

# SEJ Journal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Vol. 15 No. 2

## And the nominees are... SEJ announces finalists in annual journalism awards

By MICHAEL MANSUR

Finalists in SEJ annual awards range from *National Geographic's* massive exploration of global climate change to a small-market TV station's examination of the environmental impacts of salmon fishing.

Journalists from newspapers, TV and radio stations and on-line outlets have been nominated for their outstanding coverage of the environment in the annual SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment. This is the awards' fourth year of honoring outstanding reporting on environmental issues.

Finalists for outstanding beat coverage were reporters at *Baltimore Sun*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Seattle Times*. Finalists in other categories featured a diverse group of media markets – from public radio stations in Arizona and Vermont to *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Progressive* and TV stations in Denver, Cincinnati and Traverse City, Mich., and NBC News.

Three finalists were named for investigative reporting, an award newly named to honor Kevin Carmody, an SEJ founder and reporter at the *Austin American-Statesman* who died this year.

"It was another great year for the contest," said Dan Fagin, awards committee co-chair. "The quality was very high, and we were especially happy to see an increase in television entries because we don't always get a lot of those."

"In many categories, the judges told us they had a hard time deciding which three entries to honor because so many were deserving," Fagin added. "That's just what we like to hear, of course. We want the judges to have to make tough decisions, and that's what happened this year."

This year's finalists will be honored and winners revealed during a gala ceremony at the historic Driskill Hotel in Austin, Texas, on Sept. 28 during SEJ's annual conference. Each winning entry will receive \$1,000 and a trophy.

Judging panels consisting of accomplished journalists and journalism educators selected the 27 finalists from 240 entries.

This year's finalists, listed alphabetically by publication in each category, are:

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### Inside Story

## The Lesson: You must get some answers on your own

By MIKE DUNNE

Florida has more wetlands than any other state, yet its regulatory system has denied fewer permits to turn swamps into developments than any other state.

*St. Petersburg Times* reporters Craig Pittman and Matt Waite knew they had a great story in documenting how many acres of wetlands had been lost in the Sunshine State. The problem – a common dilemma that reporters often face – is the people who should have the data that would prove what has been lost didn't have useable or complete information.

So, the two had to find a way to document the loss on their own. The solution: Waite, a general assignment reporter and computer wiz, decided to use satellite data from several years to determine what wetlands had been turned into urban use. The results: A staggering 84,000 acres in 15 years.

The two reporters produced a series of stories called "Vanishing Wetlands," which ran May 22-23.

The opening piece documented how the U.S. Army Corps

of Engineers wetlands permitting office in Jacksonville, Fla., just didn't seem to be able to say no to developers.

Pittman and Waite were able to get some great quotes from people involved in the corps' permitting offices.

"We're not protecting the environment," the series said, quoting Vic Anderson who had recently retired after 30 years with the corps. "It's a make-believe program."

Among the series' findings:

- The corps in Florida allows a higher percentage of destruction than the corps does nationally. Between 1999 and 2003, it approved more than 12,000 wetland permits and rejected just one.

- The corps trains its Florida staff to presume that every proposal to destroy wetlands is in the public interest and they should help developers get permits.

- Human-made wetlands used to mitigate natural wetland losses are usually expensive failures. Developers also can pre-

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# Swarm of activity for SEJ includes FOIA push and new partnerships

By **PERRY BEEMAN**

Few times in my reasonably long career as an environmental journalist has the SEJ radar seemed so crowded.

Take a quick look at the listserve, flip a few pages in *SEJournal*, read the ASNE journal and it becomes clear how important our roles as watchdogs and journalists really are. In some cases, even when we come up short it is noteworthy.

That was the case recently when Austin organizers tried to arrange an on-stage conference dialogue between keynoter Bill Moyers and former Interior Secretary James Watt. In the end, Watt politely declined, after taking time to ponder the offer. SEJ missed a chance to stage a politically diverse and undoubtedly news-making session. Moyers didn't miss a beat, polishing plans for his solo keynote address at Austin. SEJ board members were excited to think of possible future sessions that could offer the opinions of viewpoints from folks on opposite ends of the conservative-liberal perspective, as we always strive to do.

On another front, SEJ ally and ASNE leader Rick Rodriguez of *The Sacramento Bee* is pushing media to perform the vital watchdog functions that SEJ certainly has stressed as well. "I'll work with stellar organizations like the Investigative Reporters and Editors and the Society of Environmental Journalists to leverage our resources," Rodriguez noted in *The American Editor*.

Nowhere is our commitment to freedom of information more evident than in the work of SEJ's First Amendment Task Force, and in our listserves' lively discussions. In recent weeks, our members have had to decide whether jailed *New York Times*' reporter Judith Miller deserved our support, even when some questioned her reporting. The discussion boiled down to supporting freedom of information above all, and most seemed to agree Miller deserved support for refusing to disclose a source involved in a story about the leaked identity of a CIA operative.

While that was going on, SEJ stalwarts Ken Ward, Jr., Robert McClure, Elizabeth Bluemink, Joe Davis and others were working on a freedom of information survey and a subsequent report calling for action on a range of key issues. You probably have seen that by now. It was a massive amount of work, and they deserve our thanks.

Freedom of information is the one issue we seem able to push without crossing over the line into ethical problems. SEJ has to watch the laws on lobbying due to our status as a nonprofit educational institution. But we've been able to encourage our task force, and of course our many members, to make ourselves heard when it looks like information is being unfairly withheld. We were there to pressure EPA's new director to tell his troops to be more open, we were there when homeland security issues threatened to bring unwarranted secrecy, and we'll be there for plenty of other issues.

SEJ radar also picked up a cyclone of activity on diversity

issues. In addition to offering our usual fellowships for journalists of color, we ramped up an unprecedented Spanish-language campaign. Web-page guru Cindy MacDonald, board members Tim Wheeler and Bill Kovarik, and SEJ's fine staffers launched an impressive Spanish-language web presence that will grow over time.

Conference manager Jay Letto and Austin co-chairs Dina Cappiello, Randy Loftis and others made sure that Austin will offer Spanish-language sessions and all the translations we can muster. Our efforts got another lift when executive director Beth Parke hired programs associate Estéban Romero, who has helped out a great deal in Philly and will be with us in Austin.

At this writing, several future annual conference possibilities also had appeared on the radar, from California to Wisconsin to New England. We'll keep you posted.

The board had a fun, productive meeting in Madison, where we learned that algae toxins remain a problem in the Midwest, and vegetarians won't fare as well at the Zach's Avenue Bar as those who eat fish boil or prime rib. More importantly, we developed good contacts at the University of Wisconsin who will be helpful in future projects.

We also have been in talks with founding board member Jim Detjen and his shop at Michigan State University about joint seminars Detjen hopes to stage around the U.S. and in other countries through his school's Knight Foundation grant. It's an exciting partnership and one you'll want to watch.

While all that zipped across the screen, the SEJ listserves, especially SEJ-Talk, lit up with the usual great assortment of questions, advice, wise cracks, and camaraderie. And the way that listserve functioned in the weeks following hurricane Katrina was extraordinary. Remember, SEJ-Talk messages are archived on the members-only section of [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) and members can also subscribe to an email digest version. SEJ staffers can help you get up and running.

Other chat in weeks prior ranged from covering the global warming angle of summer's heat to whether a tiny amount of mercury found in hair is cause for concern. Many, many reporters got suggestions for story sources – the heart of a listserve that is one of our most valuable services.

So the radar's been full, just as we like it. Sometimes it makes board members and other SEJ volunteers struggle in their roles as amateur air traffic control workers, but what a ride it is.

All that activity shows what a value your SEJ membership really is. So it's less painful to tell you that dues are going up a modest \$5 on Jan. 1, with discounts if you sign up for multiple years. The annual rates will be \$45 for one year, \$85 for two and \$120 for three. Discounted first-time memberships also will rise \$5.

## Report from the Society's President

By  
**Perry  
Beeman**



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*Perry Beeman covers the environment for The Des Moines Register.*

# SEJournal

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Winter '05 .....November 1, 2005

Spring '06 .....February 1, 2006

Summer '06 .....May 1, 2006

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# In search of Mr. Junk Science and his influence

By PAUL D. THACKER

In typical Wednesday work mode, I was running down a thinning trail of information on the Internet, trying to hunt down some small, probably unimportant fact, when I ended up at JunkScience.com. Why? How? I don't know.

I decided to click on the biography of junk-science writer – Steven J. Milloy. What I read was no big surprise – columnist for Fox News, and adjunct whatever at a couple of right-wing think tanks such as Cato and the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

But the second graph got my attention. “Milloy was also a member of the judging panel for the 2004 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Journalism Awards: Online Category.” AAAS is a prestigious science society and publisher of *Science*, a news magazine and peer-reviewed journal.

“This can't be,” I thought to myself.

Next, I went to the AAAS award site and looked up the judges for the 2004 journalism contest. No Milloy listed. Something had to be going on, so I sent out an email to a handful of top national journalists asking them if anything was astray. Certainly, Milloy was making all this up to burnish his credentials as a genuine commentator on science and science journalism.

## Suspicious deepen

Later that day, I returned from lunch and found a brief message on my answering machine from Ginger Pinholster, a public relations person for AAAS:

“I received your email posting about Steven Milloy from a couple of different folks. I'm just calling to let you know the back story on that. However I want to emphasize that I really do not want to stimulate further emailing or online postings about this; we've already dealt with it. This [contest] is a sponsored nonprofit program and I just want [this controversy] to go away. [Nervous laugh]”

The message continued, with Pinholster explaining that the whole incident was a “mistake” and that Milloy was not involved in choosing the contest winner. It ended with another subtle warning against “online postings” about the incident.

Two warnings was all the impetus I needed to send out more emails and start making phone calls. The next day, I got an email with a link to a webpage announcing the winner of the journalism award for which Milloy was apparently not a judge. There, nestled in between quotes by judges Gary Stix of *Scientific American* and Paul Guinnessy of *Physics Today* was this line about the winner:

“He gives the public a new way of looking at everyday things,” commented Steven J. Milloy of FoxNews.com.”

Bingo! I printed out a copy of the web page and got back on the phone.

## The history of the junkman

To investigate Milloy's legitimacy as a journalist, I placed my first call to Stan Glantz, a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. While Glantz is actually an expert in cardiology, he has also become a first-rate investigative journalist, regularly publishing studies in peer-reviewed medical journals exposing big tobacco's influence on science and medicine. For this work, Glantz has been sued by tobacco front groups and even had politicians attempt to rescind his research

grant with the National Cancer Institute by inserting a rider into a Congressional appropriations bill.

“You've got to be kidding me!” said Glantz, when I told him that Milloy had been a judge in a AAAS journalism contest. “I can understand why Fox News has him, because Fox really isn't journalism. But for AAAS to have someone participating on their science journalism panel whose fundamental job is spreading anti-science and confusion...it's just stunning.”

He directed me to the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library, an online archive of millions of papers that were found during discovery motions by lawyers suing the tobacco companies in the late 1990s. As part of the master settlement, tobacco companies were forced to put all these documents on an online library maintained by the University of California, San Francisco. The Tobacco Documents are a treasure for investigators trying to understand how companies create front groups, buy scientists, pervert medical reports, attack government regulators, and work with “journalists” to create a false impression that a dangerous product is safe.

During my search for all things “Milloy,” I also discovered that Bonner Cohen, a Milloy associate who works at the conservative National Center for Public Policy Research, co-authored a 1997 piece that sharply criticized EPA administrator Carol Browner. “Watch Out for this woman: The EPA's Carol Browner is exploiting health and the environment to build a power base,” read the cover of *Forbes*.

I also tripped over the draft of an editorial that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* written in 1994 by then-editor Max Boot. Still in his twenties at the time, Boot was cutting his teeth on right-wing commentary by criticizing the EPA and Congressman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) about regulating industry. For the editorial, he was relying on a report generated by Milloy, who at the time was working for an industry-backed group that no longer exists. Editing notes by Milloy can be seen in the margins of Boot's editorial. Max Boot is a self-described conservative who now works at the Council on Foreign Relations and regularly contributes to the *Weekly Standard* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Boot did not return my calls or answer emails.

After printing more than 100 documents with Milloy's name on them, I marked them up with highlights and sticky notes. I then downloaded all the income-tax returns (Form 990) for The Advancement of Sound Science (TASSC), a nonprofit started by tobacco companies to push for “sound science” and debunk “junk science.” Milloy now runs this outfit, along with another nonprofit, from his house. I Googled the phone number for TASSC and got links to other industry-backed groups run by Milloy, most of which are now defunct.

Apparently, Milloy is too thrifty to pay for multiple phone lines.

## TASSC: Boilerplate of an industry front

In 1997, Milloy became head of TASSC, a marvelously innovative, nonprofit, front group for tobacco. A search of the Tobacco Documents finds that TASSC was created by the PR group APCO on behalf of a law firm representing big tobacco. TASSC was first headed by Garry Carruthers, a former governor of New Mexico

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# 'A flawed tool'

## SEJ study finds FOIA little used, plagued by delays

By **ROBERT McCLURE**

What's wrong with this picture?

An SEJ team interviews 55 of the group's members and finds out that two-thirds won't even try to use the Freedom of Information Act.

FOIA is the federal law once widely praised as a statute that would open America's democracy to the intense scrutiny of its citizens – primarily, it was assumed, through vigorous use by the news media.

But 39 years after its passage, FOIA has become so inefficiently administered by the government that journalists are only rarely using it, the SEJ survey shows. SEJ's work is only the latest indication of this trend.

Why is this happening?

"Doesn't have time to wait. Scared off by horror stories."

"Better luck getting info through back channels."

"Finds it's easier to get around it if you can."

Those were just a few comments SEJ members made to a team of volunteers with SEJ's First Amendment Task Force who wrote the new report, entitled "A Flawed Tool."

