: Parsing the Buzzwords**
- **Sundance Screens Indie Enviro Docs**
- **Long-Time Enviro Reporter Returns to Fold**

A quarterly publication of the

Society of Environmental Journalists

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SEJ *ournal*

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Water flows through our lives as ubiquitously as it flows through our world. Forty years ago, the Clean Water Act set out to assure its health didn't jeopardize our health. A progress report begins on page 5.

PHOTO: ATTILA ACS VIA FLICKR

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Financial challenges ahead, but so too opportunities to tap our 'network'

By CAROLYN WHETZEL

SEJ begins its 22nd year a strong, vibrant, and vital organization. This is good, because like many nonprofits in the current economy, SEJ is facing some tough financial challenges. But challenges are opportunities.

Balancing the organization's current operating budget is crucial to keeping SEJ on track for a sustainable and high-impact future. That's why at its January 28, 2012 meeting, SEJ's board of directors took steps to increase revenues and cut expenses for the short term as the board and staff pursue effectiveness studies and efforts to bring in new unrestricted gifts, new foundation grants, new university and media support, and new earned income.

The board, in approving the 2012 operating budget, increased member dues and put on hiatus unfunded *TipSheets* and the fall issue of the *SEJournal*.

These decisions stem from the fact that over the last few years, SEJ's gift and grant income has not kept pace with expenses of current operations. In 2008, SEJ lost two multi-year foundation grants totaling \$275,000. As a result, the organization has been drawing down its carefully managed unrestricted reserves.

Increasing dues from \$50 to \$70 a year (\$60 if you pay for two or three years at the same time) was not an easy decision. The membership committee pointed out that the hike, which is effective April 1, brings SEJ dues in line with those of the Society of Professional Journalists, \$75, and Investigative Reporters and Editors, \$70.

Putting the fall issue of the *SEJournal* and biweekly *TipSheets* on hiatus was an equally tough decision.

Reactions are already rolling in. Thanks to the members who recognized that SEJ dues have been "incredibly low for years" and to those who labeled the hike "paltry" given what they get from SEJ in return. Likewise, we appreciate the concerns expressed about the suspension of *TipSheets* and the fall issue of the *SEJournal*. We want to hear why you think these publications are important, how you use the information in the *TipSheets*, and how SEJ publications, services, and programs can be improved.

Thanks to an organizational effectiveness grant from the Brainerd Foundation, SEJ is launching a research project to help gather this and other information that we can use to chart a path for the next three to five years. As part of the project, SEJ will be reaching out to its membership to ask questions about current programs and initiatives and generate new ideas.

Along with identifying external forces that will affect SEJ, everything from economic forces to the changes in the industry, the project includes a needs assessment to determine what

members and other journalists need most from SEJ to produce and distribute more high-quality, high-impact journalism.

The grant also opens the door for SEJ to do something its leadership has wanted to do for some time, identify the organization's most effective initiatives and inventory its strengths and weaknesses.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure SEJ is providing the most cost-effective and highest-impact initiatives possible.

SEJ's Executive Director Beth Parke often calls SEJ "the original social network." That's right, before Facebook, Twitter, or even Myspace — there was SEJ. Sure, it's a different animal than these ground-breaking web-based social networks, but SEJ is a powerful network of over 1,450 journalists who cover environmental issues.

SEJ's biggest strength is this network of journalists, members and nonmembers, and its friends. It's this network that SEJ needs to tap throughout 2012 and beyond as it tackles the challenges ahead.

While SEJ's leadership will be doing most of the heavy lifting, the board of directors urges every SEJ member and friend to join us in this effort.

So, how can you help?

- Talk to potential donors about SEJ and the impact the organization has had on your own work and that of fellow members, and encourage them to make a gift of any amount.

- Share messages about SEJ through your social networks and encourage contacts to support the group's work to strengthen environmental journalism.

- If you know of a donor-advised fund or a family foundation that may be a good match with SEJ and would welcome a formal inquiry, forward contact information to any board member or to Beth Parke at SEJ headquarters.

- When you are surveyed as part of the strategic planning project funded by the Brainerd Foundation, please respond. We need your input.

Just think, if each of the organization's 1,400 members raised \$150 from friends, family, co-workers, and others in 2012, SEJ would be over two-thirds of the way — \$210,000 — to closing the \$275,000 gap that resulted from the loss of general support grants. If 200 members brought in \$150 each, it would raise the \$30,000 needed to resume the *TipSheets*.

The encouraging news is that new universities, foundations, media companies and individuals continue to join SEJ's list of underwriters. SEJ anticipates meaningful income from *continued on Page 26*

Getting into the (Clean Water) Act

As key statute hits 40, how to tell the story of its successes, failures



In 1974, a photographer with the EPA's Project DOCUMERICA discovered these decaying auto hulks in an acid and oil-filled pond within sight of Utah's majestic Wasatch mountain range. It was later cleaned up under provisions of the newly passed Clean Water Act to prevent contamination of a wildlife refuge and the Great Salt Lake nearby.

PHOTO BY BRUCE MCALLISTER, EPA-DOCUMERICA/ NARA

By ROBERT McCLURE

The Clean Water Act, a bedrock environmental law passed four decades ago in the wake of *Silent Spring* and the first Earth Day, is showing its age. Not only has it failed to deal with the pollution it set out to end, it also hasn't kept pace with the growth of our cities, new trends in agriculture and the explosion in the number of new chemicals unleashed on the landscape.

With the statute's 40th anniversary coming up in October, there is a revelatory story to be done about how the Clean Water Act affects your readers, listeners or viewers, no matter what geographical scale you report on, from hyperlocal to national.

Let's take a look at how to turn what could be an exercise in ho-hum anniversary journalism into a serious critique of value and relevance to your audience.

Law's successes marred by ongoing violations

It's first helpful to know what the drafters of the Act intended. It's startling to go back into the history of the law and see that the framers of this law decreed:

"It is the national goal that the discharge of pollutants into

the navigable waters be eliminated by 1985 ...

"It is the national policy that the discharge of toxic pollutants in toxic amounts be prohibited ...

"It is the national policy that programs for the control of non-point sources of pollution be developed and implemented in an expeditious manner ..."

Yes, that's right — when the law passed in 1972 it was supposed to end water pollution within 13 years. Ambitious as that may sound today, it's a powerful point of comparison when you consider how much hasn't happened to achieve that goal, even after 40 years. Those goals represented what the public was calling for in 1972, and what the public apparently still expects today: that water pollution be illegal and not be allowed.

Yet something like one-third of the nation's lakes, bays, rivers, streams and sounds remain in violation of the Clean Water Act.

Any fair discussion of the Clean Water Act must acknowledge the massive amount of progress the law has spurred. Recall that

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

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of SEJ is to strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,450 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's annual conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly *SEJournal*.

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***SEJournal Editorial Submission Deadline
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Getting into the (Clean Water) Act continued from page 5

passage of the law over President Richard Nixon's veto in 1972 was spurred in part by a *Time* magazine story on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland actually catching fire because so many combustible wastes had been dumped into it. (That 1969 blaze in Cleveland was not the first river fire, nor the last, just the most famous one. The Cuyahoga had previously caught fire, as had



Thick, acrid smoke poured up from a fire on the surface of Cleveland's Cuyahoga River in November, 1952, one of more than a dozen such incidents on the industrial waterway dating back almost a century. A similar blaze in 1969 was instrumental in the 1972 passage of the Clean Water Act that led to the river's eventual recovery. PHOTO: CLEVELAND PRESS COLLECTION, CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

those in other cities.)

The Clean Water Act has done a pretty good job of getting polluters to reduce the amount of gunk being dumped, particularly if it's getting dumped through a pipe. (That makes it a so-called "point source," meaning the pollution discharge is coming from a particular point, the discharge pipe.) The law has done a much worse job controlling "non-point" pollution that flows off hard surfaces including streets and parking lots, as well as from farm fields and construction sites and other types of land uses.

Understanding the Act's inner workings

Some of the basic building blocks of Clean Water Act enforcement will help you assess the health of a particular water body, and the efficacy of government enforcement efforts.

Here's how enforcement of the Act is supposed to work:

First a state or tribe decides what the "designated use" (<http://tinyurl.com/7hgtqle>) of a given water body will be. In practical terms, this is not usually a big deal. Most of the water bodies are supposed to be fishable and swimmable, and some also are supposed to support other uses such as drinking water, livestock watering or irrigation.

Then the government — usually states, but in some states the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — establishes water quality standards and goals. If any particular water body is meeting these standards, regulators are supposed to apply a multi-tiered "antidegradation policy." (<http://tinyurl.com/871vd2g>)

Theoretically, combined with monitoring, this is designed to prevent deterioration of water quality in healthy water bodies to the point that existing uses are preserved. That doesn't always happen, though. You're likely to hear a lot about this if, say, a new factory or sewage treatment plant wants to dump waste into a water body that's just barely able to support the uses for which it is designated. Certain pristine "outstanding national resource waters" receive the highest protection — no permanent reduction in water quality is allowed.

More interesting is what happens if a lake, stream or river does not meet water quality standards.

At that point, the water body is placed onto what's known as the 303(d) list — named for a section of the Clean Water Act — meaning that it is in violation of the Act. The 303(d) list is a great starting point for any state, regional or local stories. In the [latest count](http://1.usa.gov/quIK7a) (<http://1.usa.gov/quIK7a>), the number of "impaired" water bodies ranged from 35 in Alaska to 6,957 in Pennsylvania. From this list you can determine which water bodies are violating the Clean Water Act, and what



The contemporary Cleveland, Ohio skyline beyond the Cuyahoga River in 2009.

PHOTO CHRIS CAPELL VIA FLICKR

types of pollutants are involved.

The untold stories of monitoring, cleanup

Some years ago the 303(d) list was merged with something known as the 305(b) list, which attempts to assess the health of all water bodies and recommend actions needed to achieve water quality standards.

The merged lists are now presented as what's known as an Integrated Report, which is due to EPA on April 1 of every even-numbered year. It's worthwhile to take a look at these, and compare them to past versions.

Pay close attention to the 305(b) list. It will tell you, for example, what percentage of your state's water bodies are even monitored — a quick and dirty story in and of itself, since it's likely to be surprisingly low.

More important, this list is the universe from which the agency chose those waterways that went on the 303(d) list. Did your budget-battered state environmental agency put fewer waterways on the list than it should have? Remember that the more water bodies on the list, the more work the agency has to do. Ask probing questions about how the state made decisions to leave water bodies off the 303(d) list.

When a water body is on the list of impaired waters, often a cleanup plan known as a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, will be drawn up. EPA and the states have been forced by several rounds of lawsuits (<http://tinyurl.com/7duv8fq>) to produce these plans. They attempt to sort out the sources of a given pollutant, and lay out ways to reduce the pollution sources to a point where the water body again complies with the Clean Water Act (for that pollutant, at least).

Now, here's the dirty secret that doesn't get nearly enough attention: The Clean Water Act requires these TMDL cleanup plans to be drawn up, but *it doesn't require them to be put into effect*.

So there is a fine story to be done in almost any city or state about how officials know how to bring water bodies into compliance with the Clean Water Act, but aren't taking action.

Permits, extensions yield important stories

One of the most accessible ways to cover the Clean Water Act at the local level is to take a look at one or more of the sewage treatment plants, feedlots, factories and other facilities regulated under the law.

