

# SEJ Journal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Vol. 16 No. 1

## From ink to Internet Journalists write into the blogosphere

By ROBERT McCLURE

“Yer blogging?”

The subject line on an SEJ friend’s email at first caught me a little defensive. But it turned out that my friend is a big fan of weblogs, or blogs, believing they have the power to transform journalism and the social conversation. Notice, though, that she’s not yet blogging herself. It’s easier said than done – but also more fun than it sounds.

I’m a longtime newspaper reporter who is still fumbling my way through the blogosphere. When my editors at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* told the staff they wanted to see more of us try our hand at blogging, fellow enviro reporter Lisa Stiffler and I stepped forward as early volunteers. (Some wondered: victims?)

It’s easy to see why the *Post-Intelligencer* wanted to launch into this. We’re putting increasing emphasis on our website, which – unlike our brick-and-mortar-and-“dead-tree”

Confessions of a ‘blog mama’

See page 24

product, and many other newspapers’ around the country – is constantly attracting more readers.

It’s also easy to see why any journalist might want to try blogging. We know young people aren’t picking up those dead trees as much. The age gap in newspaper readership dates back decades, but has clearly grown in the face of the Internet.

So, what are blogs? They started out as web logs – periodic Internet posts, often about one’s personal life. That was in the mid-’90s. By 2002, though, bloggers had advanced enough that they affected American politics in a big way. Bloggers helped publicize U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott’s praise of Strom Thurmond that amounted – bloggers said in chastising traditional media for not reporting it – to racism.

Understand, though, that blogging is not necessarily journalism.

As it was put by early blogger Rebecca Blood: “These weblogs provide a valuable  
(Continued on page 23)

### Inside Story:

## Testing Chicago fish opens door into big national story

By MIKE DUNNE

A combination of writing stories about mercury pollution and wondering why a pregnant wife has to be careful about eating fish became an idea for an in-depth look at tainted seafood for sale in Chicago – and why the government has fallen down on the job of protecting consumers.

*Chicago Tribune* reporters Michael Hawthorne and Sam Roe decided that although the topic of mercury in fish is not new, it deserved a deeper look. Roe remembers thinking as he bought fish in the store while his wife was expecting their twins: “This is outrageous. How did we get to this point in this country where we have to watch how much fish we eat?”

“A lot has been written on mercury, but it seemed not enough,” he said. So he and Hawthorne pitched the idea to editors, who decided the way to approach the story was to test fish in Chicago markets.

The newspaper ended up not only doing testing, but in the case of one Midwestern favorite fish, walleye, the newspaper

tested four times more walleye for this three-part series than the federal government had tested in the previous 30 years.

Tuna, often seen as a healthful addition to one’s diet, can be a source of mercury, and “light” or gourmet tuna didn’t come with less mercury than regular tuna, the series concluded.

Publishing “The Mercury Menace” was more than just going out and testing some fish. Hawthorne and Roe realized what they were trying to do would be controversial, so they wanted the *Tribune* study to stand up to scientific standards. That took a lot of extra planning and research, but made the findings less subject to criticism.

The package ran Dec. 11-13, 2005.

Before the New Year turned, the Food and Drug Administration announced it would investigate whether tens of millions of cans of tuna sold each year contain potentially hazardous levels of mercury.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, called on  
(Continued on page 19)

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# This is our time

## Opportunity amid media turmoil

By **PERRY BEEMAN**

I write this as the Winter Olympics end. Some athletes landed hard on the ice or snow and went home without the oversized jewelry they sought. Others turned an ice version of shuffleboard and a snow version of skateboarding into gold medals.

Many were inspired, and inspiring. It brought back memories of the speech '80 U.S. Olympic hockey coach Herb Brooks gave in the movie "Miracle." He wanted the young Americans to discard their fear of the Soviets, and said bluntly, "This is YOUR time!"

I shared that line with the SEJ board at our recent meeting, because in many ways SEJ is poised for a banner period. We are a leader in the U.S. fight for freedom of information. We have colleagues all over the country queuing to play host to our annual conference. We are reaching out to Canada, Mexico and elsewhere. We have the attention of editors and are working with their associations to promote the environmental beat.