SEJ's board of directors formed the First Amendment Task

Force in 2002 when it became apparent that the government's post-9/11 crackdown on information was particularly affecting journalists who cover the environment.

Earlier this year task force members led by Elizabeth Bluemink of the *Juneau Empire* began surveying SEJ members about their use of FOIA.

"A lot of people professed a profound lack of knowledge about FOIA," Bluemink said.

Most of those who did use the statute found it difficult to use – but many also agreed it was worthwhile. "People who know the value of FOIA and have used it were so excited we were doing this, and they wanted to help us," Bluemink said.

*(Continued on page 7)*



## Using FOIA: A quick guide to the confusing process

Ask even a veteran FOIA filer and you'll find that the way the law is administered, it seems almost designed to scare away journalists.

"It's a confusing and frustrating process," said Jim Bruggers, environment reporter for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, who has used FOIA repeatedly in his award-winning reporting.

But it's also what really sets apart investigative journalists who penetrate the bureaucracy from reporters content to churn out stories based on press releases, meetings and all the other dreck that comes across their desk or into their e-mail inbox.

Here are a few pointers for FOIA success:

First, try to get the information you're after without filing a formal FOIA. Experts say one reason journalists may seem to underutilize FOIA is that its very existence makes it easier for you – the practicing journalist – to get information without it.

Before filing a FOIA request, read the statute. Among other places, it can be found at [www.epa.gov/foia/foiastat.htm](http://www.epa.gov/foia/foiastat.htm). Cite it when you're talking with FOIA officers.

Go online to get familiar with how to file a FOIA request. SEJ's offerings feature a list of online resources, including sample FOIA request letters, from groups such as the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center ([www.sej.org/foia/index1.htm](http://www.sej.org/foia/index1.htm)). See also SEJ's FOIA fundamentals ([www.sej.org/foia/index2.htm](http://www.sej.org/foia/index2.htm)).

Consider calling the FOIA officer in an agency before filing a FOIA. These public servants are there to see that the law gets carried out. Sometimes they can help you shape your request in such a way that you get a faster response.

In general, consider a FOIA officer a source. A cordial demeanor and an occasional joke can help. Pump this person for information about your request: What's involved in pulling the records? Who is doing that? What is taking so long? What can you expect to receive, ultimately?

Although the law gives an agency only 20 business days to respond to your request, don't expect to receive the documents that quickly. In all but the simplest FOIAs, many agencies will just meet the legal requirement of telling you that your request will be granted or denied within that time. Some agencies may simply acknowledge receipt of the request, although this does not meet the legal requirement.

Call the FOIA officer to check on the progress of your request periodically. A call a week is a good rule of thumb.

Some reporters tend to file "rifle" FOIAs targeted at a fairly narrow range of documents or data.

Others prefer the "shotgun" approach – but typically wait longer. Then again, you may get some really interesting material that you didn't know existed.

Which approach you take will depend on the story and your individual situation.

If you follow the shotgun approach, remember that when a FOIA officer calls you and asks about narrowing your request, it's a negotiating opportunity. The FOIA officer wants to handle the request as expeditiously as possible. You can go along with that, so long as you ultimately get what you need.

You can always agree to "suspend" part of your request in order to get what you really need more quickly. You can also agree to "exclude" material from your request, but only do this if you're sure it's something you can do without. Otherwise you'll have to get in line all over again (and you'll frustrate the FOIA officer, which you want to avoid when possible.)

Finally, don't forget that when you're investigating a particular subject, you can send in a FOIA for all the other FOIAs that have been received on that subject by that office. These are usually pretty quickly dispatched, giving you access right away to the names of potential sources who are, by definition, very interested in whatever you're writing about.



# Elections will fill five active seats, one associate

SEJ's annual membership meeting will be held at 4:30 pm on Sept. 30, 2005, at The University of Texas at Austin in the auditorium of Thompson Conference Center. The meeting will be held in conjunction with SEJ's 15th Annual Conference.

Five active seats and one associate seat are up for election. The academic category holds its election in 2007.

Three active-category seats are for three-year terms. These were previously held by Peter Fairley, freelance reporter; Mark Schleifstein, environment reporter for the *Times-Picayune*; and Carolyn Whetzel, correspondent for Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. The two remaining seats are for one-year terms. One was held by Dan Fagin, who resigned after moving from *Newsday* in New York to become associate professor of journalism and associate director of the Science and Environmental Reporting Program at New York University. The other was held by Kevin Carmody, who died on March 9.

The associate-category seat was held by appointee Rebecca Daugherty, FOI Service Center Director at the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. The associate seat is for a three-year term.

Running with the three active-category incumbents, Fairley, Schleifstein and Whetzel, are Dina Cappiello, environment writer for

the *Houston Chronicle*, co-chair of SEJ's Austin conference and a finalist in SEJ's Awards for Reporting on the Environment (see story, page 1); Eugene Mulero, reporter for the *New Jersey Daily Record* and recipient of one of SEJ's 2005 Journalist of Color fellowships; and Vince Patton, environment reporter for KGW-TV in Portland, Ore, and co-chair of SEJ's 2004 and 2005 awards committees.

Daugherty is the only candidate in the associate category. She was appointed in October 2004 after the ballot count revealed that a quorum (10 percent of the associate membership) had not been reached in the associate category election.

Candidates will each be allowed two minutes to address the membership before ballots are cast. Candidates' statements are available on the Internet at [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org).

SEJ members eligible to vote include active and associate members in good standing as of Aug. 2. Members vote only for candidates in their own category of membership. Absentee ballots were mailed to active and associate members on Aug. 22. SEJ headquarters must receive absentee ballots no later than Sept. 23. The election at the annual membership meeting will collect ballots for all present active and associate members. Results will be announced before the conclusion of the annual conference.

## Awards... (from page 1)

### Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting, Print:

- "In Harm's Way" – *Houston Chronicle*. Dina Cappiello, Dan Feldstein.

- "Environmental Politics" – *Los Angeles Times*. Tom Hamburger, Alan C. Miller & Julie Cart.

- "Unnatural Disasters" – *The San Bernardino Sun*. George Watson, Guy McCarthy.

### Outstanding Beat Reporting, Print:

- *The Baltimore Sun* – Tom Pelton
- *The Philadelphia Inquirer* – Tom Avril
- *The Seattle Times* – Craig Welch

### Outstanding Explanatory Reporting, Print:

- "Environmental Politics: New Angles" – *High Country News*. Ray Ring.

- "Changing All the Rules" – *The New York Times Magazine*. Bruce Barcott.

- "Global Climate Change" – *National Geographic Magazine*. Dennis R. Dimick, Peter Essick, Lynn Addison, David Whitmore, Jeff Osborn, Tim Appenzeller, Daniel Glick, Fen Montaigne, Virginia Morrell.

### Outstanding Online Reporting:

- "Gimme Shelter (From Taxes)" and other stories – The Center for Public Integrity. Bob Williams, Kevin Bogardus, Daniel Lathrop, Alexander Cohen, Aron Pilhofer.

- "PBDEs and the Environmental Intervention" – *Environmental Science & Technology Online*. Kellyn Betts.

- "Radon in Schools: A Lesson to Learn" – *Dispatch.com*. Roger McCoy, Jon Schwantes, Gerald Tebben, Joel Chow.

### Outstanding Radio Reporting, Large Market:

- "Climate of Uncertainty" – American Radio Works. Daniel

Grossman

- "How Long Do You Keep a Polluting Heap" and other stories – Great Lakes Radio Consortium. Rebecca M. Williams

- "Carbon Black" – NPR Living on Earth. Vicki Monks

### Outstanding Radio Reporting, Small Market:

- "Living Without: Water in a Dry Land" – KNAU Arizona Public Radio. Sadie Babits.

- "Controlling Cormorants in Lake Champlain" and other stories – Vermont Public Radio. John A. Dillon.

- "Environmental Issues in the Great Lakes Region" – WKAR, East Lansing, Mich. Erin Toner.

### Outstanding Small Market Reporting, Print:

- "Mud Wrestling" – *Fort Worth Weekly*. Wendy Lyons Sunshine.

- "Jeremiad for Belarus" – *Orion*. Hope Burwell.

- "China's Computer Wasteland" – *The Progressive*. Benjamin Joffe-Walt.

### Outstanding Television Reporting, Large Market:

- "Water Thieves" – KCNC-TV, Denver. Carisa Scott, Brian Mass, Kevin Hartfield.

- "Clearing the Air" – NBC News. Jeffrey Cooperman

- "Dying to Breathe" and other stories – WTAE-TV, Oakmont, Pa. Jim Parsons, Kendall Cross, Michael Lazorko.

### Outstanding Television Reporting, Small Market:

- "Quest: Aquaculture, Down on the Salmon Farm" – Maine Public Broadcasting. Barbara Noyes Pulling, Michael McDade, Calem Crosby.

- "Airport Pollution" – WCPO-TV, Cincinnati, Ohio. Hagit Limor, Anthony Mirones, Bob Morford.

- "Water Watch" – WPBN/WTOM, Traverse City, Mich. Marc Schollet.



# Katrina: Word from the front lines

“Another harrowing day finally over. It began this morning when I rolled out of ... floor... and stumbled down the hall to the crash room where computers powered by our generator were still working to see Tuesday’s PDF paper. There on A7 was the news I’d expected. It’s a pix of a house at the corner of Filmore Avenue and the Orleans Canal.

“That one-story home sits on land about five feet higher than mine, which is about eight blocks west on Filmore. Water in the pix is up to the house’s eaves... Well, that’s what I expected.

“I broke the news to my wife and was gonna go down to breakfast. Too late. Come down to the cafeteria, someone’s yelling. There’ll be an announcement... We’re bugging out.

“It’s when we arrive down at the loading dock a while later that we realize the why. The paper’s fleet of delivery trucks are sitting in water up to the top of their huge tires, waiting for us to load into their backs...

“We make our way to our West Bank Bureau for a quick meeting of minds, raiding of supplies... After a little breaking and entering, most of us pile back onto the trucks, carrying some computers and supplies, as it becomes more clear that

we’re going to be gone for a long, long time...

“We park across the street from the paper in the parking lot of the Terrebonne Civic Center, which is being used as an evacuation shelter. Family members stay there.

“A few of us go to the *Houma Courier* office, which has given us a conference room to turn into an editing desk, free rein in much of the rest of their newsroom for the rest of the night, and just about everything else we need. They even went door-to-door in their neighborhoods to get bedding, pillows, food for us...

“It’s now 2 a.m., and we’re just about finished laying out our second all-PDF newspaper. Soon we’ll sleep and in the morning, probably get shipped off to Baton Rouge to our new temporary office to do it all over again. We’ll survive.”

– *Mark Schleifstein, New Orleans Times-Picayune, on the SEJ listserv Aug. 31, 2005, 2:54 a.m.*

**RESOURCES:** SEJ’s Hurricane/Katrina website, [www.sej.org/resource/index15.htm](http://www.sej.org/resource/index15.htm). Mark Schleifstein and John McQuaid’s prescient 2002 series, “Washing Away”: [www.nola.com/hurricane/?/washingaway/](http://www.nola.com/hurricane/?/washingaway/)

## FOIA... (from page 5)

Other contributors were Mark Brush, Sarren Samuelson and Lacey Phillabaum.

The report’s findings include:

- For those journalists who do use FOIA, it’s getting harder to keep track of the progress of requests. Some said they have even had trouble finding out who in an agency is handling a request.

- Of the 55 journalists surveyed, 17 use FOIA occasionally or frequently. Three quarters of regular FOIA users reported significant delays.

- Lengthy delays are par for the course – with some reporters waiting more than a year for requested information.

- Post-9/11 and after then-Attorney General John Ashcroft issued a memo to government agencies making it easier for them to withhold information requested under FOIA, some agencies are forcing reporters to file FOIA requests for information once routinely and quickly dispensed without a FOIA.

- Agencies whose FOIA performance was judged worst by the reporters interviewed were the Department of Energy, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Agriculture, and Mine Safety and Health Administration.

The journalists surveyed included 35 newspaper reporters, five radio journalists, seven magazine writers, five freelancers, a wire service reporter and a journalism professor.

Among them was Karen Dorn Steele of *The Spokesman Review* in Spokane, Wash., whose prolific FOIA use has exposed wrongdoing in cleanups of mining waste at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

One example, while extreme, was telling. Dorn Steele filed a FOIA with the Office of Naval Research, a Pentagon agency. The response? A document identifying the person handling the request – and nothing else. “They do not respond to calls or e-mails,”

Dorn Steele told the report’s authors. “It’s kind of ridiculous.”

Considering the findings, the authors and SEJ recommended steps that Congress should take, and also called on journalists to learn more about how to use FOIA.

Several pieces of proposed federal legislation have the potential to improve the FOIA process, the report says, although none is in itself a total answer to the shortcomings. The “Faster FOIA” bill, (S. 589) would set up a commission to investigate problems with FOIA and report back to Congress. A second, the Open Government Act of 1995 (S. 394), would make a number of changes designed to pry information from the government more readily. Among its provisions: freelancers must be treated just as reporters employed at news organizations when determining whether to grant a fee waiver; it sets up a FedEx-style tracking system for FOIA requests; and it allows recovery of attorneys’ fees in a larger number of FOIA lawsuits.

Congress must “make concrete changes in the law and regulations to require faster processing of FOIA requests, with punishment for agencies that don’t meet the deadlines,” the report says.

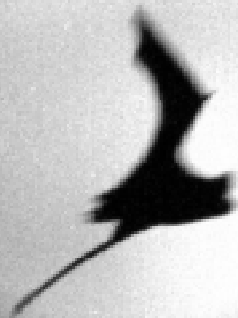
But journalists, too, need to bone up on FOIA, the report says. Taking time to learn about the law, and maintaining productive contacts with FOIA officers, can also help journalists, the report notes.

And, “Reporters can also do a better job of informing the public in their stories about how efforts to curtail public information may touch the lives of average people – whether it’s a lack of information about chemical risks at a nearby industrial plant or details of a land exchange funded by taxpayer dollars,” the report says.