A major pollution-control strategy of the Clean Water Act is requiring facilities that discharge waste into waterways to obtain a permit to do so, usually from a state pollution-control agency. These are known as National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits, known by the acronym NPDES (pronounced NIP-deez).

How those permits are drawn up is a key matter.

The original idea behind the permits was that regulators would require what could reasonably be achieved in terms of pollution reduction from factories, sewage plants and other dischargers. The facilities would be held to limits in those permits, which were to be issued for a period of five years. Theoretically, in the intervening five years technology would improve and when the next permit was issued, the polluters could

be held to a higher standard. The pollution limits would be gradually "ratcheted down" to zero.

That was the theory, anyway. It often hasn't worked out that way. It's worth looking at the largest dischargers in your area and examining their permits. Are the limits being ratcheted down over the years? Some expert guidance from a university or knowledgeable environmental advocate will be helpful here.

For a given facility, look at current and past permits. Ask, have the discharge limits been reduced? How often is the discharge tested? What about the waterway into which the gunk is dumped? (You'd be surprised how little actual measurement is done there.) How were the pollutants being monitored (often known as "parameters" or "parameters of concern") selected in the first place?

Don't overlook a huge trend, which is how overwhelmed are the state agencies issuing administrative extensions of these permits? If you see permits being extended for long periods, remember that it's more than an administrative detail. The permit renewals are intended to re-examine the pollution-control strategy, and they give the public a formal say in how those limits should be set. But if a five-year permit gets extended for four years, that's four years' worth of pollution — without public comment.

In general, these NPDES-permitted facilities will be required to monitor what they are dumping and report to the state environmental agency. These "discharge monitoring reports," or DMRs, typically are submitted on a monthly basis, although some are done quarterly. Some larger facilities

sample more frequently, even though they only have to submit their reports monthly.

Mapping compliance can show surprising problems

For an even broader look at how the Clean Water Act is functioning, consider taking a virtual look across the landscape.

Typically a state environmental agency will have a large database that includes the discharge reports. Once you obtain this, you will see that many facilities are violating the Clean Water Act,



Wading through knee-deep waters, a young participant in the 2011 Los Angeles River Day of Service in California picks up accumulated trash. PHOTO: GREG LILLY VIA FLICKR

some continuously or at least frequently. Laying those out on a map is impressive. Even better, make it an interactive map so that members of the public can learn the details of what's going on at the polluters nearest them.

EPA has its own permit compliance database: <http://tinyurl.com/7uctsu>. But the ones at state agencies will be more up to date, in my experience. [In February of this year EPA unveiled a new and supposedly easier-to-use tool, the DMR Pollutant Loading Tool (<http://cfpub.epa.gov/dmr/>), although as I write this shortly after its release, I haven't personally used it yet].

When we did this mapping at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, complete with color-coding, readers couldn't believe the amount of facilities that were violating the law.

Some years later, *The New York Times* went further on a national basis with its 2010 Toxic Waters series (<http://tinyurl.com/ng739t>), calculating the number of enforcement actions per 100 violations of the Clean Water Act.

The results:

(<http://tinyurl.com/o8kn93>) were surprising. In my home state of Washington, for example, just 8 percent of violations resulted in enforcement. Perhaps surprisingly, North Carolina led the nation, with 85 percent of violations sparking enforcement (although the *Times* pointed out that resulting fines were relatively small, averaging just \$1,387 per violation.)

In addition to spotting those facilities that are violating their permits, consider looking at the scandal in what's legal.

For example, say Facility A is allowed to have a concentration of toxic metal No. 1 of 200 parts per million in its discharge water (a/k/a "effluent"). Take a look at the actual number of gallons that were discharged over, say, a year. If that facility discharged 500 million gallons in a year — not that large a number for a big sewage treatment plant — that means 5,000 gallons of the toxic metal were discharged.

If you carry out that exercise with even the largest, say, 10 or 20 dischargers into a water body, the numbers begin to add up very fast.

Truly, the Clean Water Act is so far-reaching that we could fill up this entire issue of the *SEJournal* with more story ideas, but you've got the basics now. See the the following section of this story for a few other ideas for how you can shed light on how this bedrock environmental statute is functioning four decades

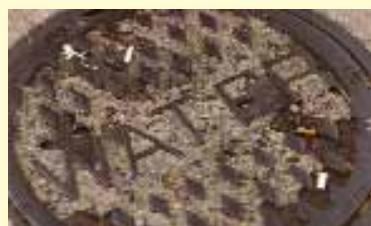
after Americans thought their waterways were to be protected.

Other clean water story ideas

- States and tribes must update their water quality standards every three years. What's happening in your part of the world?

- As mentioned in the above, the Clean Water Act has done a poor job overall in controlling so-called "non-point source" pollution washed into waterways as rainwater runoff a/k/a stormwater a/k/a non-point source pollution. The remedies involved so-called "green infrastructure" that environmentalists say should be part of all new construction and rebuilding projects. *SEJournal* and SEJ's *TipSheet* have covered this extensively in the past.

Here's a place to start: <http://tinyurl.com/8549sko>



Online Resources for Covering the Act:

One place to start is EPA's main web page on the Clean Water Act with a good overview of the law:

<http://tinyurl.com/77sesb3>

Text of the Clean Water Act:

<http://tinyurl.com/7v576mk>

Even as a veteran of Clean Water Act coverage, I found it helpful to take this "fact or fiction" quiz that lays out some basics and will give you some good questions to pursue: <http://tinyurl.com/7betllr>

Here is a barrelful of information on Total Maximum Daily Loads: <http://tinyurl.com/85sjd4l>

This site looks at TMDL lawsuits, by state: <http://tinyurl.com/7duv8fq>

Excellent SEJ *TipSheet* on the new Discharge Monitoring Report Pollutant Loading Tool: <http://tinyurl.com/7bjye59>

Here's a good Clean Water Act glossary: <http://tinyurl.com/867ax9q>

- A hardy perennial of environmental coverage in many locales is the so-called "concentrated animal feeding operations," or CAFOs. If you have these in your coverage area you probably have heard about them. The 40th anniversary of the Clean Water Act is a great time to look carefully at this source of water (and air) pollution.

Robert McClure is executive director of InvestigateWest, a non-profit journalism studio based in Seattle and covering the Pacific Northwest. He also serves on the SEJ board of directors and is chairman of the SEJournal editorial board.

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www.sej.org

Web tool brings documents to life

DocumentCloud lets journalists engage with the public and knowledgeable sources

By AMANDA HICKMAN

Looking for ways to invite readers into the story and make your online reporting more engaging? Buried in documents and hoping there's something out there that works better than a highlighter and a gross of sticky notes? If you aren't using DocumentCloud, you should be.

DocumentCloud (<http://tinyurl.com/y56na99>) is a web-based tool that reporters can use to analyze, annotate, and publish the documents behind their reporting. It's EPA reports, court filings, toxicology profiles, medical records and much, much, more.

Here's how it works:

You need to acquire and scan your documents. If you need help getting your hands on the documents you know you need, check out Muckrock (<http://www.muckrock.com/>) — they're the most dependable FOIA and FOIL butlers you'll ever meet. Once the documents are digital, you can log in and upload your documents — they don't have to be PDFs, either. DocumentCloud can handle Word and Libre Office documents, as well as PDFs. Publish your documents immediately, or keep them to yourself while you work on your reporting.

A word about spreadsheets:

You can upload spreadsheets to DocumentCloud, though the software doesn't have any understanding of rows and columns. If you're looking for a good way to manage raw data and share it with your readers, keep an eye on the Panda project (<https://github.com/pandaproject/panda>) and look into TableSetter (<http://propublica.github.com/table-setter>) and TableStacker (<http://datadesk.github.com/latimes-table-stacker>).

Using DocumentCloud to organize research

DocumentCloud takes a few minutes to process your documents — the software breaks out images of each page and stores those. If the document doesn't already contain text, DocumentCloud uses a free and open source tool called Tesseract to extract text information from the document. Then it runs your text through Reuter's OpenCalais, an entity extraction engine that will pull out and organize the names, places and key terms in each



Amanda Hickman

PHOTO: COURTESY AMANDA HICKMAN

document. DocumentCloud will also extract information like dates, so that you can look at a document on a timeline and see the dates mentioned in it, as well as email addresses and phone numbers.

DocumentCloud does all this processing and turns the documents back over to you in a clean, fast-loading web interface where you can begin annotating documents. Private annotations will be visible only to you, while public annotations are as public as the document. Making an annotation is as simple as clicking "public annotation" or "private annotation" and drawing a box around the text you want to highlight. Add your note and click save. Choosing "private" keeps it as yours alone.

Every annotation has a unique URL, so you can use DocumentCloud to manage your research and organize facts in a project of almost any size. Investigative reporter Tracie McMillan, whose book *The American Way of Eating* looks at the life and labor of the food industry, created a great tool. (A onetime student of investigative reporter Wayne Barrett, she calls it "the barrettizer"). It's a spreadsheet of facts from the book, each one linked to the source material, much of which McMillan has put on DocumentCloud.

When you're ready to publish, you can embed a single annotation in your story, publish a searchable set of documents or publish whole documents one at a time. DocumentCloud is full of great tools to help smooth the editorial process. The collaboration tools let reporters, for example, show a lawyer an annotated copy of a document or invite a geologist to review and annotate a report that you're struggling to understand.

If you have some programming chops, DocumentCloud's API will let you automate almost every step of the way. Search GitHub for "DocumentCloud" to find a great list of tools your colleagues have already written to incorporate DocumentCloud into their own sites.

DocumentCloud was founded in 2009 with a Knight News Challenge grant. Investigative Reporters and Editors took over

fundraising, support and development in 2011.

So how do you get an account? Write to:
info@documentcloud.org and tell IRE's Lauren Grandestaff who
you are and what you're reporting on.

Amanda Hickman helped launch The New York World and was program director at DocumentCloud, a Knight News Challenge-funded project that reporters around the world are using to analyze, annotate, and publish primary source documents. She currently serves as an adjunct faculty member in interactive journalism at the City University of New York.



Examples of DocumentCloud at work

- What emails reveal about the rescue effort at the massive mining disaster in West Virginia:

Post: <http://tinyurl.com/6x8zzj1>
Document: <http://tinyurl.com/84u8r9s>

- How a payday lending empire finances a famous auto racer:

Story: <http://tinyurl.com/3rbamug>
Document (compares signatures):
<http://tinyurl.com/7lssd2f>

- An annotated fact sheet on fracking:

Post: <http://tinyurl.com/7t9y4am>
Document <http://tinyurl.com/7spxetb>

- One of the many revelatory documents dug up in the aftermath of the BP oil blowout:

Post: <http://tinyurl.com/775u2la>
Document: <http://tinyurl.com/8xl6wtz>

- Another post-BP blowout revelation by ProPublica, this one on worker health:

Post: <http://tinyurl.com/6w6c5ab>
Document: <http://tinyurl.com/6vpltmc>

More examples can be found at
<https://www.documentcloud.org/featured>

FEJ

Fund for Environmental Journalism

SEJ's Fund for Environmental Journalism accepts applications for grants of up to \$3,500 to help underwrite environmental reporting projects and entrepreneurial ventures.