For our membership at large, "This is your time" could mean action closer to home. Newsrooms are reorganizing, cutting jobs, scrambling to shift to web-first delivery of news. Many papers are fighting to meet the financial goals set with some of the loftiest profit expectations in any industry. Last issue, I wrote about my concerns about our futures. This time, I'd like to share some reasons for optimism and vigilance.

In other times, the cuts we now face often would have meant the environmental beat was about to go out the door. We have to make sure that doesn't happen. For us, the "This is your time" speech is about you defending your job and pointing out why newspapers and other media outlets would be making a huge mistake to cut this coverage.

I know you already are on this page, but we have to consider our message in the new newsroom atmosphere. What other beat so directly affects readers' and viewers' lives? What other beat offers investigative stories, features, database projects, news you can use, health, medicine, public affairs and recreation coverage, all in one?

Then we have the move to the Internet. That could be a huge boon to our beat. We can load whole databases on our websites. Let people look up their town and find how out pollution there ranks with the rest of the state or country. Take a digital camera and give the sights and sounds of the kayakers, the birds, the cleanup crews, water samplers, wildlife. One of our contest winners did such an excellent job with just audio of a Native American land. Imagine what we can do with audio, video, Internet links, blogs, expanded photos, polls, questions and answers, music, quizzes. We'll be much more relevant to classes by offering these one-stop, diverse arrays of information.

This is your time.

When newsrooms go to cut things, they increasingly look to boost local offerings. It doesn't get any more local than the recycling bin at your curb, the stream behind your house and the bike trail running along the abandoned rail line right of way in town. Even global warming – which sends many an editor to the Visine bottle – is undeniably a local story. That's still a tough message for editors. They are starting to get it, though. More carbon dioxide could be a great thing for corn yields, accelerating the growth of the plant. But if more frequent hail and tornado action strips the still-growing stalks, what have we gained? What if Arkansas pests start eating lunch in Iowa's fields? What if the gut-wrenching disaster in New Orleans is an early indication of increased coastal battering to come, across the globe?

Our message to newsroom leaders needs to be more than "we aren't environmentalists, we're journalists" and "actually, I don't own a pair of Birkenstocks but thanks for the stereotype." We need to sell this beat the easy way. By asking tough questions, by subjecting the spinmeisters to our b.s. meters, by simply doing good journalism. We need to use all the new tools we have on the Internet. We need to be watchdogs, investigative journalists, and we need to make sure we aren't missing the

news on our own backyards. Our editors will expect that, and so will our readers.

This is our time.

In a world of mall beats and freeway reporters, and citizen journalists, we are among the few specialists still out there. We are on a beat – where there still are beats – that requires some added expertise. We offer depth, insight. We help readers make decisions on what could rightly be called the story of the century.

I don't know how any self-respecting news outlet could cut such a beat. I would think an expansion of environmental coverage, health news, and other hit-at-home beats would be an obvious need.

A full set of hockey gear might be a nice thing to have in the newsrooms of the 2000s. The economy and competitive forces are bodychecking us at the moment. Many times we feel like the goalie taking shot after shot, somehow trying to defend the net.

Unless too many of those pucks have struck the sides of our owners' heads, we'll be around for the next medal round.

### Report from the Society's President



By  
**Perry  
Beeman**

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*Perry Beeman, SEJ board president, writes about the environment for The Des Moines Register.*

# SEJournal

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Mike Mansur

## Assistant Editor

Mike Dunne

## Design Editor

Orna Izakson

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BookShelf	Elizabeth Bluemink
From Academe	Jan Knight
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For inquiries regarding the SEJ, please contact the SEJ office, P.O. Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046. Ph: (215) 884-8174; Fax: (215) 884-8175; email: sej@sej.org

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)3 organization funded by grants from foundations, universities and media companies, member dues, and fees for services such as mailing-list rentals, advertisements, subscriptions and conference registrations and exhibits. SEJ does not accept gifts or grants from non-media corporations, government agencies or advocacy groups, and its membership is limited to journalists, educators and students who do not lobby or do public relations work on environmental issues. The mission of the organization is to advance public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting. We envision an informed society through excellence in environmental journalism. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,400 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's annual conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly *SEJournal*.