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*SEJ board member Robert McClure edited the FOIA report and covers environmental affairs for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.*

Last year we had Batman.  
This year we have..



# Bats!

Bats Bats Bats - Austin has a love affair with bats, maybe because the largest bat colony in the world - 20 million Mexican freetail bats - lives in nearby Bracken Cave. Their emergence from the cave each evening is spectacular! But that's only one of the great reasons to come to SEJ's 15th Annual Conference. There's also...

**Tours:** Board one of eight buses on Thursday and head out to study issues like coal, oil and solar energy, water rights and water marketing, creative ranching, birding with the army (huh?), species and sprawl, Houston's chemical corridor, San Antonio's River Walk and a look at the environmental health issues faced by neighborhoods in East Austin - and how they cope.

**Sessions:** Border issues, drilling the Rocky Mountain West, global warming, NAFTA, FOIA, CITES, CAR, green industry, air toxics, nanotox, environmental databases, big oil and rainforests, mercury, environmental enforcement, do-it-yourself testing, blogs, podcasts and feeds, ecotourism (with Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin, who coined the phrase), ozone, dead zones and maybe an answer to the question: What would Jesus drive?

## Plenaries and keynotes:

Columnist Molly Ivins welcomes SEJ to Texas at the opening reception on Wed., Sept. 28.

Judy Muller, correspondent at ABC News, will moderate the opening plenary session on Fri., Sept. 30. She will ask the question: Is journalism - environmental or otherwise - a dying idea? Check [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) for who will give the answer...

Journalism legend Bill Moyers will give the keynote address at lunch on Sat., Oct. 1, on media and the environment.

But hey, I'm out of space here. If you *really* want to know what's going on in Austin, Sept. 28 - Oct. 2, 2005, go to [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org).

***What are you waiting for? Come on down to Austin!***



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# Congressman's interest in climate change concerns scientists

By **CHERYL HOGUE**

Congress has long relied on consultation with scientists as it formulates environmental policies. But this situation is morphing into what many scientists see as a politically charted “shoot-the-messenger” exchange that threatens to stifle research.

A powerful member of Congress recently went beyond asking for scientific information and advice – he apparently wants to analyze data on climate change himself. In June, Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee asked for reams and reams of information on global warming research.

Barton, a climate change skeptic with financial backing from oil and gas interests, wants data that researchers use to back up their claims that the 20th century was the warmest in the past 1,000 years. Barton asked for computer code, archives of data, and information about who paid for the research.

To many in the scientific community and elsewhere, Barton's request is a “witch hunt” aimed at mainstream scientists who support the conclusion that human activity is causing the world to warm. Barton supporters says the congressman is simply seeking the scientific truth about global warming. Barton's targets are Pennsylvania State University Associate Professor Michael Mann, the National Science Foundation, which is the federal agency that funds all sorts of scientific research, and the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Mann and his colleagues published papers in 1998 and 1999 finding that the world's temperature began warming dramatically in the 1900s. When drawn on a graph, these data form a curve said to resemble the shape of a hockey stick. Mann and his coauthors based their work on a panoply of earlier studies on a variety of temperature measurements including tree rings, ice cores, and coral growth. The investigation that led to the 1998 paper was supported by an NSF grant.

Mann has responded to Barton with an exhaustive 11-page refutation. The investigation remains up in the air.

Two scientific powerhouses, the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, have independently criticized Barton's request. The academy is the congressionally chartered institution designed to provide scientific advice to the federal government, while AAAS is a major scientific professional society.

Academy President Ralph J. Cicerone, in a letter to Barton, counseled that asking for raw data “is probably not the best way to resolve a scientific issue and a focus on individual scientists

can be intimidating.” Cicerone suggested creating a panel of experts to assess the state of climate change science.

Barton never responded to the offer.

Meanwhile, a fellow Republican, Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, a moderate from upstate New York and chairman of the House Science Committee, cried foul at Barton's request. In a letter to the Texan, Boehlert said Barton's request showed “insensitivity toward the workings of science” and “its purpose seems to be to intimidate scientists rather than to learn from them, and to substitute Congressional political review for scientific peer review.” Such blunt, public criticism within the top echelon of the GOP is rare.

In an op-ed in the *Dallas Morning News*, Barton argued that his request was justified in the face of reports published after the “hockey stick” papers casting doubt on some of the data that Mann and his colleagues relied on. Barton also said Congress is exercising appropriate oversight for taxpayers when it occasionally asks scientists like Mann, who receive federal dollars, to explain their research. “Federally funded scientists with nothing to hide have nothing to fear,” Barton wrote.

Conservative writers such as Stephen J. Milloy (see Paul Thacker's viewpoint on Milloy on page 4) defend Barton's actions as appropriate skepticism to counter global warming “alarmism.”

But others see Barton's request as part of a bigger effort by conservatives to attack mainstream science. This includes opposition to expanded research on embryonic stem cells and promotion of “intelligent design” as a scientifically valid alternative to evolution. Blogger and magazine writer Chris Mooney, in his new book “The

Republican War on Science,” argues that many in the GOP work to discredit science that does not support their political agenda and promote investigations that do.

While some scientists and their organizations are actively pressing Barton, researchers who shun the limelight may quietly shift the focus of their investigations to avoid politics and its attendant publicity. The question of whether politics is intruding into and changing the direction of science is a ripe one for environmental journalists to explore.

Links to documents, Barton's request, Boehlert's letter, and the response of Mann and his colleagues are available at [www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=172](http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=172). This page of links was posted by scientists who view Mann's work favorably.



**U.S. Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas.**

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*Cheryl Hogue reports for Chemical & Engineering News.*

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## Research News Roundup

# Air pollution coverage and how reader views affect story impact

By JAN KNIGHT

*Air pollution coverage in diverse newspapers geared toward upper class, 29-year examination suggests*

A study of 29 years' worth of air pollution coverage by Los Angeles and New York City mainstream, African-American and other alternative newspapers shows that all newspapers geared their stories toward the upper class and that coverage has not changed over time.

About 73 percent of the coverage identified industry as the cause of air pollution and about 79 percent suggested that the government is responsible for cleaning it up. Most coverage (59.1 percent) presented air pollution as having neutral effects, while 31.3 percent presented air pollution as harmful to individual health and 7.7 percent presented air pollution as harmful to the earth, the study found. Almost all of the coverage (95.4 percent) did not mention solutions to air pollution and almost all (98.7 percent) did not mention civil rights and socioeconomic class factors in their coverage. The study focused on coverage between 1972 and 2000.

The study, conducted by a researcher at the University of Minnesota, aimed in part to determine whether the alternative press serves a social responsibility function for its readers. Some fear that the consolidation of media outlets will lead to a "monolithic content" void of diverse coverage and views. But, similarly, some anticipate that the alternative media, with their diverse and multiple ownerships and unique readerships, will continue to provide many segments of the U.S. population with information geared to their individual needs.

This study showed otherwise. The examination of 1,180 articles appearing in 15 newspapers reflected "nearly monolithic coverage," the researcher wrote. The newspapers studied were all owned by different parent companies – conglomerates as well as individual private owners – and included the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*, each geared toward upper-class readers, and mainstream and alternative newspapers in each city geared toward African-Americans and lower socioeconomic groups.

"Regardless of socioeconomic readership, newspaper size, type of ownership, geographic location, specific issue or time, coverage concerning the environmental movement was invariable across all newspapers throughout the 29 years," the researcher concluded. "The 'reality' learned from 29 years of environmental coverage appeared to be overwhelmingly relevant to upper-socioeconomic groups. Yet those in the lower-socioeconomic classes suffer the most from health problems that are caused or exacerbated by environmental degradation."

Based on this study and past research, the researcher suggested that the traditional journalistic value of social responsibility may have been subsumed by reliance on advertising revenue, at least in the case of air pollution coverage. Journalism values, the researcher offered, "may need to be expanded to include aristocracy."

For more information, see Linda Jean Kenix, "A Comparison of Environmental Pollution Coverage in the Mainstream, African American, and Other Alternative Press," *The Howard Journal of Communication*, January – March, 2005.

*Framing power may be weakened by audience knowledge frameworks, study shows*

For the past 30 years, framing, currently a buzzword in party politics, has been the focus of much research into how news coverage affects the public. One line of research focuses on media framing as the choices journalists make when selecting information to include and exclude in a news story and when determining how to present that information, including providing a story line and using metaphors to explain issues. One concern about news media framing is that it represents society's status quo, or dominant power structures, while also holding the power to shape public opinion.

A recent study, however, suggests that framing's power may not be as strong as often thought. Rather, the study suggests, the effect of media framing depends on individual audience members' "schema" – their mental organization of acquired knowledge, which they use as a framework to understand new information.

A Pennsylvania State University researcher conducted an experiment involving 193 communication students who read news stories created to present different frames of two debates in the news, including the dispute over oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. One of the stories presented an economic frame, with a headline reading "Arctic Drilling Good for U.S. Economy, Say Supporters." The other story presented an environmental frame, with a headline that read "Arctic Drilling Bad for Environment, Say Critics." Before reading the stories, students filled out questionnaires designed to measure their individual "schemas," or stored knowledge, of the ANWR issue. After reading the stories, students wrote informal essays about their thoughts on the issue. By comparing students' responses to the questionnaire to their thoughts in the informal essay, the researcher could measure whether the news frames impacted students' attitudes toward ANWR drilling.

The researcher found that while news frames did significantly impact readers' attitudes toward drilling in ANWR, this was mediated by readers' processing of the issue based on past knowledge. In fact, the researcher found that schemas were more influential than frames in shaping individual reaction to the news stories. For example, those students with an "economic schema" toward drilling were more supportive of drilling after reading either story, regardless of whether the news story framed the issue in terms of economic benefits or environmental costs.

In essence, this means that fears of framing's ability to sway a perhaps passive public may be overblown because "attempts to frame issues and sway public opinions may hinge on the dispositional states of individuals," the researcher wrote.

"Individuals do not necessarily flip-flop their attitudes because of the accessibility of media cues or frames . . . [This study] underscores the importance of individual differences in explaining the limits as well as the power of framing effects."

For more information, see Fuyuan Shen, "Effects of News Frames and Schemas on Individuals' Issue Interpretations and Attitudes" in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Summer 2004, pp. 400 – 416.

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*Jan Knight, a former magazine editor and daily newspaper reporter, is an assistant professor of communication at Hawaii Pacific University in Honolulu. She can be reached at [jknight@hpu.edu](mailto:jknight@hpu.edu).*

# Remembering Ken Saro-Wiwa

## Nigerian activist, journalist executed a decade ago

By **BILL KOVARIK**

Ten years ago this November, the military government of Nigeria executed Ken Saro-Wiwa, an activist, writer and environmental journalist. Commemorative events for 2005 will include demonstrations, conferences and publications in major cities worldwide ([www.remembersarowiwa.com](http://www.remembersarowiwa.com)).

For environmental journalists, the anniversary may also provide a moment to assess the human cost of international oil and mining operations and to report on efforts underway that might minimize resource conflicts in the future.

Saro-Wiwa was an Ogoni, one of about half a million ethnic minority Nigerian people who live in the oil-rich delta region. He was a popular newspaper columnist, the author of several books and the writer / producer of a popular Nigerian television program, "Basi and Company." He had also been a university teacher and a regional government official.

In 1990, Saro-Wiwa started the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Within three years, the movement mobilized widespread support against severe ecological conditions in the region. Although the oil industry had pumped billions of barrels of oil from Nigeria, ordinary people were no better off – in fact, as Saro-Wiwa argued, their lives were much worse as a result.

In response to massive non-violent protests, Shell Oil Co. suspended operations in the immediate Ogoniland region in 1993. However, Saro-Wiwa continued to hold the oil company responsible for "ecological war" and for organizing, arming and providing intelligence to Nigerian military units which, he said, was conducting a "dirty war" against the Ogoni people.

After many overnight detentions and run-ins with Nigerian officials, Saro-Wiwa was arrested in 1994 and charged with the murders of four pro-government Ogoni leaders. Since the murders were committed when Saro-Wiwa was in police custody in a distant town, and since no real defense was permitted, the trial was universally considered to be an injustice.

Saro-Wiwa told the media: "I was found guilty even before I was tried."

Calls for commuting Saro-Wiwa's death sentence came from the highest levels of the

human rights and United Nations communities, yet Nigeria's military leaders ordered him to be hung at the prison in Port Harcourt.

The execution on November 10, 1995 outraged the international community. Nelson Mandela, then president of South Africa, called it a "heinous act." US President Bill Clinton said it flouted "even the most basic international norms and universal standards of human rights." British Prime Minister John Major described events as "a fraudulent trial, a bad verdict, an unjust sentence," which, he said, "has now been followed by judicial murder." Dozens of ambassadors were recalled. Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth countries. International loans were cancelled.

Nigeria became a pariah state and never quite recovered its reputation. A few years after the execution, Nigerian Gen. Sani Abacha died of a heart attack. Democratic elections were held, but the winner was another general.

Today, ten years after Saro-Wiwa's execution, very little has improved in the Niger delta. Rusted pipelines are still spilling crude oil. Cleanup rarely happens. Most fish and wildlife are long gone and even subsistence agriculture is impossible in many areas. Enormous flares of natural gas still light up villages and fields day and night. The army, still known as the "kill-and-go's," randomly arrests dissidents and ruthlessly destroys whole villages when unrest emerges.

Even so, Shell Oil Co. began negotiating with MOSOP for a return to Ogoniland in the summer of 2005, helped by the UK's International Centre for Reconciliation. One environmental bonus: better company access to pipelines might mean fewer spills.

While Nigeria itself has not changed, international reaction to Saro-Wiwa's execution has been relatively strong. For example:

- The U.S. State Dept. and U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office began meeting in 2000 with oil and mining companies, together with human rights, labor and corporate responsibility groups, to develop "Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights."