The purpose of the FEJ is to provide incentives and support to qualified journalists and news organizations to enhance the quantity and quality of environmental journalism.

WHO MAY APPLY?

Any qualified journalist working independently or on the staff of either a for-profit or non-profit news organization worldwide is eligible to apply for a FEJ grant.

HOW ARE THE FUNDS TO BE USED?

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QUALIFICATIONS

SEJ membership is not required, but all applicants must meet SEJ's eligibility requirements: your work must be in journalism or closely related to journalism, and your responsibilities must not include public relations work on environmental issues or lobbying on environmental issues.

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Dykstra returns to the calling of journalism, climate change and the next best story

By BILL DAWSON

Among SEJers, Peter Dykstra is one of the most widely known and highly regarded figures in the world of environmental journalism. He worked for 17 years at CNN, serving as the network's executive producer for science, environment, weather and technology. During that time, he shared Emmy, Dupont-Columbia and Peabody awards.

Before his CNN career, he was national media director for Greenpeace. After leaving CNN, he launched a video news series called Science Nation for the National Science Foundation in 2009 and was deputy director in charge of communications for the Pew Environment Group from 2009 until 2011.

In May 2011, he was named as publisher of *Environmental Health News* and *The Daily Climate*, affiliated websites that publish original journalism and aggregate environmental news reports by hundreds of outlets around the world.

Dykstra responded to emailed questions from *SEJournal*'s Bill Dawson.

Q: What have you been doing (and what will you be doing) in your role as publisher of *Environmental Health News* and *The Daily Climate*?

A: I'm nearly a year in as of this writing, and I'm enjoying it immensely. We have a hard-working, seasoned team that's aggregating the world's environmental news and offering strong original pieces as well. The aggregated content is a great source of story leads and historical research for journalists, all free of charge.

Q: The announcement of your appointment said you had been assigned to broaden the sites' reader base and increase distribution of their enterprise reporting. What are some of the ways that will or may happen? How large was that reader base when you joined the organization?

A: We're growing, with more email subscribers and more web visitors. We launched an aggressive social media effort that's growing quickly, and worldwide. There's been some great original content that's been picked up by large news organizations. *EHN* is nine years old and *Daily Climate* is four. Our goal is to greatly



Peter Dykstra

PHOTO: COURTESY PETER DYKSTRA

increase the reach of both sites. We're still pretty far behind Justin Bieber and Lady Gaga in terms of traffic, but our audience is a great cross-section of opinion leaders. Roughly equal numbers of journalists, academics, NGO's, government officials, and for-profit readers.

Q: The same press release said one key aim is to position *EHN* and *TDC* so they can do an even better job of providing access to "quality journalism at a time of drastic cutbacks for traditional news organizations." Am I right in inferring that you and your colleagues think quality journalism is still out there, but perhaps not as easy to find as it should or could be?

A: Many conventional news organizations are turning their backs on substantive, quality reporting on specialized beats like science and environment. But quality journalism doesn't happen without quality journalists, and they're everywhere. Between our editors, Marla Cone and Douglas Fischer, contributors like Rae Tyson and Bill Kovarik and myself, we've got five current or former SEJ board members. We have other bylines, like Jane Kay, who topped the San Francisco environment beat for years, and rising stars like Brett Israel and Lindsey Konkel. Pete Myers is the CEO, and he literally wrote the book on the key, emerging topic of endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Well, at least he co-wrote the book. Quality journalism hasn't gone away. Not a bit. Some big news organizations are missing their backbones, but we'll do everything we can to fill the void.

Q: You're a person who has paid a tremendous amount of attention to environmental coverage for quite a few years now. Amid all the "drastic cutbacks" in basic public-affairs reporting — not least, in reporting about environmental issues — what is your very general view of the situation right now? Have things stabilized for the moment? Still deteriorating in terms of reductions in staffing and other resources?

A: It's a disgrace, and a threat to the ideals of a healthy democracy and a well-informed public. SEJ and its members are shining

exceptions, but the current high level of contempt for not just journalists, but scientists, public servants, artists and teachers reminds me a lot of the McCarthy Era. It'll get better because it can't get much worse.

Q: What's your view of the role and importance of non-profit news organizations in the future? Will they be increasingly important as a substitute for some of the coverage that's been eliminated as commercial outlets cut back? What are some of the particular pitfalls and difficulties you see as more non-profit outlets are launched?

A: I started journalism school during the year of the peak enrollment for journalism majors, 1975, right after Woodward and Bernstein. Those days may be gone, but nonprofits are one of the brightest hopes out there.

Q: You've moved between key leadership roles in journalism and environmental advocacy during your career — from Greenpeace to CNN to Pew and now to *EHN* and *TDC*. What were some of the main challenges you faced in doing this? Or was it easier than one might imagine? How did your experiences in journalism inform and influence your work in advocacy, and vice versa?

A: Many journalists tend to hold a theocratic view that these two fields are irreconcilable. That's BS. They each have their own rules, and it's not brain surgery to follow the rules for either. I'd like to think I've benefitted from learning the rules for both. As a journalist, I know how advocacy works, and vice versa. Advocating a position does not mean you're lying for cash payments. That's different. I have no regrets about the very different career stops I've had, and have learned from all of them. And I've lowered my blood pressure by 20 points since I took this job.

Q: During your years at CNN, you were an active, high-profile member of SEJ, serving both as a board member and conference chair. Do you expect to become that active again? In any case, do you think SEJ's role is different or changing now, compared to the time when you were in leadership positions with the organization?

A: It's heartbreaking to see so many SEJ stalwarts lose their full-time positions at major news organizations. But the organization is still strong. I'm not a fashion-show kind of guy, but the SEJ Miami conference was a real triumph.

Q: Looking beyond the hot issues of the moment, are you willing to venture a guess about what key subjects will be occupying environmental journalists a few years from now? Admittedly, there are so many unknown unknowns, as Donald Rumsfeld put it, which make such predictions a very risky business.

A: I always told my CNN folks that their stories should look smart on the day they're aired, and look even smarter 20 years down the road. By this standard, environmental journalism already has a lot to be proud of. There's nothing I'd like better than for my

colleagues and me to be proven totally, abjectly wrong about things like climate change. But the science says there's very little chance of that. Our refuge is to tell the truth as we see it, about climate, about human health and the environment, about the oceans, and about habitat loss. They'll all still be issues for our lifetimes and beyond. It's not a pretty picture, but at least we're doing our jobs well.

Bill Dawson was the long-time assistant editor of SEJournal.

FAQS to the SEJ office

Q. I'm not getting my SEJ-Talk listserv posts any more. What's happened?

A. If your dues are not current, you could be unsubscribed from SEJ-Talk.

If you have changed jobs and/or your email address, the posts are still going to your former email address. Contact the SEJ office for help.

It's important to "white list" your listservs in your spam filter so they aren't blocked.

Q. I'd like to volunteer to write for the SEJournal. How do I go about that?

A. Contact SEJournal editor Adam Glenn at aadamglenn@hotmail.com and pitch your story idea or suggestion for a column.

Q. I forgot my username and password for the SEJ website. What's the easiest way to get it?

A. If you can't recall your login information for the SEJ website, look on the home page for the words, "Need Help?" Click there, then enter your email address, and click on "email new password." If you have recently changed your email address and not updated your SEJ web profile, you won't get the reminder.

You will need to email the SEJ office (sej@sej.org) or call (215) 884-8174, to have your password re-set. Once you login, however, be sure to go to your personal profile and update your contact information.

Thank you for your generous contributions in 2011

SEJ is grateful to donors whose contributions to the Endowment Fund, the Fund for Environmental Journalism and unrestricted general support made such a difference in 2011. For detailed funding policies and a complete list of foundations, media companies and university sources of support for SEJ please visit <http://www.sej.org/about-sej/funding-sources>

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Film festival puts indie envi

Sundance screens documentaries on pesticides, climate change

Chasing Ice



"Chasing Ice" features photographer James Balog, founder of the Extreme Ice Survey, shown here adjusting a remote camera above an Alaskan glacier. (See *Glacier Chasers*—SEJournal cover story, Summer, 2009: <http://tinyurl.com/78lko7r>) PHOTO: © JAMES BALOG

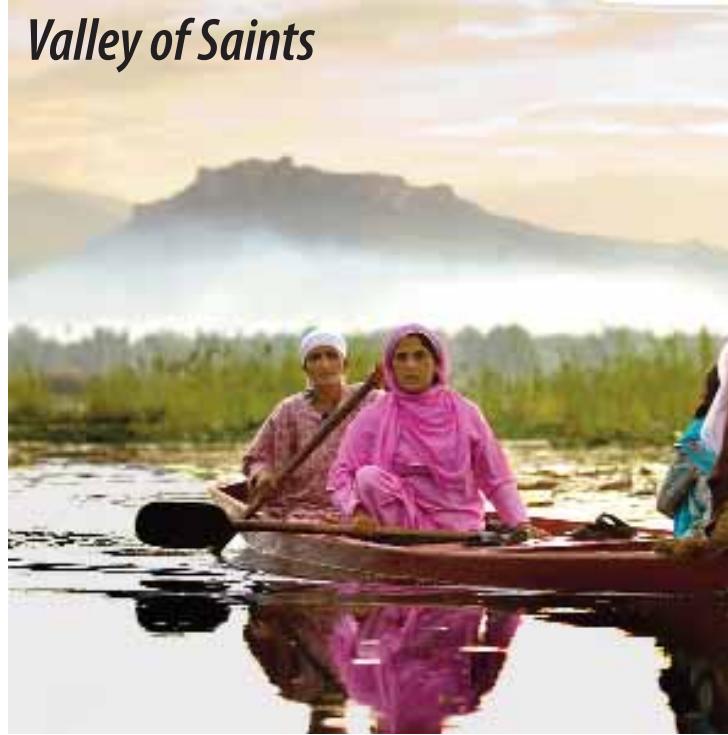
By JOANN VALENTI

Indie films screened at Robert Redford's annual Sundance Film Fest in the mountains of Utah set the agenda for movie festivals all over the country, all year. The best move on to Academy Award nominations, win Oscars, top the showcase for major cable TV outlets and pull in worldwide audiences. SFF, from humble beginnings in the '80s, is now a major route to success both for filmmakers and film lovers. When you add in the documentaries and short films screened, the SFF 2012 program served up 181 independent efforts to reach distributors and maybe a mass audience.

Not unexpected for this fest of film rebels, many of this year's program, especially in documentaries and shorts, focused on the fading pulse of the American Dream, international unrest and the power of protest.

For example, a not-to-be-missed doc from Sweden, *Big Boys*

Valley of Saints



Women living on the edge of a dying lake in Kashmir take their wares to a boaters' market. The film, *Valley of Saints*, won the Audience Award at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival.

Gone Bananas, brilliantly captures the aftermath of the 2009 documentary *Bananas*, as Dole Food Inc. sues the filmmaker, controls U.S. media reports (very scary) and threatens anyone trying to screen the film. All this over the story of Dole's use of a pesticide, later discontinued, and accusations by Nicaraguan workers of poisoned people and land. Spoiler alert: the little guys win against the multi-national corporate giant.