- Also in 2000, the United Nations launched its Global Compact initiative to bring oil and mining companies together

(Continued on next page)



Photo courtesy of GREENPEACE

**Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1993.**

### Ken Saro-Wiwa

**Born:** Bori, Nigeria, Oct. 10, 1941

**Executed:** Nov. 10, 1995, at 11:30 am, in the prison at Port Harcourt, Nigeria, along with eight other environmental activists, on trumped up charges.

**Change in Nigeria:** Almost none.

**Immediate international reaction:** Worldwide protests, expulsion of Nigeria from Commonwealth nations, suspension of bank loans, UN Human Rights Commission investigation.

**Long term international reaction:** Civil lawsuits in US courts, continued protests against Shell Oil Co., US-UK "Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights," United Nations Global Compact

with human rights, labor and environmental groups.

• In 2001, a lawsuit against Shell Oil Co., brought under the Alien Tort Law Claims Act by Ken Wiwa, son of Ken Saro-Wiwa, survived motions for dismissal and remains active in federal court for the Southern District of New York. The suit charges that Shell was complicit in human rights abuses in Nigeria.

**“They had been sleepwalking their way towards extinction, not knowing what internal colonialism had done and was doing to them. It had fallen to me to wake them up from the sleep of the century and I had accepted in full the responsibility for doing so... To die fighting to right the wrong would be the greatest gift of life! Yes, the gift of life.” – Ken Saro-Wiwa**

These are just the beginning, according to Ken Wiwa. “We need binding legislation to ensure that corporations can be held to account for their actions because they have forfeited the right to self-regulation,” he said in March 2005. “We want the world to recognize that corporate immunity is a grave and gathering threat to good governance, peace and security around the world.”

**Further reading:**

Remember Saro-Wiwa living memorial website: [www.remembersarowiwa.com](http://www.remembersarowiwa.com)

United Nations Global Compact: [www.un.org/Depts/ptd/global.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/ptd/global.htm)

US State Dept. Statement on Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights: [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/2931.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/2931.htm)  
Human Rights First, VPSHR: [www.humanrightsfirst.org/workers\\_rights/issues/vp/](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/workers_rights/issues/vp/)

Wiwa v. Royal Dutch Shell website, Earth Rights International: <http://earthrights.org/shell/index.shtml>

**By Ken Saro-Wiwa:**

“A Forest of Flowers”

“Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English”

“A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary” (London: Penguin, 1995)

**By other authors:**

“In the Shadow of a Saint.” By Ken Saro-Wiwa’s son, Ken Wiwa.

“Before I Am Hanged: Ken

Saro-Wiwa, Literature, Politics, and Dissent.” Onookome Okome, editor.

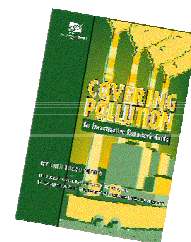
“Ken Saro-Wiwa: A Bio-Critical Study.” Femi Ojo-Ade.

“Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist.” Craig W. McLuckie and Aubrey McPhail, editors.

“Ogoni’s Agonies: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria.” Abdul-Rasheed Na’Alla, editor.

*Bill Kovarik is a professor in the Department of Media Studies at Radford University and an SEJ board member.*

**Ever wonder how they got that prize-winning environmental story?  
Where she found that perfect set of data?  
Who he called for that crucial piece of information?**



**"Covering Pollution: An Investigative Reporter's Guide" by Lori Luechtefeld**

A Society of Environmental Journalists and Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) collaborative effort.

A practical, easy-to-use guide to pursuing stories about environmental health. Its 171 pages are jam-packed with tips from some of the most experienced environmental reporters in the U.S. There are chapters on air pollution, water pollution, the Toxics Release Inventory, hazardous waste issues beyond TRI, dealing with advocacy groups, reporting and writing local environmental stories, and mapping environmental data. The five appendices are a treasure trove of names, telephone numbers and databases you'll need to successfully navigate the bureaucracies at EPA and a horde of other federal and state agencies that deal with environmental issues. You'll find useful advice about angles and sources, and you'll learn how to search Internet-based environmental databases.

SEJ member rate- \$19; Non-member rate - \$29 (Includes shipping) Contact SEJ for foreign rates: [sej@sej.org](mailto:sej@sej.org)

Mail or fax order to SEJ at: SEJ Book, PO Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046 (Fax: 215-884-8175)

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City: \_\_\_\_\_ State/Prov: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal code \_\_\_\_\_

Check or VISA/ MasterCard/American Express

CARD NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ EXPIRATION DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Authorized (including shipping) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Tapping into speedy RSS feeds

By **RUSS CLEMINGS**

SEJ's most heavily used news services – including *Environmental Journalism Today* – are now available via RSS feed.

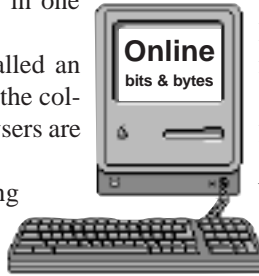
What does that mean?

It means that you can take advantage of the new RSS protocol to collect all of the news from all SEJ's services in one location, for ease of browsing and reading.

You'll need either a special piece of software called an RSS aggregator, or an account on a web site that does the collecting for you. Within a year, though, major web browsers are expected to have RSS capability built in.

In Figure 1, you can see what SEJ's feeds (along with a few from other sources) look like in the RSSReader aggregator (free from [www.rssreader.com](http://www.rssreader.com)). All of the current *EJToday* entries appear in the top right; click on one of them, and a fuller

version appears at bottom right, along with a link to the complete story (when available). available at [www.sej.org/rss/ejtoday.rss](http://www.sej.org/rss/ejtoday.rss). We've also produced RSS feeds for the SEJ Environmental Events Calendar ([www.sej.org/rss/calendar.rss](http://www.sej.org/rss/calendar.rss)), Useful Links ([www.sej.org/rss/links.rss](http://www.sej.org/rss/links.rss)), *TipSheet* ([www.sej.org/rss/tipsheet.rss](http://www.sej.org/rss/tipsheet.rss)) and *WatchDog TipSheet* ([www.sej.org/rss/watchdog.rss](http://www.sej.org/rss/watchdog.rss)).



Users who are new to RSS might want to check out Bloglines ([www.bloglines.com](http://www.bloglines.com)), a web service that performs many of the same functions as an RSS aggregator. Once you've taken the plunge and are ready to install your own aggregator, check any search engine for a list.

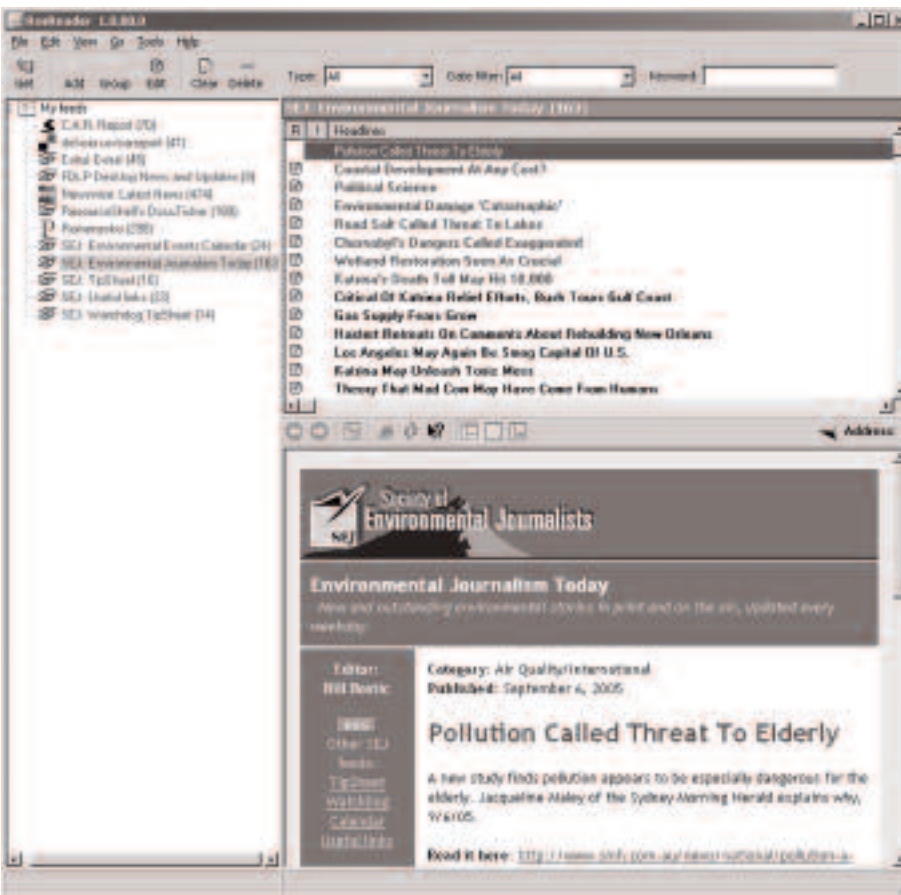
Here are some tips and links to aggregators from Yahoo: <http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/news/beta/beta-03.html>

Regardless of how you get your RSS feeds, you'll need to learn how to plug them into your reader. It's easy, but a little bit confusing for the neophyte.

First, if you have the URL for the feed (as with the SEJ feeds listed above), you're halfway there. Just check your aggregator's instructions for adding new feeds. In RSSReader, that means simply clicking the "add" button at the top of the screen and entering the URL in the resulting dialog box (see Figure 2). Click "next," and if the feed is properly formatted, it should automatically be added to your list.

If you don't have the URL, check for a little red or orange box labeled "XML" or "RSS" on a web page that advertises the feed you want. Either copy the URL that's linked to that icon (right-click and "copy link location" in Windows XP), or just click on the icon to follow the link. What you'll see will look like gibberish mixed with some text. Don't worry. You just want to copy the URL from the address bar at the top of your web browser, and paste it into your aggregator.

SEJ's five feeds are set up to be updated automatically soon after any new items are received and approved. How often your aggregator checks for updates will depend on its own settings. Check your instructions for details.



version appears at bottom right, along with a link to the complete story (when available).

One advantage of getting *EJToday* via RSS is speed. Instead of waiting for the daily e-mail version, you can see new headlines as soon as they appear on the SEJ website.

*EJToday*'s RSS feed is

*Russ Clemings edits Bits and Bytes and reports for The Fresno Bee.*



## Junk Science... (from page 4)

who is now a business dean at New Mexico State University.

In short, the job of TASSC was to look like a movement of scientists advocating for “sound science” and against alarmist environmentalists. When APCO launched TASSC in 1994, an editorial in the *Los Angeles Daily News* praised the “grass-roots organization” as a remedy against “years of shaky science, reckless reporting and inane sloganeering.” The editorial continued, “At the most elementary level, that means countering the radical environmentalist in the public schools.”

The writer was then fledgling conservative commentator Michelle Malkin, now a syndicated columnist and Fox News host.

When Milloy took over TASSC, the group was located in the DuPont area of Washington, D.C., and employed a secretary one block away. Currently, the IRS documents showed Milloy is the only paid employee, and earned \$126,000 last year for 15 hours of work a week.

Milloy no longer has a secretary and runs the group from his house. Since 1997, Bonner Cohen, the author of the *Forbes* cover story on Browner, has been listed as the group’s director.

### Final round of calls

A week after I found out that Milloy had been a journalism judge, I had all my documents and IRS forms ready for a story. But first I wanted to get a comment from Milloy and another comment from AAAS.

When I called AAAS to speak with Pinholster, I was told she was out of town. So I left a message and then dialed Milloy’s number. A woman answered at Milloy’s house and said that he wasn’t home and that I could call back in thirty minutes. But when I called back, nobody picked up the phone. I left a message explaining about my story and then sent Milloy an email.

In the late afternoon, Pinholster called me from Atlanta wondering why I was bringing up an issue that had already been handled. I explained to her that I was doing a story on Milloy being chosen as a judge and told her about what I had discovered about Milloy. She aggressively questioned my credentials as a journalist, and stated again that Milloy had not been a judge.

When I explained that Milloy was quoted on the group’s webpage along with other judges praising the winner of the award, Pinholster got upset and asked to speak with my editor. I then reminded her that she was on the record, and gave her the link to the Web page. Ten minutes after the interview, she called back and apologized.

Later that evening, a different AAAS spokesperson called asking for contact information for Milloy, who had called AAAS. “Milloy left a message asking why he’s not listed as a judge,” the spokesperson said.

### Fallout?

After my story went online, “Junkman Climbs to the Top,” I got a handful of emails from different sources praising the article. I also got a phone call from a scientist who said he was sending it to his friends, including AAAS President Donald Kennedy and a number of prominent scientists. But a month later, I ran into a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* who said it was a great story but then wanted to know why I had done it.

Obviously, I was not endearing myself to the AAAS nor any other awards committee.

The best I can say is that this story needed to be done. As it is, AAAS never apologized for the mistake or even tried to correct itself, and warn other journalists about Milloy. Instead, they pulled the quote from Milloy off their website, as if the incident never happened.

I also got different stories about who chose Milloy as judge from AAAS and one of the judges I called for the story. According to this judge, Milloy was chosen by one of the other judges who knew him. According to AAAS, Milloy was listed in Bacon’s directory as a science editor.

However, not everything can be laid at the feet of AAAS. The whole incident is merely a symptom of serious problems in both science and journalism. Industry has done a wonderful job of legitimizing people like Milloy and pushing the “sound science” ideology when regulations might cost them money. They buy scientists and journalists and create front groups in a “get out the information” drive to journalists and the public.

Milloy regularly appears on Fox News, and his columns run in a number of conservative venues such as the *Washington Times*, *New York Sun* and Canada’s *Financial Post*. And this is not the first time Milloy has appeared in the pages of the *SEJournal*. In 2000 (Fall 2000 vol. 10, No. 3), Kevin Carmody touched off a spat by highlighting Milloy and some of his conflicts of interest.

The next issue of the *SEJournal* featured back to back editorials by Michael Miner, media critic for the *Chicago Reader*, and Dan Miller, business editor of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Miner attacked the *Sun-Times* for hiring Milloy as columnist without identifying any of his numerous conflicts of interest. Miller defended Milloy, but it was also noted that Miner had been a former publisher at the Heartland Institute, another conservative think tank.

### Lessons learned

Throughout the 1990s Milloy wrote for the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal* and for numerous other papers. Meanwhile, JunkScience.com was profiled by many important science publications including *Science* and *Popular Science*. Milloy also testified to Congress about EPA risk assessments and ran TASSC, a “grass roots” educational group created and supported by tobacco and regularly quoted in the media.

Yet it was never mentioned during this whole time that at least until 1999, Milloy was also a registered lobbyist whose clients included energy and chemical companies.

We must remain vigilant and not fear exposing how industry perverts journalism and science. Both fields are far too important for our democracy. There are times when journalists have to drop the “he said/she said” nonsense and really dig in to figure out what is happening. If we don’t, we risk drowning in a sea of uncertainty created by the Gods of PR spin.

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*Paul D. Thacker is an associate editor at the peer-reviewed journal, Environmental Science & Technology.*

# On the firing line in Central Asia

By ERIC FREEDMAN

Environmental journalism is risky business in Central Asia, where environmental controversies often don't make it into print, on the air or onto the Web. Even reporters who write for Western media often seek safety behind pseudonyms, and many sources prefer – or demand – anonymity. That's a dilemma for journalists and the public in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Does "news" happen if nobody covers it? Of course, environmental news happens, from individual events – toxic spills or natural disasters – to systemic, often long-term occurrences such as desertification or deteriorating radioactive dumpsites. The region confronts some of the world's most severe ecological related public health challenges, such as the dying Aral Sea, diseases associated with the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing area and over-fishing of the Caspian Sea. None of the nations is immune. A United Nations Development Programme report cited water, nuclear radiation and industrial waste in Kazakhstan; agricultural irrigation and mining for uranium and gold in Kyrgyzstan; natural disasters, limited drinking water, desertification and land degradation in Tajikistan; biodiversity loss, soil erosion, pesticide contamination and dam construction in Turkmenistan; and water scarcity, land deterioration and widespread salinity in Uzbekistan.

These former Soviet republics lack financial, political and technological resources to effectively tackle such problems while their authoritarian regimes diligently minimize and marginalize public awareness of such issues.

Meanwhile, most media remain government-owned or tightly controlled. Journalists exercise self-censorship even without official censorship and confront serious legal, economic and practical constraints if they explore these issues. Much of the media system remains a legacy of the Soviet era that officially ended with independence in 1971. All five constitutions ostensibly guarantee freedom of speech and expression. The comparatively few independent media outlets of Central Asia have some environmental coverage, but only under the heavy shadow of potential sanctions. Meanwhile, media organizations and their employees face prison, assault, assassination, exile, harassment, loss of jobs and licenses, tax audits, destruction of property and costly libel litigation, both civil and criminal. It's no surprise that investigative reporting is rare, or that the public lacks confidence or trust in the press.

At the same time, it's difficult for journalists – and for environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that may be sources for such stories – to get information about governmental activity on ecological issues. One result is a lack of substantive reporting, especially investigative and analytical reporting, about environmental issues.

Since domestic media outlets are unwilling or unable to cover serious environmental stories, some independent journalists turn to Internet venues such as three Western-based news sites: Eurasianet ([www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org)), IRIN News ([www.irin-news.org](http://www.irin-news.org)) and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) ([www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net)). Even as these sites strive to observe

professional values of fairness, balance, ethics and accuracy, realities dictate that many stories incorporate anonymous sources and that many reporters use pseudonyms to shield themselves from retaliation.



Photo courtesy of ERIC FREEDMAN



**Now heavily contaminated with chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides, the former bed of the Aral Sea is a wasteland in western Uzbekistan. Ships that once sailed the Aral have been abandoned in the wasteland that is now about 100 km (65 miles) from the receding shoreline.**

There are many limitations on the scope of these three Western sites. IRIN News – an arm of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – posts stories in English but not Russian. Eurasianet, an Open Society Institute program, and London-based IWPR post in Russian and English but not in national or ethnic languages. Yet most people can't read English, and many can't read Russian. Internet access remains limited and too expensive for most Central Asians. Even for journalists, the Internet isn't a routine part of how they work: A 2004 survey of journalists at workshops in three Uzbek cities found that 41 per-

*(Continued next page)*

## Central Asia... (from page 15)

cent use the Internet less than once a week or never in their reporting; 54 percent lack access at their offices.

Still, these sites have potential impact and influence. Users are generally better educated, more influential and, perhaps, leaders in government, business, academics, media or NGOs. Local journalists who read stories on the sites sometimes follow up for their own media outlets.

### Looking at Coverage

What topics do they cover? These three sites posted 64 original environmental and environmental health stories in 2003. More than 60 percent dealt with environmental health, such as typhoid and radiation-related illnesses; water issues such as scarcity and contamination; and natural disasters such as floods and landslides. Stories about hazardous, biological or nuclear wastes ranked fourth in frequency. Next came coverage of the Aral and Caspian seas. The rest dealt with habitat issues such as endangered species, solar energy, environmental NGOs and climate.

How do journalists for these sites work around restraints on press freedom?

Western reporters rarely use pseudonyms. Their bylines are regarded as signs of professional accomplishment and success, especially on investigative or otherwise hard-hitting, in-depth or analytical stories. Audiences and opinion-makers may seek reporters whose work they respect with tips. Not so in Central Asia, where environmen-

tal issues are politically sensitive and where authorities believe “negative” reporting – even when accurate – embarrasses them and their regimes. Given the prospect of adverse reactions, it’s understandable that journalists who tackle such stories often shield their identities in their published reports.

Photo courtesy of ERIC FREEDMAN



**Zaamin National Park was established during the Soviet era as the first national park in what is now Uzbekistan.**

IRIN News uses no bylines as a matter of policy. On the other two sites, about 20 percent of stories appeared with pseudonyms. But even a pseudonym doesn’t ensure freedom from sanctions, as Josh Machleder of the media support group NGO Internews cautions, because “authorities can figure out who the journalists are. In the end, it’s not really so hard. The authorities could follow the money (how payments are made to journalists); they could follow the representations of the news organizations; they can interrogate the people who are cited in interviews or subjects of the reports to track down who they are.”

Credible sources directly affect public trust and confidence in a news organization and observing fundamental values such as accuracy, fairness and balance partly depends on the sources cited. Journalists in the West who cover controversies seek a variety of sources, including stakeholders, partisans and independent experts. Use of anonymous sources is discour-

aged for reasons of ethics and credibility. In contrast, unnamed sources appeared in one-quarter of the Web articles studied, using descriptions like “an official of the Ministry of Ecology and Emergency Situations” or “participant,” or with a partial name such as “Nurbek.” Governmental officials and “ordinary” people accounted for three-quarters of them, presumably fearful of retribution if they were quoted by name.

Collectively, these sites report on important environmental issues that domestic media can’t do because of governmental, cultural and self-imposed restraints and because of inadequate resources. That’s certainly not to say that Central Asian journalists lack the skills or interest to cover such issues. After all, journalists from the five countries wrote most of these stories.

As the Internet becomes more widely accessible and affordable, the potential audience for such news Web sites will expand, particularly if they make all their stories available in Russian and in ethnic languages. And as that occurs, perhaps more environmental news will happen in Central Asia.

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Photo courtesy of ERIC FREEDMAN



**Ala Archa National Park, with mist blanketing its sacred junipers, is a mountainous reserve within driving distance of Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.**



# Wetlands... (from page 1)

serve wetlands under a formula that counts existing acres as if they were new. There is little monitoring or follow-through by the corps.

• Building in wetlands costs the taxpayers in the form of having to pay for increased flood losses, more pollution and fewer sources of drinking water.

The series and its follow-ups have stirred a lot of reaction from the public, Pittman said.

SEJournal recently asked Pittman and his partner, Waite, a series of questions to get the “inside story” on how they researched, reported and wrote “Vanishing Wetlands.”

**Q: How did you conceive of the project – what was it that made you decide to not just do a story but something more in-depth?**

**A:** In 2001 an arm of the National Academy of Sciences put out a report about wetland destruction and wetland mitigation. It's titled “Compensating for Wetland Losses Under the Clean Water Act.” Someone from Florida was on the panel that wrote it and suggested I check out the report. I did and was blown away. It was an indictment of the way the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits the destruction of wetlands under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

When I visited the Corps' own website I saw that it issues more “404 permits” in Florida than in any other state. That was enough to convince me that it was worth looking into, although it wasn't until 2003 that I got an editor to give me the green light.

Early on, I found out that all of the 404 permits included Geographic Information System reference points. So I figured that we could get the corps' permitting database and map out where Florida had lost the most wetlands. That's how I wound up working with Matt, who is an expert on computer-assisted reporting in general and GIS in particular.

We had no idea at that point what we were getting ourselves into.

**Q: How did you get started? I assume you had written some stories in the past on wetlands?**

**A:** Not really. I had done stories about several controversial development projects around Florida and after I read the National Academy of Sciences report it dawned on me that what linked them all was they needed 404 permits. It was like stumbling on a unified field theory of Florida environmental reporting.

Matt and I started by filing a Freedom of Information Act request for the corps permitting database in Florida. Nobody had ever asked for anything like that before, and the corps balked. We tussled with them for months on end. Only after we went to Jacksonville to talk to them face-to-face about the corps' responsibilities under federal law did they at last turn it over.

What we got turned out to be nearly worthless. A lot of the datafields were never filled out, and some of the GIS points were off in the Atlantic Ocean or up in Pennsylvania.



Photo courtesy of ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

**Hydrogeologist Sydney Bacchus stands atop a pond cypress root ball in a mitigation area for the Oldsmar Wal-Mart. The shopping center destroyed some wetlands, and tried to make up for it by creating a human-made wetland adjacent to the Wal-Mart. The fallen cypress is testament to its failure.**

By then we had also visited the National Wetlands Inventory office a couple of times and also acquired the state's own permitting database. Their tracking systems had problems too. We realized that nobody was keeping track of what wetlands had been wiped out. That's when Matt proposed using satellite imagery analysis to figure out how much had been lost.

This may be the most important lesson we learned: Sometimes if you want an answer, you're going to have to get it yourself.

**Q: What kinds of sources did you use, especially for the way wetlands work and how development threatens them?**

**A:** Our folks in Newsart put that wonderful graphic together. Our editor, Tom Scherberger, suggested that instead of spending a lot of time in the stories explaining how wetlands work and why they're important, we get a nice big graphic to do that chore. It was a great idea, as was devoting a whole page to some of the more artistic wetland photos taken by our photographer, Lara Cerri. That made the whole package very inviting for the readers.

*(Continued next page)*

## **Wetlands...** (from page 17)

Some of my source books, which I loaned to the graphics folks, included “Swamp Song: A Natural History of Florida’s Swamps” by Ron Larson and “Priceless Florida: Natural Ecosystems and Native Species” by Ellie Whitney, D. Bruce Means and Anne Rudloe. Our lead artist, Jeff Goertzen, also talked extensively with a wetlands expert with one of our state agencies.

In reporting this story, I read permits and lawsuits and academic papers, tracked down books on the history of the corps and its decision-making process, talked to biologists and congressional aides, got copies of old U.S. General Accounting Office reports on the corps’ flaws and so forth.

But nothing I did can top Matt. He took not one but two college courses at the University of South Florida to learn how to do what we needed done with the satellite imagery.

Also I have to credit Tom, our editor, for convincing upper management to spend about \$4,000 on new software and a computer upgrade so Matt could properly analyze the satellite imagery of the entire state, something no other newspaper has ever done.

**Q: You used some really good stories to make the key points in your series. How did you find them and how did you pick them, because it looks like you had lots from which to choose. Did you outline your points and look for examples that proved the point?**

**A:** Early on, I taped a map of Florida up near my desk and as we did our reporting I stuck hot pink Post-its on places where we had turned up interesting permits. On each Post-it I wrote a short note about what it was. After we got a dozen Post-its on the map, a co-worker joked that if we could figure out the pattern, we’d know where the killer would strike next.

The map helped us key in on certain permits. Some were obvious even without the map, of course, like the Wal-Mart project in New Smyrna Beach. It was one of the rare permits the corps denied, and the activists who successfully fought it had filed a big lawsuit.

**Q: If you did use an outline or some other mechanism to help you organize? If so, how often do you think you changed it?**

**A:** Wherever I go I carry a small notepad in my back pocket, and at odd moments – watching my 3-year-old’s swim class at the “Y,” or waiting for my 6-year-old to finish soccer practice – I would pull it out and jot down ideas about the most important points. The notes were short, like “Denials are hard,” and “How much did they save?” Then I would try to arrange them in different ways, aiming for an order in which one thought naturally flowed into the next.

When Matt and I started writing, those notes became the basic outline for the story. We went through a very extensive editing process – the first-day main story was the 11th version – but we made sure those key points stayed in.

**Q: As you gather information, what do you do with it? How do you manage information as you collect it?**

**A:** The main thing I’ve learned to do on a project this size is to type up your notes as soon after an interview or a site visit as you can. I put in a lot of late nights doing that on this project. It would help my wife get the kids in bed and then work from 10 p.m. till midnight or later. I typed the notes in with detailed nota-

tions at the top that help me later in remembering the conditions of the interview or site visit.

When I transcribe my notes I always mark the best quotes in boldface so I can find them easily when I’m writing the story later. This also helped when we were doing our fact-checking, because I could quickly find the source of a quote and verify its accuracy.