Although the Swedish parliament, conservatives and liberals (imagine that!) formally request Dole to stop their threats on freedom of speech, U.S. media come off looking incredibly suckered in by a massive PR machine. "It's terrible [to be sued]," Swedish filmmaker and former journalist Fredrick Gertten told me. "It's against the meaning of democracy." Gertten said he wants balance in his stories. "It was important to let the audience listen to the best arguments from Dole," he said. "I believe in transparency. I know they [international corporations as well as his blog fans] follow what I do. I have no secrets," he said.

When I asked how he felt now about American journalists who for a year after the story ran with the PR spin, he noted the stress of time pressures on reporters but worried more that "it takes a lot to go against the tide." In this case, the *L.A. Business Journal* set the agenda based on facts, later proved false, created by Dole that deflected the real story. Ultimately, people are intelligent, they can take a stand and truth will win.

Two films in spotlight

climate change, nuclear power and more



ket. "Valley of Saints", co-winner of the Sloan
PHOTO BY YONI BROOK



"Bear 71" from Canada featured over 11 years of video clips from trail cameras following a grizzly bear that were embedded in an online grid at a festival installation. PHOTO BY JEAN SEBASTIEN DEFUY, NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

even under attack, Gertten said.

As if on cue, yet another suit was filed on opening day against a filmmaker whose doc focused on what was to be the largest — read most obscene — house in the United States, being built in South Florida. The billionaire allegedly went into foreclosure. The audience might relate to the housing bust issue, then wince at the morality of more bathrooms with more square footage in one house than total space in a five-star hotel. By fest end, the suit disappeared and the film — *The Queen of Versailles* — won a directing award.

Chasing Ice, a serious improvement over *Inconvenient Truth*'s effort to tell the climate change story, brings massive calving icebergs from around the globe onto the screen through the lens of National Geographic photographer James Balog. The Extreme Ice Survey (EIS) project set up 30 cameras in Alaska, Greenland, Iceland, the Alps, Canada, Bolivia and Glacier National Park in Montana (soon to be known as Glacierless National Park). Filmmaker Jeff Orlowski won an award for Excellence in Cinematography.

Two years into making the doc *The Atomic States of America*, the Fukushima accident sent filmmakers Sheena Joyce and Don Argott back to their nuclear experts who had told them no one would pay attention to the potential danger of nuclear power until we had another Three Mile Island or Chernobyl. Their film offers a before-and-after perspective on the shift in public perception of nuclear's risk.

This year the annual Alfred P. Sloan Award for accurate representation of a science issue, technology, or portrayal of scientists or engineers recognized two films, both, as per the award's requirement, feature films. You will soon see *Robot and Frank* starring Frank Langella, Susan Sarandon, James Marsden and Liv Tyler in theaters. Sony Pictures Worldwide and Samuel Goldwyn Films acquired rights to this "in the near future" mechanical solution to elder care for \$2 million.

Award co-winner *Valley of Saints*, also the winner of the Audience Award for World Cinema Drama, comes from India and features a dying lake in Kashmir.

Even a one-time SEJ member, author Phil Shabecoff, saw his book *A Fierce Green Fire* morph this year into a lengthy documentary by the same name. A fifty-year history of the environmental movement is retold via archival footage and a showcase of notable talking heads, among them Shabecoff, the late Stephen Schneider and reps from the bigger enviro NGOs. [Note from a retired academic: It would take two class sessions to expose students to this film; they can read the book on their own time.]

For me, in my second decade of covering SFF, the most outstanding look into what's ahead came from the New Frontier art installation *Bear 71* from Canada. Redford noted in the opening press conference that creative tools are mixing and new hybrids are emerging to show us what's in the future. *Bear 71* clearly forecasts what's coming. Over a decade of park rangers' trail cam footage, an online map/grid of Banff National Park and a narrative voice created for a female grizzly invite user participation. *Bear 71* is an exciting interactive lesson in a real animal-human interaction.

As the star, the bear herself, repeats her mantra, "Don't do what comes naturally," a modern day fable emerges from the world of media scientists, a new breed combining artist/filmmaker/journalist/game designer. It's bioelectric architecture, computer technology and more creating a cyborgish future normal. Seriously. Normal is not what it used to be. Go to <http://bear71.nfb.ca>.

Access to more information on SFF2012 films can be found at sundance.org. Also see sundance.org/apps.

JoAnn Valenti, Ph.D., spends her retirement working from her home in Tampa, FL. Emerita Professor seems to mean nothing ever stops. Probably not such a bad deal.



Are meteorologists environmental journalists?

And why that matters for the coverage of climate change

By BUD WARD

Recently, a thread arose on the SEJ-Talk listserve when a reporter asked the seemingly innocent question “Are television meteorologists environmental journalists?” Like any good question (and all not-so-good questions?), the answer is Yes. No. Maybe … and it depends.

Meteorologists’ largest credentialing professional society, the American Meteorological Society, aims to see them become “station scientists,” the go-to news persons on staff who presumably could steer other TV reporters straight on issues ranging from tomorrow’s weather to the next century’s climate; from aeronomy and agronomy to astronomy (but not astrology); from atmospheric chemistry to aquatic biology; from limnology to forest ecology. You get the picture, even if they might never.

Which brings up a subject nearly always in the news, the weather. The nexus between climate and weather is a hot topic in the many “framing” discussions constantly under way in the climate change science and communications fields nowadays. (Ink-in-vein journalist types need not apologize for being suspicious that some of this “framing” talk amounts to little more than traditional pull-the-wool public relations. They’re right. But not all of it, and that’s a reason they should pay heed to these considerations and keep an eye on them, with all due and appropriate journalistic skepticism.)

Going beyond the standard meme

Many in the climate science community, and in particular those generally viewed as being among the most respected in that community, are themselves struggling with how best to parse details involving the relationship between our warming climate and the trends toward more and more severe weather “anomalies” (the preferred term of art in the field).

Some in the science community appear ready to go beyond the standard meme: that no single weather event can be tied directly to global warming. The emerging meme may be more along these lines: no single weather event can be tied directly to global warming, but emerging patterns appear consistent with what the best science has said might happen in a warming world.

And add in: The changing climate, as best symbolized by increasing atmospheric concentrations of CO₂, is the new and influential background on which emerging weather events are occurring.

It’s just this issue that is discussed at length in a 2011 journal report “Changing the Media Discussion on Climate and Extreme Weather” (<http://bit.ly/wy4kYb>). The academic authors of that article — Christine Shearer of the University of California Santa Barbara and Richard Rood of the University of Michigan — praise reporters who “directly or indirectly reframe the question from ‘did climate change cause this weather event?’ toward ‘How are human-generated emissions affecting physical conditions in ways that can manifest both over the long term (climate) and the short term (weather)?’”

They urge scientists to help move reporters in this direction “given the politicization of climate change science where scientific uncertainty is often mischaracterized and promoted as an excuse for inaction.”

Is ‘false balance’ dead or just on a holiday?

All of this is happening within a context where many professional societies’ annual conferences — beyond SEJ’s own, that is — echo with the message: The media by and large are blowing it on the “environmental challenge of the century” by not sufficiently informing their audiences about climate challenges and associated risks and options.

That may be a generalization many journalists actually accept, along with their non-media observers and critics.

Now take it a step further. Part of the shortcoming in today’s reporting lies with a continuing preference among too many editors to maintain what has become known as the “faux balance” — with the views of a dozen or so climate outliers presented aside the more evidence-based perspectives of the vast majority of professional climatologists and their professional organizations (American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Geophysical Union, American Meteorological Society, American Institute of Physics, Ecological Society of America; the list goes

on and on).

On that point, many SEJ members indeed appear to have a substantially different take. They say, and not without hard numbers to justify their view, that the “balance bias” is pretty much behind them at this point. And has been for several years now. This group no longer sees a need to “balance” the take of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or National Academy of Sciences, for instance, with those of a former and shrill congressional staffer turned fossil fuels shill. That’s so yesterday that even many local TV news directors no longer drink that particular flavor of Kool-Aid®.

Mind you, there’s a lurking and concerning issue out there on this one: With the continued “downsizing” of mainstream news outlets’ science and environmental beats and specialized sections, one can imagine an upcoming crop of general assignment reporters having to go through the same steep learning curve that seasoned environmental and science reporters have already surmounted. Which is to say that the ghost of balance-as-accuracy reporting may not be vanquished after all, but rather may just be in a state of suspension. Some day (and how soon, no one can be quite sure) it may return in all its News Reporting 101 vengeance.

Journalists and others agree more coverage is needed

Another universal thread found in nonjournalist climate science circles — whether they be earth scientists or the increasingly active social scientists — is one on which they and reporters may again see more eye-to-eye: Not enough coverage. Period.

By now there are several hard number-crunching findings that show coverage of climate change/global warming/whatever-you-prefer-to-call-it is down, way down from the 2006/2007 high-water mark.

There are of course reasons for this, and some are reasons that roll off the tongues of those in the journalism community while perhaps seldom occurring to those beyond it: The profound revolutionary impacts on major metropolitan dailies of the Internet; the collapse of much classified advertising revenues and the economic recession generally; the overall shrinking of the “news hole” in many media, and in particular the news hole for complex and scientific issues; the pink-slipping of a number of seasoned science reporters; the move of much of the dialogue from legacy news outlets to online “new media.”

Add to those, some media and media watchers might say, these factors: From a policy standpoint, the dearth of federal and international activity creates a vacuum, and there’s not a whole lot truly “new” about most of the underlying scientific evidence.

Not enough coverage, and not enough of it made readily available to much of the general public, and not sequestered on some preach-to-the-choir web site or garroted behind a paywall. On that point, many in the media may in fact generally agree with their critics in the physical and social science/climate change communities — Wanted: More Climate Coverage.

So, are meteorologists environmental journalists? It’s for each to decide. So too is it for environmental journalists to decide the extent to which they need to better reflect some of the approaches



Regardless whether a weather reporter is deemed a journalist or a ‘station scientist,’ as the American Meteorological Society encourages, all agree increased weather reporting on climate and weather is necessary. PHOTO: CC WENZDAY01 VIA FLICKR

of meteorologists. And, for that matter, of earth and social scientists when it comes to the issue of adequately informing the public at large on critical climate issues.

Bud Ward, one of the co-founders of SEJ, is editor of The Yale Forum on Climate Change & The Media, published by Yale University’s School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and its Yale Project on Climate Change Communication.

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SEJ grant program has real impact on reporting

Fund for Environmental Journalism supports 31 projects in two years

By TIMOTHY WHEELER

CB Smith-Dahl got the means to investigate toxic contamination in her own California community — and an introduction to the challenges and rewards of environmental journalism. Sue Sturgis, a veteran journalist from North Carolina, gained “the luxury of time” to spend a week in Louisiana’s coastal communities researching a series on the aftermath of the Gulf oil spill.

Those are just two of the more than 30 reporting projects and ventures aided by the SEJ’s Fund for Environmental Journalism in its first two years. They illustrate the varied ways in which the fund has helped new and seasoned journalists alike pursue new ideas and dig beneath the surface, with money for travel, training and getting their stories an audience.

One grant allows environmental coverage on people of color

“The grant really allowed me to grow as a journalist,” said Smith-Dahl, who spent four months last year intensively reporting on polluted properties in West Oakland for Oakland Local (<http://oaklandlocal.com>), a nonprofit online news site co-founded by long-time Society of Environmental Journalists member Amy Gahran.