**Q: Some of the quotes from corps officials as well as former corps officials were pretty honest and upfront. How did you get them to say what they said?**

**A:** Some of them were ready to talk. They were fed up and wanted to vent. Others took more persuading. Over the course of about a year I interviewed John Hall, the head of the corps’ regulatory division in Florida for 15 years, a total of seven times. Six times we talked on the phone for up to 90 minutes, and then one interview was face-to-face with a tape recorder running. At first he was very defensive and didactic, but by the time we were doing the face-to-face interview in Jacksonville he was very open in talking about the flaws in their system.

**Q: I noticed that at one point, you quoted the corps’ public notices as of July 1 of the previous year, about 11 months before your series ran. Did you look at them on that date or go back and look at them? How long did you work on this?**

**A:** Matt and I decided that it would be telling to pick a single day of public notices and analyze them. So we picked July 1 kind of at random and on that day we downloaded all of the notices into a file where we could count up the number of acres being requested, etc. We worked on this series off and on for 18 months. Our original plan was to publish in the fall of 2004 but God had a different schedule in mind. Matt and I wound up being pulled in to help cover the four hurricanes that hit Florida last summer, which pushed our publication date back to the spring of 2005.

**Q: The web presentation is very multi-media, etc. Did you think as you were reporting and gathering information or doing the analysis about how you were going to present this on the web as well as in print?**

**A:** Sort of. *The Times* is a statewide paper with a large following via our website. So from the outset, we planned on a significant web presence and included our web staff in most of the staff meetings where we discussed the project. We had plans for video, audio; there was even talk at one time of building an interactive map server so people could see satellite imagery of their own areas. But then we got so busy with the stories themselves that video didn’t get edited and the map server wouldn’t play ball. In the end, two of the most crucial web elements – the before-and-after aerial shots and the audio clips from John Hall – didn’t come together until a week before publication.

**Q: Do you think Florida is unique or could this story be duplicated in any state with lots of wetlands? If it can be duplicated, how would you suggest a reporter take on the challenge?**

**A:** Florida has more wetlands than any state but Alaska, and the corps has issued more 404 permits here than anywhere else. That means doing this for any other state ought to be a lot easier, right?

*(Continued next page)*

If you're going to attempt this, maybe it's best to start small, say with a four-county or five-county area where you already know there has been lots of development, and learn the ropes. The more you do it, the better you get.

Just beware of potential pitfalls. The most gut-wrenching surprise we encountered came after Matt had completed his initial analysis of all the wetlands in the state. He figured we could compare one image year to another and – voila! – we'd have a total acres lost figure. He found a *huge* amount of wetlands loss, far more than we ever expected. On closer inspection, though, he discovered a lot of wetland loss paralleling the coastline. Turns out that in one image, the tide was out, and in the other one the tide was in.

That's when Matt figured out that what we should do is just look at areas that had been converted to urban uses, because those were both permanent and easy to spot.

**Q: Matt, can you describe how you did the photo analysis?**

**A.** Explaining how we did the analysis without writing a book on it is almost an impossible task. It took almost a year, involved two college courses and introduced me to concepts and terms I can barely spell. What I learned doing it – what I can pass along to you – is more useful.

When we started, it seemed so simple: sure we could just take two satellite images, one old and one new, and then compare them and then we'd know how many acres of wetlands had disappeared. Easy, right?

Wrong.

It wouldn't have been so hard if we had followed our own advice, and started small, sticking with our own coverage area. Instead, we decided to look at the whole state of Florida. It took a lot of work, but in the end we found that about 84,000 acres of wetlands had been wiped out by urban development.

What did it take? College courses, \$4,000 in software, 220 gigabytes of hard-drive space, editors with an abundance of patience and about 10 months of free time.

Easy, right?

Using imagery in your reporting doesn't have to take all that. We used more sophisticated satellite image analysis techniques where pixels are classified together by how light and infrared radiation reflect off them. An easier approach, working on a smaller scale, would be to use aerial imagery to hand digitize things on the ground. You can create maps on your own, looking at images and drawing polygons around what it is you're after. And, if you are already a Geographic Information System user, you don't need specialized software to do that.

But there are some basics you'll need to know before you go forward.

- Start by learning Geographic Information Systems. I believe GIS is the most useful computer-assisted reporting tool journalists can use. Readers get maps. Editors get maps. More

Photo courtesy of ST. PETERSBURG TIMES



**A wetland in 1995; the same area in 2004, covered with a Wal-Mart.**

and more government data is being mapped. And environmental data is by far the most common data available in maps. The reason to be comfortable with GIS first is it gives you a foundation to work from.

- This sounds obvious, but you have to do your homework. With large scale and complex imagery analysis, that should mean taking a college course in imagery analysis. The reasons are legion, but the most important is this: it is very easy to go very wrong.

- Start small, start simple. The reason our wetlands story took so long is because we aimed very high – covering the whole state. It would have taken a fraction of the time we used to just look at our coverage area.

- Plan your analysis out. The easiest way to keep from going astray is to use the scientific method. The scientific method helps you form your question and detail how you are going to analyze the data.

- Verify your data. Remote sensing analysis requires an accuracy assessment – using random sampling techniques to assess how well

your analysis worked. Another step you should seriously consider is having outside experts review what you did. They may see a flaw in your logic that will keep you from having to write an embarrassing correction.

Imagery can be a powerful tool for reporting. The downside is it requires more work than other tools in the journalist's tool bag. The upside is that it's hard for a government official or polluter to argue with a picture.

**Q: Craig, what kind of response did it get from readers? How about any government response?**

**A:** We were, pardon the pun, swamped. Lots of readers were outraged and asked what they could do about it. We had lots of letters to the editor. We received several e-mails from current and recently retired federal employees who wanted to say thanks for telling the truth. Some other newspapers jumped in with their own editorial comments. The *Miami Herald's* Carl Hiaasen wrote a pretty fiery column, for instance.

About a month later, we finally got a reaction from the corps. The colonel in charge in Jacksonville complained that we had

*(Continued next page)*

# Wetlands... (from page 19)

“downplayed” the good work they do in shaving a few acres of wetland impacts off permit applications. I pointed out that we had in fact put that in the story – along with our finding, based on the corps' own documents, that in Florida the corps was doing a poor job compared to the corps' national average. He didn't have much to say after that.

no matter what there will be no more satellite imagery analysis. He says his eyeballs just can't take it.

See “Vanishing Wetlands” and follow-up stories at: [www.sptimes.com/2005/webspecials05/wetlands/](http://www.sptimes.com/2005/webspecials05/wetlands/)

Photo courtesy of ST. PETERSBURG TIMES



**This golf course community of roughly 1,000 homes is typical of many in Florida. Roads and several houses in the development were built on top of wetlands, though most wetlands remain untouched. Most of the homes in the southern cul-de-sac in this photo were built – with the government's permission – on a wetland.**

After our first stories ran in May, two different development projects in two different counties in our circulation area were voted down by local planning boards. Both projects would have destroyed wetlands, and opponents of those projects cited our series as a reason why the projects should be stopped on the local level. They said our stories showed no one could count on the corps to protect wetlands from development.

**Q: I know you have done some follow-up stories. Tell me briefly about them.**

**A:** In July we documented how Florida's developers had mounted a behind-the-scenes campaign to get the corps to hand over some permitting responsibilities to the state, which is even more lenient about wetlands destruction than the feds and faster to issue permits, too.

We had documents showing how a lobbyist for the developers wrote the bill for a friendly legislator to sponsor, and then how developers orchestrated a campaign to get 15 members of Congress to send the governor a letter urging him to sign it. Meanwhile they were meeting with top Pentagon and corps officials to persuade them to back their plan.

There are more wetland stories to come, but Matt swears that

Florida. The stories caused such an uproar that Gov. Jeb Bush scuttled the plan. Pittman lives in St. Petersburg with his wife, an editor at the *Times*, and their two sons.

**Matthew Waite, 30,** is the kind of reporter who doesn't go anywhere without his laptop. Although technically a GA, his assignment is to get computer-assisted reporting into the *St. Petersburg Times* as much as possible. While a student journalist at the University of Nebraska, he went to Bosnia to report on the conflict there. He also won an IRE award in 1996 for a *Daily Nebraskan* story involving a computer-assisted examination of crime rates in a Lincoln, Neb., neighborhood. At both the Little Rock, Ark., *Democrat-Gazette* and at the *Times*, he has used computer-assisted reporting to cover crime, transportation, utilities, the environment, education, real estate and the occasional hurricane. A frequent speaker at IRE and NICAR conventions, he lives in Largo, Fla., with his wife and daughter.

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*Mike Dunne is associate editor of SEJournal and a reporter for The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La.*

## The poisoned pole, nature deprivation and Big Green

Book on arctic contamination hints of global problem

**SILENT SNOW: THE SLOW POISONING OF THE ARCTIC**

By Marla Cone  
Grove Press, \$24

Reviewed by NANCY BAZILCHUK

You'd be hard pressed to find two places more diametrically opposed than Los Angeles and Qaanaaq, Greenland, population 860, where the local version of sushi is a dish called mattak, or raw narwhal blubber. But in June, 2001, Marla Cone, an award-winning environmental writer for *The Los Angeles Times* (and former SEJ board member) found herself in Qaanaaq, on a quest to find out how the world's remotest inhabited regions had come to be the most toxic places on the planet. This seemingly pristine region, far from the chemical refineries and smokestacks of the industrialized world, is home to the world's most contaminated fish, animals and even humans.

"I did not come to this project with an innate love of the Arctic," Cone writes in the introduction to her excellent new book, "Silent Snow: The Slow Poisoning of the Arctic."

"I was drawn there by the irony of its plight and my compulsion to explore and chronicle the damage inflicted on wildlife and people by contaminants spreading around the globe."

Cone undertook her project after being awarded a 1999 fellowship from the Pew Fellows Program in Marine Conservation. Cone spent two years traversing the Arctic, from the wilds of Greenland to the icy outposts of the Norwegian island of Svalbard, the Faroe Islands and the northernmost communities in Alaska. In her book, she blends compelling human interest stories with powerful imagery and good explanations of the toxicology and chemistry of persistent pollutants.

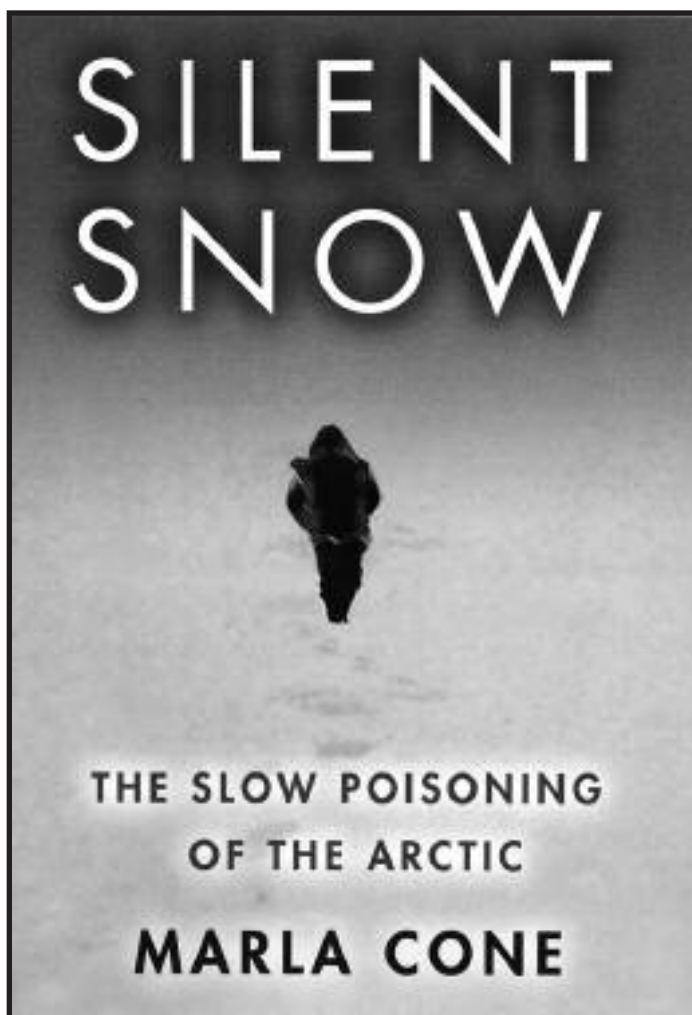
It helps that some of her characters are people like Andy Derocher, a colorful wildlife biologist who journeys to Svalbard to fulfill his dream of finding polar bears undisturbed by hunting and far from the pollutants and intrusions of the modern world. But the convergence of air currents from Europe, Asia and North America over Svalbard means that toxic accumulations of PCBs found in the island's polar bears are at levels 12 times higher than their Alaskan counterparts.

Derocher and other researchers have found subtle health problems in the bears that they suspect are linked to the chemicals: from an increase in pseudo hermaphrodite female bears to reduced immune system functions. But making definitive statements about toxic effects on bear populations and overall health is difficult. And studying polar bears in the wilds of Svalbard is risky and dangerous – as we learn in the course of one chapter, where Cone documents time spent with Derocher swooping across the barren expanses of Svalbard in a helicopter with one eye always on the weather and the other one the lookout for polar bears.

Cone also takes readers on a different hunt – one in which native peoples of northern Canada, Alaska and Greenland hunt whales and seals as a part of their traditional livelihood. A diet

heavy on marine mammals means that Inuit living in remote areas of Greenland carry more mercury and PCBs in their bodies than anyone else on earth.

Quoting Eric Dewailly, director of the Public Health



Research Unit at Laval University, Cone writes that many individuals from Greenland have such a heavy body burden of toxic chemicals that their bodies could be declared hazardous waste. Scientists believe these contaminants cause the babies of indigenous northern peoples, particularly in Greenland, to suffer greater rates of infections because of immune system impairment, and cognitive problems because of altered brain development similar in scope to if their mothers drank moderate amounts of alcohol while pregnant.

Yet at the same time, the Inuit traditional diet brings many health benefits as well as cultural ones. Heart disease is "more or less unknown" among northern natives who adhere to their traditional diets, and antioxidants in marine mammals also seem to lower the Inuit's risk of cancer. Moreover, hunting is absolutely vital to indigenous culture. This creates a terrible paradox for native groups as well as the health officials who struggle to offer them sound advice.

(Continued next page)

Why care about these tiny populations of people who, though living far from civilization's benefits, are the victims of its wastes? It's a matter of social justice, of course, but Cone also argues that we ought to be worried because the Arctic gives us a hint of our own fates if we fail to curb the releases of persistent toxic chemicals.

*Nancy Bazilchuk is a freelance environmental writer and editor in Trondheim, Norway, 300 miles south of the Arctic Circle.*



### Magical childhoods should include time in nature

**LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS: SAVING OUR CHILDREN FROM NATURE-DEFICIT DISORDER**

By **Richard Louv**  
Algonquin Books, \$24.95

Reviewed by **JIM MOTAVALLI**

A 2002 study discovered that average eight-year-olds in Britain could readily identify the characters on Japanese Pokémon trading cards but were clueless when asked to identify native animal and plant species in their own communities.

It's not surprising that kids feel so disconnected from nature. Families moved to San Diego's Scripps Ranch for its "child-friendly" atmosphere, enhanced by eucalyptus groves and canyons with walking paths. But when the kids actually tried to build forts and put up bike ramps, they were stopped from these potentially destructive and dangerous activities by directives from the local community association.

More than a few of the Scripps kids took their poles to a pond to try and catch some bluegills, but they were chased away from that as well. In fact, they were lucky not to run afoul of Gill the Fish, the six-foot costumed representative of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), who goes to schools and warns kids that fishing is "the final frontier of animal rights" and that "fish are friends, not food." Both fishing and hunting seem to be declining as an activity for young people.

In place of outdoor activities frowned on by parental authorities, today's children have learned to find "adventure" from cable TV, hand-held screens and online surfing. Have you ever noticed that the kids seen on television never watch TV? Media companies have a stake in not acknowledging what nature phobes kids have become. This reviewer's own daughters, when asked to observe a flock of Canada geese on a downtown lawn, looked past the birds and proclaimed, "McDonalds!"

Dr. Donald Shifrin, a Bellevue, Wash., pediatrician, told the *New York Times* that he rarely sees kids with the broken arms that come from falling out of trees. Instead, they arrive at his office intact, toting video games, cell phones and hand-held computers.

"We have mobile couch potatoes," Shifrin says.

Richard Louv addresses this alienation from the natural world in his book "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder." Louv says an occasional nature walk and exposure to the Animal Planet network isn't enough to pump a love for the outdoors into our children. Indeed, he reports that society, even when it intends otherwise, teaches young people to fear and avoid nature. Like most Americans, kids spend 90 percent of their time indoors, where air quality is two to 10 times worse than outside air.

After outlining the problem, Louv turns to the spiritual, social and intellectual rewards of introducing children to nature.

Louv also includes a useful chapter on environmental education. While the trend in the U.S. is toward dropping recess, some schools are sending their students outdoors to get educated. The best-devised curricula allow students to learn lessons from on-campus ponds and native-plant parks, or collect data from a nearby stream.

Corporate-sponsored environmental lesson plans are freely available to cash-strapped school districts ... typically on DVD or VHS.

Louv celebrates New Urbanism, which encourages city developments to include open space. He offers a wealth of good examples from Europe, where at places like Het Groene Dak (The Green Roof) in Holland, kids play in a communal inner garden where cars are banned and parents can be free of anxiety.

"Last Child in the Woods" is well written and prescriptive without sounding like a scolding uncle. Louv tells how he spent his youth exploring the woods and farmland of Independence, Mo.. He climbed trees imagining himself a character out of Kipling's "Jungle Book," and dangled string in creeks to catch crawdads. He wants other kids to have magical childhoods, too.

*Jim Motavalli is the editor of E Magazine.*



### Defending The Nature Conservancy and its work

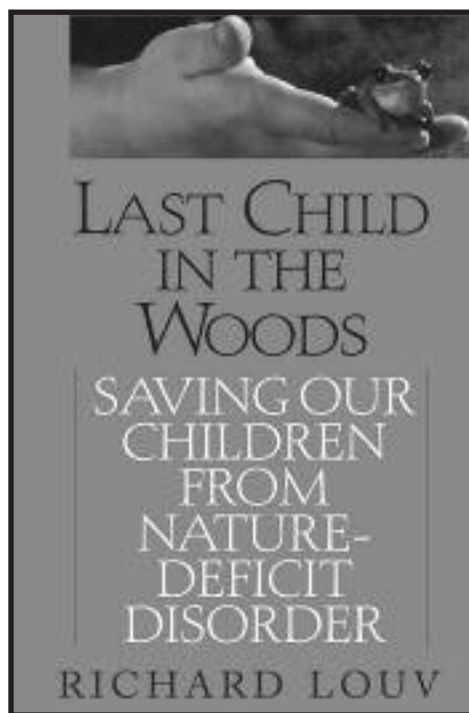
**NATURE'S KEEPERS: THE REMARKABLE STORY OF HOW THE NATURE CONSERVANCY BECAME THE LARGEST ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATION IN THE WORLD**

By **Bill Birchard**  
Jossey-Bass, \$24.95

Reviewed by **MISTY EDGECOMB**

Forget everything you've read in the past year about The Nature Conservancy as a villain. Nature's Keepers, a new profile of America's richest environmental group isn't an exposé, it's a history written by one of its members.

*(Continued next page)*



Bill Birchard, a long-time business and environmental writer, recounts the founding of the Conservancy and the set of individual leaders to whom he credits its staggering success.

In a quick rundown in Chapter One of highlights from the 2003 *Washington Post* series that exposed the seamier side of the Nature Conservancy – such as rustling for natural gas in Texas – Birchard tags the *Post* for showing “a taste for the Conservancy’s knottiest transactions.”

He continues later in the chapter, “Many people wondered why the *Post* didn’t look more at the Conservancy’s success.”

Certainly when measured by size, the Conservancy has been successful. It brings in over \$800 million each year and employs 3,450 people operating from four hundred offices in fifty states and twenty-eight countries, Birchard writes.

The Conservancy has also preserved a staggering amount of land. “No other (environmental) organization surpasses the Conservancy’s record of on-the-ground results,” Birchard claims, noting that it protects more than a million acres per year.

Birchard organizes his book into chapters that focus on individuals who helped shape the organization – from eminent ecologists to businessmen who joke about their inability to identify songbirds.

Birchard doesn’t excuse the Conservancy for its mistakes but credits them to bad choices by individuals rather than a broad culture. His interest lies in the leaders who performed well. “As for foul-ups, well, they happen at any big organization,” he writes.

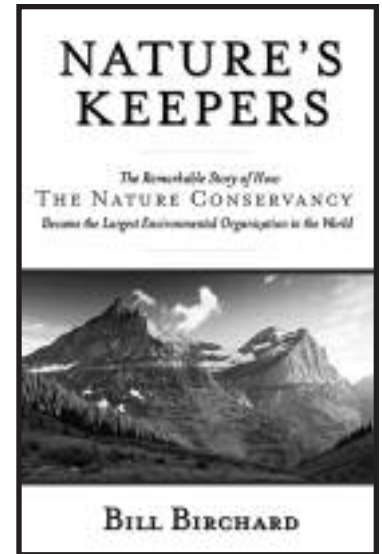
The controversial “private enterprise” aspect of the Conservancy – in which less ecologically valuable lands are sold off or used for their natural resources – dates to Patrick Noonan in the mid-1970s, Birchard says.

Noonan was also known for spearheading the practice of reaching out to large corporations to fund land deals by the Conservancy.

Birchard painstakingly researched Conservancy history through correspondence and meeting minutes, but as a result, the book often reads more like a text for his fellow researchers than a story to savor.

Still, the choice to lead with the characters who brought the organization to life does breathe life into the book. Their quirks, their triumphs and their foibles are what make it a worthwhile read.

*Misty Edgcomb is a reporter for the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat & Chronicle.*



## ENDANGERED Environments



**Toxic Drift**  
*Pesticides and Health in the Post-World War II South*  
PETE DANIEL

In this sobering exposé of the use and abuse of pesticides in the South from 1945 to 1970, Daniel recounts an important episode in ecological history. He tells a story of bureaucratic perfidy, scientific hubris, and corporate irresponsibility, revealing the careless mentality that allowed pesticide application to swerve out of control. Consequences of this unchecked campaign included fish kills in the Mississippi River, ducks falling dead from the sky, and for humans: death and severe debilitation.

Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History  
Illustrated, \$16.95



**America's Wetland**  
*Louisiana's Vanishing Coast*  
Photographs by BEVIL KNAPP  
Text by MIKE DUNNE

“A uniquely personal perspective on the ecological, economic, and cultural impacts of the loss of Louisiana’s coastal wetlands. On each page, we get a glimpse of a way of life that is vanishing as rapidly as our coastline and, if nothing is done, could disappear forever.”  
—Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, State of Louisiana

140 color photographs, \$39.95

Proceeds from the sale of this book will benefit America's WETLAND Campaign to Save Coastal Louisiana and fund national public education efforts about wetlands conservation.



**Marsh Mission**  
*Capturing the Vanishing Wetlands*  
C. C. LOCKWOOD and RHEA GARY

Through rapturous photographs and paintings, Lockwood and Gary extol Louisiana’s endangered marshlands, hoping that art will inspire concern where statistics have not. Together, the two impart an aesthetic experience that explains better than any map or scientific data the irreplaceable treasure being lost.

100 color plates, \$39.95

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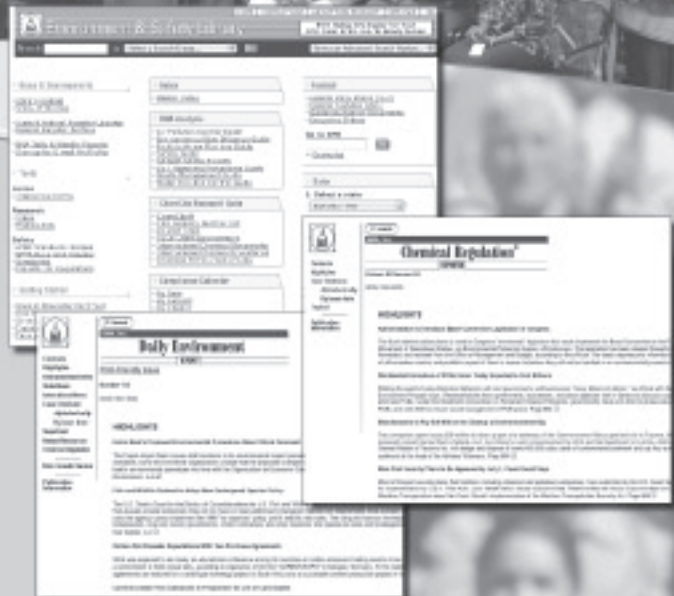


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# Chemicals in the air, in your fish and in your old waste dumps

By MIKE DUNNE

Reporters in two cities known for a high concentration of chemical plants wrote stories recently about new technology now becoming available to detect leaks that can cause places like Houston and Baton Rouge to have ozone problems.

Baton Rouge Advocate reporter Amy Wold wrote on July 13 about the new tool the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality is using to help identify sources of leaks. The state is aggressively trying to find ways to solve the ozone problem in the five-parish Baton Rouge area.

Wold wrote: "Five minutes after leaving Baton Rouge Metro Airport aboard a helicopter equipped with a pollution leak-detection camera, officials found their first 'leaker.' In fact, of the hundreds of industrial facilities, storage tanks, barges and railroad cars examined during a two-day aerial survey in June, almost all had some sort of leak, said Bruce Hammett, a state Department of Environmental Quality administrator."

A "leaker" was defined as anything detectable by the test camera, including emissions allowed through permits, he said. "If we could see it from the air and it looked like smoke (in the image produced by the instrument), it was a leaker," Hammett said.

The new detection camera, known as the "Hawk," can't measure how much or what kind of material is leaking, but it does give enforcement staff and inspectors a better idea of where to investigate, Hammett said. Just about every facility had at least one "leaker," Hammett said. The Hawk, however, didn't detect any leaks from the hundreds of railroad cars surveyed, he said.

Nearly a month later, on Aug. 9, the *Houston Chronicle's* Dina Cappiello wrote about new Texas data that showed smog-forming, and possibly toxic, pollution is leaking from nearly 200 previously undocumented locations. Using infrared technology, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality study unearthed new pollution sources, decades after efforts to clean up smog began. Those new

sources may need to be controlled for Houston and other industrial areas of Texas to meet health-based standards for ground-level ozone.

The state research found 175 previously invisible leaks coming from barges, flares, storage tanks and other industrial equipment along the Houston Ship Channel and in Texas City, Beaumont and Port Arthur. The technology works much the same as tools that enable soldiers to see at night. It is unable to measure the quantity or detect the specific chemical released.

"We never had the opportunity to see who else was out there that we were missing," said TCEQ Commissioner Ralph Marquez of the \$100,000 research project.

Those were just two of the hundreds of environmental stories written in the last quarter.

Summer heat often is the launching pad for mid-year stories and this year was no different.

Louisville, Ky., often has a similar summer ozone problem.

Jim Bruggers of the *Courier-Journal* wrote about "roasting temperatures, abundant sunshine and sometimes-stagnant air" bringing pollution alerts back to the metro area. "By all accounts, new pollution controls on coal-fired power plants have improved the community's air quality in recent years. In 1999, the area exceeded a pollution standard for ozone on 44 days. Last year, that number had dropped to two days," Bruggers wrote.

But 2005 was different, thanks to a

return to a more normal summer weather pattern. The levels of ozone have already been higher than the federal standard on seven days since June 24, Bruggers wrote at the time.