Smith-Dahl, a West Oakland resident with experience in film-making and celebrity journalism, was recruited to follow up on a series, Bay Area Toxic Tour, done in 2009 by newsdesk.org, another noncommercial news site. Where that series focused on air pollution, Smith-Dahl’s, “Toxic Tour II, Right Beneath Our Feet,” concentrated on how current and former “brownfields” were affecting one of Oakland’s most environmentally challenged areas, which is bounded by freeways (<http://tinyurl.com/74xswxb>).

It was a story that resonated with Smith-Dahl, who’s lived there since 2005, and wonders if it’s affected her and her children’s health. She has a nagging cough, she said, and has had her 9-year-old



CB Smith-Dahl

PHOTO BY TEHEA ROBIE

twins tested for lead poisoning because of the area’s extensive soil contamination (results negative). Her personal stake in the story also extends to her mixed African-American and white parentage.

“There aren’t that many people of color reporting on issues (like this),” she said, “and a lot of environmental reporting doesn’t happen in cities. That felt really good, to have that perspective and to do that reporting that’s essential.”

In addition to the \$1,000 grant from FEJ, Smith-Dahl said her reporting benefited from mentoring by Gahran and one of SEJ’s founding members, Rae Tyson. Besides writing stories for the web site, she recorded audio and video interviews, took still photographs and even developed an interactive web page, seeking to engage community members in a dialog about what defines West Oakland. The grant not only covered some of her expenses, it enabled her to experiment with presenting her reporting in varied media.

The interactive drew only one comment, but the narrated slide-show got “an incredible number of hits,” she said, and her series had other kinds of impact as well. Environmental officials seemed to become less dismissive of residents’ questions about the safety of remedial work planned when they realized she was covering their community meetings, she said.

“As a journalist and resident, it was really great to have the funding to dig deep, talk to local advocates (and others) and spend some time walking the neighborhood. It’s my understanding that kind of ‘beat’ journalism doesn’t happen anymore. I was really invigorated by that kind of journalism and see how it’s a guarantor of democracy.”

She also had the satisfaction of seeing one of her stories — about a novel remediation technique using fish bones to neutralize the lead in the soil — get picked up a month later in *The New York Times*.

Though the grant funds have been used up, Smith-Dahl says she’s still following developments. “I’m really excited to continue

“There aren’t that many people of color reporting on issues (like this) and a lot of environmental reporting doesn’t happen in cities. That felt really good, to have that perspective and to do that reporting that’s essential ... I feel like the grant made it possible for me to join the league of exceptional environmental reporting.”

CB Smith-Dahl

to do this kind of reporting. I feel like the grant made it possible for me to join the league of exceptional environmental reporting."

New round of funding backs wide array of projects

The Fund for Environmental Journalism got launched in 2010 with seed money from SEJ's budget, but since then it's drawn a steady stream of individual donations. It's also garnered significant support from the Grantham Foundation and the Heinz Endowments, plus a surprise unsolicited gift from the Cornelius King Foundation, according to Beth Parke, SEJ's executive director.

As the fund has grown, it's been able to back more projects in both new and mainstream media, including a few with international reach.

In four rounds of grant-giving since summer 2010, FEJ had provided full or partial support to 31 projects through January of this year. The vast majority of the awards covered travel expenses, but some funds also went to document-access fees, Web site training and in one case for lead emission testing.

In the January round alone, funded projects focus on American cities and suburbs, Appalachia and the Amazon and promise to shed light on issues related to mining, the food system, air pollution, land use, and invasive plants.

Not every FEJ-supported project has worked out as planned.

Bob Berwyn, editor of the independent non-profit news site Summit County Citizens Voice (<http://summitcountyvoice.com>), got \$400 for travel expenses to do a multimedia online report on climate change and water pollution in Colorado and Utah.

Berwyn says the FEJ grant wasn't enough by itself, and he wasn't able to raise sufficient additional funds to make the month-long trip he'd planned from the Colorado River's headwaters to the Utah line. But he did put the FEJ grant to good use, he says, strengthening coverage of Colorado River issues.

"The funding did help me put some extra time toward reporting Colorado River issues a couple of summers ago," he said in an email. "I was able to take a few extra days to attend some workshops and conferences where I did some live blogging and tweeting. Along with a volunteer citizen journalist, I also did a one-day tour of water diversions in Grand County and put together a video report."

Grant supports in-depth reporting on Gulf spill

One grant that paid off was a probing five-part investigation of the Gulf spill's health impacts in *Facing South* (<http://tinyurl.com/7n3oad2>), the online magazine of the Institute for Southern Studies. The series by Editorial Director Sue Sturgis and *Facing South* Publisher Chris Kromm is the kind of in-depth reporting all too rarely seen in newspapers anymore.

Sturgis said she has been regularly visiting the Gulf region since Hurricane Katrina in 2005 for *Facing South* and *Southern Exposure*, the North Carolina-based institute's printed magazine.

But after the BP offshore well blowout, she said they wanted to take a more intensive look at the impact of the prolonged spill on Louisiana's coastal communities.

"FEJ gave us the luxury of time," Sturgis said. (FEJ guidelines actually preclude paying for a journalist's time or for equipment. In this case, Sturgis meant that the grant enabled her and publisher Kromm to spend an entire week reporting in depth, a longer stay than they'd been able to afford on previous reporting trips).

"The oil disaster wasn't over when the well was capped," Sturgis explained. "What we found was sort of a slow-motion disaster that was unreeling even a year after the oil spill (with) a lot of people suffering from the oil spill."

The series reported on health problems among cleanup workers and coastal residents, and it examined how the regulatory system had failed to prevent harmful exposures. But it also tackled the broader issue of the energy industry's role in the Gulf, the political power wielded by it and other industry interests to thwart regulatory reform, and how their health concerns have

turned ordinary citizens into grassroots activists.

"People were pleased that somebody was paying attention," she said of the reaction she and Kromm got in Louisiana communities to their visits. "One of the things you hear from people in the region was that the powers-that-be have been

in a hurry to say the disaster's over, everything's fine, it's okay to eat seafood, okay to start drilling again."

Facing South's reporting was picked up in other media outlets and blogs, and other news organizations did similar reporting on post-BP spill health concerns. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., also pledged to follow up with BP on medical claims and to hold a meeting addressing health problems related to the spill, according to the institute's web site.

Sturgis said she's planning to return to the Gulf this year to follow up, but with a focus this time on how the Gulf spill's legacy may play out in this year's election.

"For us this is really an ongoing project," Sturgis said. She's grateful for the support she's been able to get from FEJ, especially considering all the other stories seeking funding.

"I'm just always so blown away when you look at the (grant) winners, you think, 'What great projects!'" she said. "You just wish there was a lot more money to fund other projects. There's so much happening on the environmental news front, and such shrinking coverage, which really worries me. That's why FEJ and everything SEJ does is so important."

Tim Wheeler covers the environment for The Baltimore Sun. He has written on environmental topics frequently in his 38-year journalistic career. His reporting on the Chesapeake Bay, childhood lead poisoning, growth and other subjects has won multiple awards. He's a former president and board member of the Society of Environmental Journalists. During his time on the board, he helped launch the Fund for Environmental Journalism and has since assisted with reviewing FEJ grant proposals.

Analysis: Buzzwords to watch for this election year

Energy, enviro catchphrases to listen for and what they'll mean

By LISA HYMAS and CHIP GILLER

Don't expect the environment to be in the spotlight in national political campaigns this year — the economy and the culture wars look to be the stars of 2012. Still, environmental issues are getting talked about, often obliquely as part of larger discussions about energy.

In politician speak, energy policy has become a proxy for economic policy, a way to talk about stances on job creation and stimulus spending and free-market capitalism. But the words don't always mean what you might think they mean.

Here's a guide to energy and environmental buzzwords you'll be hearing — or not hearing — this election year:

Climate: In 2008, from the presidential candidates on down the ticket, Democrats and Republicans alike offered up grand plans for combating climate change. But you won't be hearing "climate change" or "global warming" in many of this year's stump speeches — and that absence speaks volumes.

President Barack Obama thinks he'll reach more independents by talking about energy innovation, clean energy, and an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy (snatched right from the Republican playbook). Many of his fellow Democrats are following his lead and letting climate stay in the background, especially after the ignominious death of climate legislation in 2010.

The GOP's Mitt Romney doesn't like to talk about climate change because he's been accused of flip-flopping on the issue. Most Republicans in Congress or at the state level bring up climate change only if they want to voice their skepticism. Former GOP Rep. Bob Inglis (S.C.) is launching a new group to promote conservative solutions to climate change, but don't expect that effort to gain much traction this year.

Keystone: If you hear a politician say the word "Keystone" this year, you can bet s/he's a Republican.

The Obama administration in January denied a permit for the Keystone XL pipeline that would carry tar-sands crude from Alberta to the Gulf of Mexico, but Republicans are going to do everything in their power to keep the issue in the news during this election year. In speeches and advertisements, they argue that Obama's move killed jobs and made America less energy secure.



To help combat climate change, a nationally designated demonstration area of riparian buffer zones on private farm lands in Iowa combines multiple rows of trees, shrubs and native grass.

PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND VIA FLICKR

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other conservative groups are piling on with ads making the same assertions.

Many Democrats, meanwhile, are walking on eggshells around this one. They don't want to anger the green wing of the base, which showed its might by elevating Keystone into a national issue last year. But they also don't want to be painted as anti-job or tick off any of the unions that want to help build the pipeline (the labor community is split on the issue).

A poll released by Hart Research in February suggested that the Keystone fight is winnable for Democrats if they articulate a clear message — for instance, that the pipeline would create only 2,500-4,500 temporary construction jobs, accord-

ing to researchers at Cornell University, and much of the oil it transports would be shipped overseas.

Stay tuned to see if Dems will seize the opportunity.

Solyndra: If you hear a politician say the word "Solyndra" this year, you can know s/he's a Republican.

Republicans will keep harping on the bankruptcy of solar company Solyndra, which got a federal loan guarantee of more than half a billion dollars. They say it shows the folly of the federal government trying to pick winners in the energy sector and boost the economy through stimulus spending. (Mitt Romney even slipped up early on the campaign trail and said "Solyndra" when he meant "Keystone," betraying the fact that Republicans see both issues primarily as cudgels with which to attack Obama.)

Obama has been defending his administration's Solyndra investment, albeit without mentioning the company's name. His first TV ad of the campaign season went after his Solyndra critics, and in his State of the Union address, he said, "Some technologies don't pan out; some companies fail. But I will not walk away from the promise of clean energy." Other Dems have been less sure-footed in their responses to the Solyndra mess. Expect them to avoid the topic whenever possible.



A portion of the Keystone Pipeline under construction near Swanton, Neb. in 2009.
PHOTO: © SHANNON PATRICK VIA FLICKR

Fracking: Hydrofracking for natural gas is turning into a flash point this year. Environmental activists are campaigning hard for stricter regulations or even outright bans on the process, which has been linked to groundwater pollution and possibly even earthquakes.

Republicans counter that risks are being hyped and we need to exploit this domestic source of energy.

President Obama is trying to walk a middle line: he's calling for more fracking, but his administration is working on rules that will require companies to curb their air and water emissions and disclose the chemicals they use. Other Democrats span the spectrum from firmly pro-fracking to decisively anti-, with a good number uncomfortably in between.

Green jobs: You'll hear this phrase less often than in past years — it's lost some of its luster. But the issue of how many jobs might be created or lost as a result of energy policy decisions is bigger than ever.

Obama spotlighted a wind-turbine worker during his State of the Union address, and he and the Democrats will keep talking about the economic promise of a clean energy economy. Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) is taking this line of argument even further, saying the administration's new rule requiring cuts in mercury emissions from power plants will create more jobs than the Keystone pipeline would have, as utilities will have to hire engineers and construction workers to outfit old plants with scrubbers.

Republicans and their allies are countering by talking about "energy jobs" — the kind that come from building pipelines and mining coal and fracking. "Drill baby drill" talk continues to resonate with the GOP base. Still, two Republican governors — Iowa's Terry Branstad and Kansas' Sam Brownback — recently called for extension of a wind-energy tax credit that's set to expire at the end of the year, and other Republicans from states with big wind and solar potential recognize that clean energy can be a job creator.

Poll after poll finds widespread support from voters across the spectrum for renewable power, so watch to see which politicians try to tap into that vein.

And more:

The **Environmental Protection Agency** used to get bipartisan support for efforts to clean up air and water, but Republicans in Congress are increasingly accusing the agency of overreach. With the EPA poised to release new rules for power

plants and fracking this year, attacks from the GOP could escalate.

Talk of **energy subsidies** will bubble up periodically, and that phrasing generally means that a politician doesn't favor the form of energy being subsidized. If s/he does like an energy source, you'll hear words like "investment" and "support" and "job creation," and talk of "subsidies" will be sidelined.

If **gas prices** go up, expect to see Obama assailed by Republicans on that front, even though his administration is opening up a number of offshore areas to new oil drilling. Oil prices are determined by global commodities markets, not by the actions of an American administration, but most politicians glide right over that fact.

Lisa Hymas is senior editor at Grist.org, a leading independent source of online environmental news and analysis, reaching a monthly audience of one million.

Chip Giller is founder and CEO of Grist.org. He was named a Time Magazine "Hero of the Environment" in 2007 and was honored with a Heinz Award in 2009.



Dina Cappiello

By DINA CAPPIELLO

Don't get sidelined on election story

Working the political campaign for enviro angles

As an environmental reporter, I've never worked an election night. I've missed the excitement of returns coming in, the newsroom camaraderie — and the free food. My sole contribution typically was filing a story for the election-day paper that wasn't about the election.

But just because environment-beat reporters aren't central to election coverage, doesn't mean they can't contribute at all. While at times we can feel a million miles away from the political action — and the Beltway-based press corps that follows national political candidates — our subject matter expertise can help inform election coverage, and can assist political reporters and readers in separating out fact from fiction.

It can also help voters in your town, region or state decipher how candidates' stances will change things at home, if at all.

That's true more than ever this year, when energy and environmental topics from drilling to high gasoline prices to regulation of heat-trapping gases are repeatedly showing up on the campaign trail.

Here are some ways environment-beat reporters can get a piece of national election coverage:

- With some in the GOP field calling for the reversal of Environmental Protection Agency rules — and the abolition of

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Boots on the ground at annual SEJ gathering

Texas conference to bring sneak-preview screening, numerous sessions, Big Bend tour



By RANDY LEE LOFTIS

What the photographer posted about this dust storm in Lubbock, Texas: "You'd think that agricultural practices might have changed in response to the Dust Bowl of the 1920s and 1930s. Turns out that at least in this part of Texas, you'd think wrong. Oh, and it rains mud here too."

PHOTO: TIMANDKRIS VIA FLICKR

Let's start with the hyperbole: In mid-October, as the summer heat wanes, the greatest gathering of environmental journalists, doers, and thinkers in the world will take place in a region of legend and drama — the Southern Plains.

Now for the reality check: It's all true.

Nothing quite compares with the annual conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists. It's a journalism meeting conceived, planned, and run 100 percent by journalists, with support from SEJ staff. It's a science meeting where the scientists get questions their peers never thought to ask.

It's a politics conference without a political party. It's a social-issues meeting where the participants learn first-hand from those affected — and those doing the affecting — rather than from a corner office in a think tank. It's a how-to conference where everybody has something to contribute, and does.

Screening planned for Ken Burns documentary

SEJ has many good habits, but choosing great venues for the annual conference is among its best. From California to Massachusetts, from Oregon to Florida, SEJ has gone to places where the environment and the human experience are most closely intertwined. We go to places where society, for better or worse, does the hard work of trying to keep itself alive.

This year, from Oct. 17-21, we're in a place where Comanches and the cavalry faced off in box canyons. Where people saw their lives blow away in the Dirty Thirties. Where people learned to tap

an ancient, unsustainable aquifer to feed and clothe millions, but now wonder where their water for drinking will come from.

It's a place where the land and water matter every day, not just in the abstract. It's a place where climate change is, quite literally, a matter of life and violent, skyborne death.

So it's fitting that we'll get an exclusive-to-SEJ first look at *The Dust Bowl*, a new film by Ken Burns that airs on PBS on two nights in November. Dayton Duncan, the film's co-producer and screenwriter, will lead us through this unforgettable tale.

We'll visit, on our Thursday tours and our post-conference tour to Big Bend National Park, some of the iconic but troubled places of the great Southwest — places with globe-changing history still happening today.

And stay tuned as we pursue a truly multimedia experience — a combination of live, world-class music and perspectives on the land like nothing else in SEJ history. Keep your fingers crossed on that one.

Tours visit bat caves, canyons, ranches, nuclear facilities

The daily rundown is as rich as we've ever had at SEJ.

We'll start Wednesday with an all-day workshop on the business of freelancing. From multimedia to copyright law, new or experienced journalists will learn from veteran contributors to *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *Scientific American*, and many other publications.

Wednesday night we'll have our traditional SEJ kickoff,

including the annual SEJ awards. We're working on top-notch speakers and plan a live, remote hookup with those across the world who are fighting to save the land.

Our Thursday day tours will include some of the best that the Southwest has to offer. Carlsbad Caverns is the destination to discuss bats and human impacts. The huge and legendary 6666 Ranch prompts questions about the land and food. The nation's newest nuclear fuel plant and newest radioactive waste facility are on the agenda. So is Palo Duro Canyon, where natural grandeur and history merge with cutting-edge climate research. Environmental justice in the Oil Patch and a standoff between oil and an endangered lizard are also in the mix. Other tours will look at wind, water, and wildlife.

Thursday night we're back at the Overton Hotel in Lubbock for our annual independent hospitality receptions and a sneak peek at our paid exhibitors. And we might find a chance for some late-night, expert-guided stargazing under the stupendously clear West Texas sky (clear, that is, when the dust doesn't roll).

Friday includes plenaries on journalism's proper role in communicating climate change and on the vital but misunderstood links between land, water, and food. Friday also includes our first concurrent sessions, ever-popular network lunch and the annual SEJ membership meeting.

Friday night's "dinner and a movie" will include highlights from *The Dust Bowl*, which depicts a tragedy that wracked West Texas like a slow-motion tornado and made conservation a cause to embrace.

The Saturday agenda includes more concurrent sessions, a lunch plenary previewing the upcoming presidential election — high-level invitations have been sent — and Saturday afternoon's mini-tours to Texas Tech labs, a working feedlot, and other attractions.

Post-conference tour to take in Big Bend National Park

Saturday night is boots time. We'll be at the National Ranching Heritage Center, a beautiful Texas Tech museum, for a barbecue — great vegetarian fare included — and live music on the patio beneath a West Texas sunset.

On Sunday morning, the venue moves to the American Wind Power Center, a fascinating museum set high on a hill that displays the history, technology and human factors of wind energy. There we'll have breakfast, a conversation with noted authors on the Southwest, and our annual book authors' pitch slam.

The post-conference tour promises to be among SEJ's best yet. Big Bend National Park hugs the Rio Grande and the Mexican border. Stunning scenery and desert-mountain quiet can't hold off the pressures of habitat and climate change, a fight over water, and budget woes. But there's also globally renowned birding, the effort to create a protected ecosystem bigger than Greater Yellowstone, and the classic Texas hike: the South Rim of the Chisos Mountains, always rewarded by a view never to be forgotten.

So plan on joining us in Lubbock Oct. 17-21. Most likely, you haven't seen anything like it. Most definitely, you'll be very, very glad you did.

Randy Lee Loftis is chair of the SEJ Lubbock conference 2012 sponsored by Texas Tech University.

Don't get sidelined on election story
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PHOTO BY RICH CLEMENT

The EPA not only gets dumped on by detractors in Congress seeking its elimination. Last September, opponents of mountaintop removal mining dumped 1,000 pounds of dirt and rubble in front of the agency's headquarters in Washington, DC.

the EPA altogether — what would be the effect in your area if these regulations, or this agency, went away? Would Superfund site cleanups stop? Would air pollution problems, and the health effects that come with them, persist?

- On the flip side, would reversing some Obama administration environmental rules keep a power plant or factory in your area open longer? Would certain jobs be more secure if some of the current rules would be abolished?
- Highlight examples where the position of the candidate running for national election runs counter to those in their party at the state or local level. I recently teamed up with one of our reporters in Ohio for a story about how the GOP presidential contenders are to the right of those in their own party in that state on the regulation of hydraulic fracturing.
- Check candidates' facts when it comes to local environmental issues. A good example of this was when former House Speaker Newt Gingrich used a landfill in Nashua, New Hampshire to highlight how radical the EPA had become. "The city of Nashua recently had a dump that was cited by EPA. They went down to find out, what was it being cited for? And they told them, frankly, 'We don't know. We can't find the records that lead to this citation'....," Gingrich said. *PolitiFact* called up the local reporter who had recently written about the case to help separate fact from fiction. But local beat reporters can do it themselves.
- Identify environmental and energy firms in your area that are supporting or donating to the candidates and examine their records. Is one of the biggest polluters backing one of the candidates? Is a clean energy company contributing to President Barack Obama's campaign because they expect greater support if he is re-elected?

Dina Cappiello is the national environment reporter for The Associated Press and a former SEJ board member.



SEJ members honored, produce videos, win awards and grants

Others change jobs, publish books — or just retire

By JUDY FAHYS

Long-time SEJ member **Adam Glenn** has been named acting editor of the *SEJournal*. Glenn, an associate professor of journalism at the City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism, had previously served in the early 1990s as the *Journal's* features editor, and as co-editor with founding SEJ board member Kevin Carmody, and continues as a member of the *SEJournal* Editorial Board.

Professor **Kris Wilson** of the University of Texas at Austin was recently elected a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for his "pioneering research on the role of weather forecasters in communicating accurate, credible information on climate change, and excellence in teaching future science communication specialists."

Deborah Fryer created a short video about the history of environmental health for the American Public Health Association. This video is available as a free download for use in classrooms, on websites, and other educational purposes. You can watch the video here: <http://vimeo.com/32226544>. You can also get the embed code or download to your desktop from that same site.

Heather King, freelance producer/journalist, recently attended COP17 to cover industry developments as a Climate Change Media Partnership fellow. She also celebrated the 1-1/2 year anniversary of "View from the C-Suite," which profiles CEOs who are greening their industries, and she is launching "Red, Hot and Green" — a series looking at game-changing green innovations.