Photo courtesy of THE ADVOCATE

**This hand-held Hawk Leak Detection device can spot leaking chemical vapors for tanks, pipelines, barges, railcars and other hazardous chemical containers. Louisiana environmental officials plan to use the machine in the Baton Rouge area ozone non-attainment area.**

Much farther north of Louisville, the warm weather being experienced is being seen as a marker of global climate change. *(Continued next page)*

## Help us improve the *SEJournal*!

To improve the *SEJournal*, the Editorial Board would like you to answer a few questions. Please email answers to [mmansur@kc.rr.com](mailto:mmansur@kc.rr.com).

1. What do you like about the current *SEJournal*?
2. What do you not like?
3. What would you like to see added or changed?
4. Looking at its design, would you prefer a color cover or other color elements within the text?
5. Any other comments?

On Aug. 21, **Nathan VanderKlippe** of CanWest News Service wrote about sea ice changes.

“Three years after a huge crack split one of Canada’s last remaining ice shelves in half, scientists have found fresh evidence that global warming is splintering the mass of ice,” he wrote.

diplomatic talks. Environmentalists feared the lake water will send pollutants north of the border as it travels through a 22-kilometer-long Devils Lake outlet. Water from the lake flows through the outlet and into the Sheyenne River, which drains into the Red River that flows into Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg.

**Perry Beeman** wrote a July 31 story for the *Des Moines Register* about the sometimes surprising findings in Iowa’s most comprehensive lake-quality report card ever conducted. Iowa State University compiled the ratings for the state Department of Natural Resources, which will use them to decide which lakes to restore. The data rate the lakes on measurements taken over the past five years and offer the latest readings from this summer as well.

In addition to ranking lakes for various water-quality measurements, the study shows that many Iowa lakes suffer from a low-oxygen condition, the culprit behind the much-publicized “Dead Zone” in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Tracy Sawyer** of the *Yakima Herald-Republic* wrote Aug. 7 about the increased all-terrain-vehicle (ATV) traffic in the Washington mountains. The ATVs bringing increased fire danger, air pollution and noise to the backwoods and growth has happened so fast that authorities were unsure how to handle the problem.

“Most of the use is legal with recreationists strictly adhering to the “green dot” system marking roads that are open to motor-vehicle use,” Sawyer wrote “But then there are the ‘renegades’ – those who abuse their right to public lands by going off-road, tearing up wetlands and historically significant mountainsides in the process.”

**Judy Fahys** of the *Salt Lake Tribune* wrote about mercury in fish in Utah. She said the Great Salt Lakekeeper group says it will fight a state ruling that blocks an independent study of toxic mercury in fish from the Great Salt Lake Basin.

Fahys wrote: “It really boils down to years of opposition by the Division of Water Quality to citizen monitoring,” said Jeff Salt, whose group is part of a nationwide coalition of 137 organizations focused on protecting lakes, rivers, bays and coastlines.”

The state said it is already working on solving the mercury issue and was concerned about public confusion by studies that might conflict.

Old dumps continued to make new news.

**Sarah Lin** of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote on Aug. 17 that six months of heavy winter storms “turned a long-closed Huntington Beach landfill into a soupy,

(Continued next page)

Photo courtesy of the YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC



**The use of all-terrain vehicles in the mountains of Washington state is increasing fire danger, air pollution and backwoods noise, Tracy Sawyer of the Yakima Herald-Republic reported this summer.**

The Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, about 3,500 kilometers north of Edmonton, is losing its edges quickly as climate change rapidly alters Ellesmere Island, Canada’s northernmost landmass, he wrote. The ice shelf is a 450-square-kilometer ledge that’s 25 meters thick and reaches up into the Arctic Ocean from the mouth of Ellesmere Island’s Disraeli Fiord. It surrounds Ward Hunt Island, which at 83 degrees north lies at the very tip of land in the Americas.

Hot weather makes water stories hot, too.

The *Austin (Texas) American-Statesman’s* **Stephen Scheibal** wrote Aug. 21 of a study that shows there “should be enough water between the Hill Country and the Gulf Coast to keep the region in rice fields and green lawns until today’s elementary students start retiring.” But it won’t be cheap – about \$1.5 billion.

**Steve Lambert** of the *Canadian Press* wrote on Aug. 15 about a water project that runs between the U.S. and Canada.

Water began draining from a U.S. lake into a river that flows into Canada after years of planning, legal battles and

**Mike Taugher** of the *Contra Costa Times* wrote about the decline of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta in California, largest estuary on the West Coast. “For 10 years, it has also been the focus of a multi-billion dollar effort to ensure it remains ecologically viable and a reliable source of water. Now, to the surprise of scientists and water managers, the Delta’s open-water ecosystem is in a sharp, dramatic and unexplained decline,” he wrote.

**Ben Shouse** of the *Sioux Falls, S.D. Argus-Leader* wrote about the Dakota grasslands. Using satellite photographs of thousands of tracts blanketing an area known as “the coteau,” researcher Scott Stephens of Bismarck and others have documented the loss of 88 square miles of native grassland in central South Dakota since 1984 – 10 percent of the area’s remaining acreage. The trend appears to be accelerating, and farmers and officials say government subsidies and new technology are responsible, Shouse said. Conservationists and local ranchers want to halt the loss, while some farmers argue their new methods are good for wildlife.

toxic mess.” An emergency cleanup was underway and neighbors were concerned about their health.

In February, workers pumped nearly 4 million gallons of rainwater from the 38-acre Ascon Landfill, half a mile from the beach.

Nineteen cracks were discovered in an 18-foot-high earthen berm which lined the two northernmost waste pits. The repairs are needed to prevent the berm from giving way during another storm and allowing hazardous sludge to spill onto streets, she wrote.

**April Lynch** also wrote an August story in the *San Jose Mercury News* about old trash dumps in California where burned garbage has left behind toxic substances and polluted land. Near one, a Chico doctor gives free blood tests for toxic lead contamination. San Diego finds itself with patches of pollution that cost more than \$6 million to clean up.

San Jose had one in the Watson Park area.

“The long-overlooked site of what once was San Jose’s main trash dump and incinerator plant will soon get extensive testing to see what cleanup may be needed,” Lynch wrote. Soil tests already found elevated levels of lead, zinc and other hazards. And almost all of the park is now closed, waiting for fences. The old dump might even go beneath an elementary school and nearby homes.

**Kera Abraham** of *Eugene (Ore.) Weekly* wrote on July 11 about logging done in the wake of the July 2002 Biscuit Fire. The fire burned 500,000 acres of the Siskiyou National Forest in southwest Oregon.

The Forest Service adopted a plan to log 372 million board feet from the burned areas – the largest salvage operation in the agency’s recent history. That prompted lawsuits from environmental groups and ongoing protests at the site. The Forest Service claims that the logging is imperative for the struggling local economy, but early sales indicate that taxpayers will lose big on the project, Abraham said.

“Using a loophole created by the Bush administration,” Abraham wrote, “the Forest Service declared an economic emergency to allow sales to move forward despite public appeals. But the 12 sales now under contract – comprising 67 million board feet of timber over 3,500 acres of old

growth and mixed-growth forest – fell dramatically short of agency expectations.”

So far, Biscuit salvage timber has fetched an average of \$75 per thousand board feet, compared with earlier Forest Service estimates of \$187 to \$250 per thousand board feet.

July 24 – a Sunday – turned out to be a good day for environmental journalism with at least nine notable citations.

**Ken Ward Jr.** of the *Charleston, W. Va., Gazette*, in a story about dioxin contamination in Nitro from a former Monsanto Chemical facility, wrote: “Across town, other remnants of Monsanto’s 50-year history remain hidden in the dust inside residents’ homes and in the dirt of their backyards....Dozens of homes in this community are polluted with what residents fear are dangerous levels of the toxic chemical dioxin, according to records filed in court and with government agencies.”

Tests also show some long-time residents have measurable amounts of dioxin in their blood, he also wrote.

*The New York Times’* **Amy Cortese** wrote about DuPont’s Teflon troubles.

Some investors had hoped paying out \$100 million last fall to settle a lawsuit contending its Parkersburg, W. Va. plant has polluted local drinking waters would end potential problems for the substance.

But scientists advising the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency determined earlier in the month that the ingredient, perfluorooctanoic acid, also known as PFOA or C8, was a “likely carcinogen,” or cancer-causing agent. EPA regulation could now occur and the finding could jeopardize the outcome of a criminal investigation into whether it hid tests showing a health threat and a class action suit filed on behalf of people who bought Teflon-coated cookware.

The *Jefferson City (Mo.) News Tribune’s* **Michelle Reagan** wrote of brownfields:

“Many vacant pieces of property – maybe in the heart of a community, maybe once a beautiful gem – sit idle because questions loom about what chemical shadows from previous owners might still be there.”

**Nancy Lofholm** of the *Denver Post* wrote that new safety rules governing uranium mining are on the upswing again.

“Fans ventilate mine air,” Lofholm wrote. “Radon levels are monitored. The

air is checked for diesel and silica particles. Miners are kept out of areas where radon or dust exceeds certain levels and are allowed in only with respirators. And if miners even carry smoking materials into the mines, they are fired.”

She quoted Teresa Coons, a senior scientist at the Saccomanno Research Institute: “This next boom will be a lot safer for those working in the industry.”

**Greg Gordon** and **Randy Furst** of the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* also wrote about mining safety and new tests that show elevated levels of asbestos in taconite dust. The results reopen decades-old questions about mine workers’ safety. At the Northshore Mining Co., which crushes millions of tons of ore each year in a dusty process that makes iron-rich taconite pellets for the steel industry, federal regulators have urged the company to reduce worker exposures. Federal officials would not comment on the problem to the newspaper and the mine’s owners dispute the test results.

**Colleen Disken** of *The Record* of Bergen County, N.J. wrote about the continuing debate over fluoride. After opening the story with a dentist who refused to expose his patients to the substance, Disken wrote: “When Teaneck orthodontist Frank Graham hears the arguments against fluoridation, he bristles like a well-worn toothbrush.” Science supports the use of fluoride, Graham said. He said he rarely sees a mouth that doesn’t glisten from the benefits of fluoride treatments. “The most effective and efficient way to ensure everyone gets access to fluoride is to add it to our water systems,” he said.

**Andy Mead** and **Jim Warren** of the *Lexington Herald-Leader* wrote about Boyd Haley, a University of Kentucky chemist who is a leader in a nationwide effort to tie the vaccinations that were required for millions of American children to a rapid increase in the number of youngsters being diagnosed with autism. The developmental disorder severely affects verbal communication and social interaction, and strikes about 25,000 children each year.

Haley and his allies are fighting against most of the mainstream scientific community. Mead and Warren wrote: “The battle rages on the Internet, in Congress and in some state houses, and has become so volatile that some of the scientists involved

(Continued next page)

## The Beat... (from page 27)

say they've received death threats. Research into autism continues, but for now no one knows whether Haley ultimately will be judged as a shaman or a savior."

**Gina Czark** of *The Times of Munster*, Ind. also wrote about the decision to vaccinate or not. "Parental support groups and scientific studies published gave credence to both sides of the debate over vaccinations," Czark wrote. "Between 10,000 to 12,000 cases of vaccination reactions are filed annually with the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. An estimated 20 percent of those cases are classified as serious, meaning hospitalization, disability and life-threatening illness or death."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the American Academy of Pediatrics called for the elimination of thimerosal, which contains ethyl mercury, from vaccines as a precaution, said Dr. Julia McMillan, who serves on the academy's board of infectious diseases and is a professor of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University.

**Shankar Vedantam** of *The Washington Post* wrote that Sunday about the nuclear industry's response to the Bush Administration's initiatives to promote a new generation of nuclear power plants. The industry, Vedantam wrote "sees a giant dollar sign. Critics see a giant mushroom cloud. For investors and taxpayers, who will have to pony up the cash, the sign may be a giant

question mark." No one has placed an order for a nuclear plant since 1973. A House-Senate conference committee was weighing an energy bill that includes a clutch of proposals to revive the industry.

How's that for a Sunday's worth of stories?

Critters continued to make news. Two Aug. 17 stories are good examples.

**Dan Vergano** of *USA Today* wrote about the possibility of using the cleared areas under the nation's powerlines for conservation zones for bees and other creatures.

More than 5 million acres of land nationwide are taken up by high-voltage power lines, says biologist Kim Russell of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Biologists have long known that hard-to-find species of bees, dragonflies and even small mammals turn up in these often semi-wild pieces of property, Russell says, but not many have considered the slices of land as possible conservation sites.

**Rex Springston** of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* wrote about the disappearance of species in Virginia, where more than 900 species of animals have dropped in numbers or are otherwise imperiled, according to a draft report from the state's wildlife agency. The animals range from ones long known to be in trouble, including the peregrine falcon and loggerhead sea turtle, to others that are considered common but declining, such as the whippoorwill.

**Merritt Clifton** of *Animal People* took an animal-centric look at the disaster last Christmas from a tsunami on the hard-hit Thai island of Phuket. In the July/August issue he wrote: "More development may mean more homes for dogs and cats, and more donors to support animal charities. Paradoxically, more development could even mean more protected wildlife habitat."

And fish fouled by chemicals continued to make news. The Vietnamese fish basa, which competes with farm-raised catfish, was seized and taken off the market in Alabama and Louisiana in early August because it contained a drug from the fluoroquinolone antibiotic family.

On Aug. 19, **Russ Henderson** of the *Mobile Press-Register* wrote that the same drug has been commonly and legally used in U.S. poultry production. The drugs were never approved for use in U.S. farm-raised catfish, but were approved for poultry in 1995, Food and Drug Administration officials said. Just last month, after five years of deliberation, the Food and Drug Administration moved to ban one drug in the fluoroquinolone antibiotic family from use in farmed chickens, but the ban was not scheduled to go into effect until Sept. 12.

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*Mike Dunne is associate editor of SEJournal and a reporter for The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La.*

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