Gustave Axelson is changing jobs, moving from managing editor of *Minnesota Conservation* magazine to science editor at the ornithology lab at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. In his new role, he will be a communications liaison between the lab's team of research scientists and the public. He also joins the editorial team of *Living Bird* magazine, produces the lab's annual State of the Birds report for the U.S. Department of the Interior, and does writing and communications projects for citizen science and education initiatives.

Producer **Alexa Elliott** reports that her South Florida Public Television team won another award for an episode in their "Changing Seas" series. "Alien Invaders," which focuses on the lionfish invasion in the Western Atlantic and Caribbean, won a Suncoast Regional Emmy Award.

Christy George received a \$5,000 grant from the Regional Arts & Culture Consortium to work on the Oregon chapter of a book about climate change: <http://tinyurl.com/7538a4d>. She earned a two-week writing residency at Hill House in Michigan, from the Institute for Sustainable Living, Art & Natural Design, to work on the opening chapter of the same book. Her other work includes producing three more stories for the PBS show *History Detectives*.

Soll Sussman of Austin, Texas, was expected to retire from the Land Office in February after 21 years and he plans to work more often as a freelancer. He's already making regular appearances on the EnergyMakers podcast/broadcast <http://tinyurl.com/7x6zbgo>

Margot Roosevelt, former *Los Angeles Times* environmental reporter, is now working for Reuters covering election year politics.

This spring, **Cara Ellen Modisett's** essay "Farmland, Shenandoah Valley" will be included in "The Mountains Have Come Closer," Vol. 15 of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, published by the Southern Appalachian Writers' Cooperative. The essay is from a manuscript in progress Cara is completing as part of her MFA in creative nonfiction at Goucher College.

Osha Gray Davidson published *Kirstenbosch: Africa's Garden*, a book of photographs from South Africa's Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, the world's oldest botanical garden devoted to preserving indigenous plants. (With a preface by Zaitoon Rabaney, executive director, Botanical Society of South Africa.)

Judy Fahys is environment reporter at The Salt Lake Tribune. Send an email about your latest accomplishment or career shift to fahys@sltrib.com

President's Report *continued from Page 4*



conference-related fees, dues, ads and subscriptions, and new grants in 2012. Loyal foundation funders continue to support SEJ. Project funding for the Fund for Environmental Journalism mini-grants has increased and university sponsorship for annual conferences remains strong. Exciting partnership opportunities continue to emerge for SEJ.

In 2011, for the first time the organization began accepting unrestricted gifts of general support of up to \$15,000 from any source who supports SEJ's mission and work. This source of support has great potential for SEJ. Last year, SEJ raised \$7,000 from these sources. Gifts from individuals totaled \$27,560.

We know SEJ can increase those numbers, with strong strategic planning and with the support of our membership.

Carolyn Whetzel covers environment issues in California for Bloomberg BNA.



Blue Revolution Unmaking America's Water Crisis

By Cynthia Barnett
Beacon Press, \$26.95

Reviewed by TOM HENRY

I'm a self-professed water geek, with a strong Great Lakes focus. My friend Cynthia Barnett is also a self-professed water geek, with a strong Florida focus. Now that we've got that messy little disclosure out of the way, I have to hand it to her: *Blue Revolution: Unmaking America's Water Crisis* blows me away.

Can you be envious and proud at the same time? Cynthia takes readers on a highly ambitious worldwide search not only for evidence of water conflicts and tension, but also in search of a water ethic. Sadly, she finds little evidence of one, at least not consistently enough and in areas that most need them, especially the United States.

Her book is a call to action, imploring readers to see the potential of applying Aldo Leopold's land ethic to water management.

She's right. There are water management districts everywhere. But a unified, systematic approach to conserving and using water more wisely in all walks of life, from producing energy to flushing toilets, is lacking. That's happening even as the crisis worsens, with more people here and abroad lacking access to clean water.

Barnett makes the point that water abundance is a myth we've all grown up with and come to accept.

I'd go a step further and say water management is, bad pun intended, an incredibly dry subject to way too many people. Much of the public's interest in water is, like air, crisis-driven. Too often, discussions are left to policy wonks and lawyers until there's an oil spill of the magnitude of those associated with BP's in the Gulf of Mexico and the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska. Most people today are unaware that one of the key driving forces behind the first Earth Day in 1970 was the massive 1969 oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, Calif.

But I digress. This book isn't about spills. It's about the deepening crisis over sheer volume, from Atlanta to the Colorado River and across the globe.

Blue Revolution is hardly the first to sound the alarm over excessive and misplaced water usage. But in this book you get into the mindset of one of the West's biggest power brokers, Las Vegas water authority chief Patricia Mulroy. You also get a greater appreciation of people and issues from Milwaukee to San Antonio

to Singapore to Holland.

The book provides vivid examples of what works, what doesn't and why people should care.

Through her keen observations and impassioned quest for what drives society's collective thoughts about water, Barnett taps into the psyche of apathy, neglect, and indifference that has pervaded generations. She shows why, fundamentally, that must change.

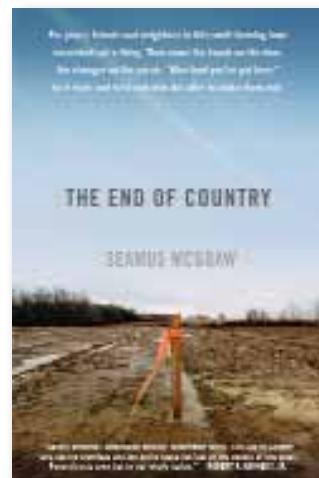
Fellow SEJer Bruce Ritchie, another of Cynthia's friends, wrote in a review on his blog, Florida Environments (floridaenvironments.com), "She paints no one as saints or villains, just players in a system where too much authority has been turned over to utilities, power companies and engineers. We use water with wasteful abundance in some areas when it is tragically lacking in other areas."

Blue Revolution is a compelling read and an incredibly well-researched book capable of whetting your thirst about one of the world's driest — yet most vitally important — topics.

Tom Henry is an editorial writer and columnist for The (Toledo) Blade. He is a member of SEJ's board of directors, SEJournal's editorial board and is SEJournal's book editor.

The End of Country Dispatches from the Frack Zone

By Seamus McGraw
Random House, \$26



Reviewed by SUE SMITH-HEAVENRICH

In the fall of 2007, Seamus McGraw's mother is planting bulbs when a woman drops by. She's got a ring in her nose, an armful of gas leases and — in an unpardonable breach of etiquette — no time to admire the garden. When his mother seriously considers leasing the farm, McGraw heads to Dimock, Pa., with a fresh notebook and loads of questions.

In *The End of Country*, he delves beneath the issue of leasing to reveal the characters of those most impacted by drilling: Victoria Switzer, a retired school teacher who moved to Dimock to build her dream home; Ken Ely, who quarries bluestone from his farm just uphill of Switzer; and Rosemarie Greenwood, an aging dairy farmer who apologized for not baking muffins because her oven stopped working years ago.

Book Shelf

McGraw's no "parachute journalist" — he grew up in Dimock, riding his bike on the country roads and later filling his gas tank at Ely's station. So when Ely tells him that the land is resilient, McGraw understands that Ely's referring to past years of timbering, dairy farming, coal mining and, now, gas drilling.

"Sure, you could kill it if you took too much," Ely said.

Greenwood leased so she could feed her cows and pay grain bills for one more year. For Ely, it was another way to work his land. For Switzer, it was an ambivalent faith that drilling might provide energy security to the region and the nation.

In this book, readers gain a close-up view of seismic operations and insight into how drillers make decisions. McGraw shows how land is cleared for well pads and access roads, helps readers hear the blasting, the hundreds of trucks grinding up the roads heavy with rig parts, the thousands of trucks bearing millions of gallons of water and chemicals used in blowing the rock apart two miles below the surface, the thousands of trucks hauling away the liquid waste — water so contaminated it must be injected deep into disposal wells or treated in special facilities.

But his real story is about character — the character of the country and the people who make up the community. Even as they debate the proffered leases, McGraw insists we see these people with our hearts. They are more than the decisions they make, he says. And the leases are less about money than about hope for a better future, one in which young men and women are not sent off to war to secure access to foreign oil fields.

As more drillers move into the countryside, those who welcomed them become acutely aware of just how disruptive the industrialized drilling process is to their way of life.

Those who haven't leased feel under siege as the number of landmen multiply. "Their phones rang constantly, their mailboxes were crammed with letters representing Chesapeake and Devon and a host of other companies large and small that none of them had ever heard of," McGraw wrote.

Things shift; neighbors seem more guarded. Whenever conversation drifts too close to leases and recent offers, a chasm of silence opens up. Neighbors suddenly seem a lot more concerned about their property lines, people begin studying their deeds.

There was, McGraw explains, a vague but growing sense that something fundamental had changed — that, in the face of the gas company money, the community was starting to come apart. Though the land was resilient — forests reclaiming old roads and foundations, leaving not a trace of the civilization that had come before — people are not. Just the promise of money was enough to make neighbors view each other with suspicion.

"People who had always stoically shared the hardships of rural life seemed no longer willing to share anything at all," McGraw writes. It was, as one woman put it, "the end of country."

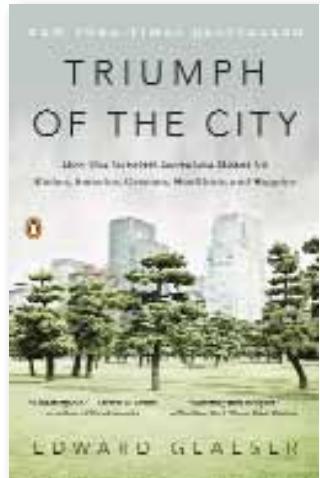
Sue Smith-Heavenrich writes about science and agriculture from atop the Marcellus Shale in upstate New York.

SEJ Members ... got a book coming out?
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Triumph of the City

How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier

By Edward Glaeser
Penguin Press, \$29.95



Reviewed by JENNIFER WEEKS

In 2009, the world passed a milestone: For the first time, 50 percent of humans around the globe lived in cities. That percentage continues to grow. In the United States, the statistic is even more pronounced — more than two-thirds of Americans now live in urban areas

In *Triumph of the City*, Harvard economist Edward Glaeser makes a forceful case that cities are humanity's "greatest invention." Cities spawn all kinds of innovations, such as new art concepts and high technology advances. They are, in Glaeser's view, the greenest way to live.

That may seem counterintuitive to readers who equate urban life with traffic jams, air pollution and sewers. As Glaeser acknowledges, cities, especially in developing countries, concentrate millions of the world's poor into dark and unhealthy slums. But when modern cities are compared with other models — especially low-density, car-dependent suburbs — Glaeser says cities are far greener.

According to Glaeser and his colleagues, living in densely-settled urban areas greatly reduces gasoline use because people don't have to drive as far to get their daily errands done. A household in a census tract with more than 10,000 people per square mile uses 687 gallons of gas yearly, compared to 1,164 gallons for a household in an area with fewer than 1,000 people per square mile (about one household per acre).

Urban residents also use less electricity, which accounts on average for two-thirds of residential energy use. As with gasoline, there are variations among cities. Coastal California cities (San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Jose) are among the greenest, while less-dense Sun Belt cities such as Houston and Memphis are among the dirtiest. Older Northeast and Midwest cities lie in between these extremes.

In Glaeser's view, it would make sense to have more growth in green regions because going elsewhere will do more damage.

To make his point that growth can be progressive, Glaeser compares two British visions for what cities should be: the traditional view, represented by Prince Charles' model community of Poundbury (a walkable community in Cornwall, similar to New Urbanist projects in the United States, although less car-dependent), and the larger-scale policies of socialist London mayor Ken Livingstone, widely known as "Red Ken."

Livingstone's approach combines high-rise construction (which expands London's tax base, giving the city more money to

spend on social programs) with quality-of-life policies like congestion pricing and support for mass transit.

"The urban model is green when used by real people," Glaeser argues. "High costs of land restrict private space, and density makes car use far less attractive. Urban living is sustainable sustainability. Rural ecotowns are not."

Chicago and Vancouver are two cities that Glaeser believes are getting it right, building densely but intelligently (Vancouver has narrow skyscrapers that leave plenty of open views) while also emphasizing trees and parks.

Most urban growth, however, is taking place in the developing world. In Glaeser's view, the most important tests for urban development in the coming decades will occur in China and India. If those nations adopt the model of dense urban growth with mass transit, world carbon emissions will be more manageable than if they become as car-dependent as the United States.

Developing countries will also have to solve the problems of urban poverty — no small challenge, as anyone who saw the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* realizes. In Europe and the United States, making cities healthy places to live required huge government investments in clean water, sanitation, mass transit and housing. Some developing countries are already on that path (Singapore and Bogota, Colombia are examples) and have earned praise for making their cities livable for both the poor and the wealthy.

Glaeser doesn't downplay how ugly conditions can be for poor people in mega-cities such as Rio de Janeiro. But, he argues, it's essential to remember that poor people are better off in cities than in rural areas, where there are fewer services and opportunities.

"The part of the world that is rural and poor moves glacially — only occasionally shocked by famine or civil war, or, very rarely, something as helpful as the Green Revolution — while the part of the world that is urban and poor is changing rapidly. There is opportunity in change," Glaeser wrote.

Glaeser argues for policies that give cities "a level playing field" instead of providing incentives to flee to suburbs. They include free trade, pro-immigration policies to let talent move freely from place to place, and carbon taxes to make energy users pay the full social costs of their actions.

With steps like those, especially in developing countries, Glaeser speculates that "American suburbs will begin to look like an exception rather than a prognosis of the world's future."

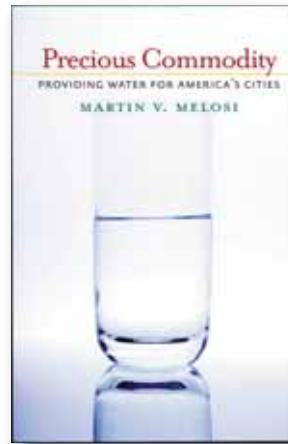
Jennifer Weeks is a Boston-based freelance writer and a member of SEJ's board of directors.

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Book Shelf



Precious Commodity

Providing Water for America's Cities

By Martin V. Melosi

University of Pittsburgh Press,
\$27.95

Reviewed by CAROLYN JOHNSEN

Martin Melosi's most recent book, *Precious Commodity*, explores the history of efforts to provide pure water and adequate sanitary systems to America's cities, a process fraught with politics and favoritism and complicated by the frequent conflict between economic benefits and human need.

Melosi, a history professor at the University of Houston, does an adequate job of examining the effects of this conflict in selected U.S. cities. In the process, Melosi also explains the historical factors that led some cities to choose privately owned water and sewer systems over publicly owned utilities.

Although the book's content is history and not advocacy, Melosi notes the problems inherent in viewing water as a "commodity," a prominent attitude among policymakers and elected officials who have frequently been more diligent in providing water for industrial and economic purposes than for people of all income levels and races.

Melosi points out that those who control water are as important as those who get the water and how the water is used. In the process, he raises important questions about the human right to fresh water.

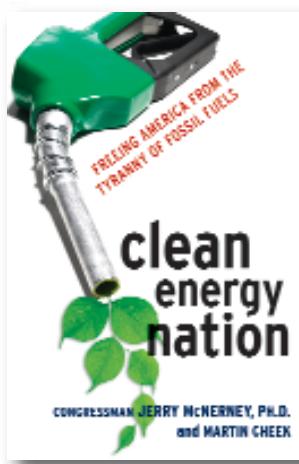
However, *Precious Commodity* lacks a clear narrative line and human voices. The author seems to be writing for other historians and public-works officials rather than for the general public, and so tends toward the abstract.

But for readers with the common expectations of city dwellers (pure water from every tap, a sewer system that carries waste away and treats it properly, adequate water for gardening and fire fighting alike), *Precious Commodity* provides a fine, broad context.

The information on growing human needs for water worldwide is especially useful in this respect. In examining the frequent assertions that the world faces "a water crisis," and "water is the next oil," Melosi wrote that "reliance on water goes much deeper into history than dependence on oil. Truth be told, 'water is the next water' — if such a phrase makes any sense at all."

It is for this very history of U.S. municipalities' search for water that many readers will value this book.

SEJ member Carolyn Johnsen is writing a book about the history of the Ogallala Aquifer in Nebraska, and has written about factory hog farms and about communication for scientists.



Clean Energy Nation

**Freeing America from the
Tyranny of Fossil Fuels**

*By Jerry McNerney and
Martin Cheek*

*AMACOM/American Management
Association, \$27.95*

Reviewed by JIM MOTAVALLI

In 2007, Newt Gingrich wrote a book called *A Contract with the Earth*, which called for a new type of conservative environmentalism because the green groups stood for “litigation, regulation, taxation, bureaucracy.” He declared, “Free enterprise is not the enemy of the environment; it is the engine that will drive promising alternatives to failed practices.”

Weighted down by internal contradictions, the book didn’t go anywhere.

These days, Gingrich wants to dismantle the U.S. EPA in favor of a new agency that focuses on “what do we need to do today to get a better environment that also gets us a better economy.”

That’s the central paradox of environmental books written by numerous politicians: They’re often forced to declare that sustainability equals growth, ignoring some of the colder realities dictated by Mother Nature.

Clean Energy Nation: Freeing America from the Tyranny of Fossil Fuels by U.S. Rep. Jerry McNerney (D-CA) and journalist Martin Cheek is a much better book than Gingrich’s *Contract*, but it’s also shaped by politics. It makes a strong case for why green energy is good for America, but underestimates the hurdles that stand in its way.

The book is full of hopeful nuggets like this one: “A fleet of 10,000 hybrid delivery trucks, for example, would save 7.2 million gallons of diesel fuel a year for FedEx, reducing America’s oil consumption and saving the company money.” Undoubtedly, but then why does FedEx actually have only 365 hybrid vans out of a fleet of 75,000 vehicles?

There’s some inconvenient truth here. Fuel costs aren’t, as the *Wall Street Journal* reported, “a big weight on [the FedEx] balance sheet.” Hybrid trucks cost a lot more up front, so big companies such as UPS and FedEx tend to buy them when they get federal subsidies. That’s exactly the kind of political largesse targeted by the Tea Party and the politicians elected in its name.

The bankruptcy of solar producer Solyndra, which secured \$535 million in U.S. Department of Energy loan guarantees, was a rallying point for Republicans in the House, many of them elected in the 2010 midterms. It was an Obama failure and a

campaign opportunity. Perhaps Tesla Motors or Fisker Automotive — green car companies that received hundreds of millions in federal loans — will, they hope, be next. Understanding that helps explain why the conservative blogosphere wants the General Motor gas-electric Volt, the recipient of Obama Administration subsidies, to fail.

Clean Energy Nation calls for a “patriotic partnership,” the kind that existed when (of all people) Richard Nixon was in the White House.

“Great American leaders at all levels of government know the necessity of moving beyond their ideology to achieve great outcomes,” the authors wrote. “It is probably not possible to entirely end our reliance on petroleum and fossil fuels, but we can certainly enact programs that give the proper incentives to become more energy efficient ...”

That seems like wishful thinking. There was a brief window when such legislation could get passed, but bringing it back would seem to require hard-nosed and targeted strategic thinking that’s beyond the scope of this book. We get vague pronouncements along the lines of, “Our nation’s people must become passionate about taking actions toward solving our energy challenges.” But how are we going to get there when “drill, baby, drill” is a simplistic political mantra, and a decreasing percentage of said citizens believe that climate change is even real?

Politics aside, there’s a lot of value in *Clean Energy Nation*.

The book is clearly written and well documented, and it acquits itself well in explaining how we got addicted to oil. It’s a useful primer in the basics of solar, hydrogen, wind, nuclear, geothermal and biofuels. It explains how our energy choices affect education, agriculture and America’s overall health. Readers come away from reading McNerney and Cheek entirely convinced of the need to abandon more than a century of fossil fuel dependence. But making that happen is the hard part, and the book isn’t much help there.

Jim Motavalli is the author of High Voltage: The Fast Track to Plug in the Auto Industry (Rodale) and a contributor to the New York Times, National Public Radio’s “Car Talk,” Mother Nature Network and PlugInCars.com.

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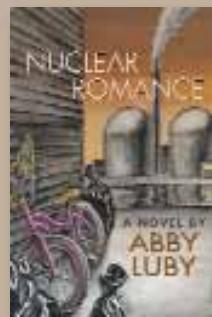
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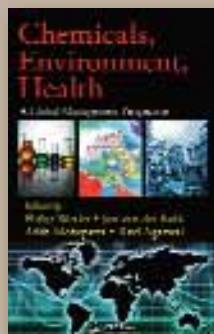
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by Charles Saylan

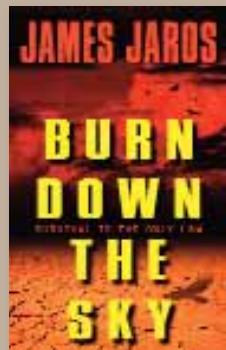
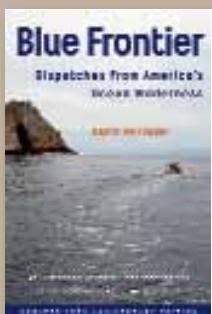
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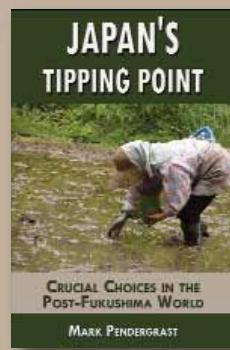
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SEJ's Next Conference Destination . . .



Just as SEJ's annual conference was about to get under way in Miami last October 17th, Emily Davenport, a Texas Tech University senior majoring in environment and humanities, noticed the sky suddenly darkening outside her apartment in Lubbock, Texas, and stepped out to investigate. She was immediately confronted by what is known as a haboob — a fast moving wave of dust and dirt kicked off by an atmospheric downburst. "I'd seen dust storms here before," she said about her four years on the Texas Tech campus, "but never anything like this!" She had just enough time to capture this view on her iPhone before the dust engulfed both her and the adjacent Overton Hotel, where SEJ's 2012 conference will be based starting next Oct. 17th. For an overview of what we can expect, see page 24.

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