SEJournal is available online at [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org).

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## In This Issue

### Cover

#### ■ From ink to Internet: Journalists write into the blogosphere

By Robert McClure.....1

#### ■ Inside Story: Testing Chicago fish opens door into big national story

By Mike Dunne.....1

### Report from the Society's President

#### ■ This is our time: Opportunity amid media turmoil

By Perry Beeman.....2

### SEJ News

#### ■ What SEJ offers: Many members unaware of full range of services

By Chris Rigel.....4

#### ■ Guns and butter: SEJ annual conference planned for October in Vermont

By Nancy Bazilchuk.....5

#### ■ Media on the move

By Jackleen de la Harpe.....6

### Research News Roundup

#### ■ Studies focus on biotech and environmental-justice coverage in the United States

By Jan Knight.....7

### Science Survey

#### ■ Scientists still tracking source of 'Teflon chemical'

By Cheryl Hogue.....8

### Reporter's Toolbox

#### ■ Biodiesel: A noble experiment, but there's much to consider

By Naomi Lubick.....9

### Viewpoint

#### ■ Has balance warped the truth?

By Paul D. Thacker.....14

### Features

#### ■ Covering climate change: A story that doesn't fit journalism's norms

By Paul D. Thacker.....11

#### ■ Environment and science on screen at Sundance

By JoAnn Valenti.....17

#### ■ The joy of a personal blog, or becoming a 'blog mama'

By Wendee Holtcamp.....24

### Book Shelf

#### ■ "An Unreasonable Woman: A True Story of Shrimpers, Politicos, Polluters and the Fight for Seadrift, Texas" by Diane Wilson

Reviewed by Elizabeth Bluemink.....26

#### ■ "The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth" by Tim Flannery

Reviewed by Jim Motavalli.....27

#### ■ "America's Wetland: Louisiana's Vanishing Coast" photographs by Bevil Knapp, text by Mike Dunne

Reviewed by Mark Neuzil.....27

### The Beat

#### ■ Mercury- and fish-contamination stories dominate recent coverage

Compiled by Mike Dunne.....29

## SEJournal submission deadlines

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

Fall '06.....August 1, 2006

Winter '07.....November 1, 2006

Spring '07.....February 1, 2007



# What SEJ offers

## Many members unaware of full range of services

By **CHRIS RIGEL**

If you're like most members, you're too busy making your deadline to read all the SEJ literature, email and website content that has been developed to help you plug into the SEJ community and to enhance your reporting on environment. If this sounds like you, please give a quick scan to the headers below to see if there's something you don't know about that might just be a terrific resource.

**Freedom of information:** SEJ has been active in the FOI fight since 2002 when it formed a task force to address the problem of dwindling information. Specific initiatives are listed at [www.sej.org/foia/index5.htm](http://www.sej.org/foia/index5.htm), including the latest: SEJ filed a statement Jan. 13, 2006, calling on EPA to abandon its proposal to cut back on how much data the agency collects and publishes on toxic emissions. SEJ's opposition to the Toxics Release Inventory "burden reduction" was endorsed by seven other national journalism organizations.

SEJ members can get hands-on help with their ongoing information requests from federal, state or local governments by contacting the First Amendment Task Force. To see the task force members' names and contact information, visit [www.sej.org/foia/index6.htm](http://www.sej.org/foia/index6.htm). If you're interested in FOI issues and you're not getting the *WatchDog*, a biweekly email, contact SEJ at [sej@sej.org](mailto:sej@sej.org) or 215.884.8174 and ask to be subscribed.

**Sharing stories:** The daily SEJ-Beat email, now edited by *TipSheet* editor Joe Davis, is a summary of the day's online postings to *EJToday*. Davis brings his savvy news-hound mind to *EJToday*, rounding up daily coverage of published, aired or posted environmental news. To subscribe, contact SEJ.

Online at [www.sej.org/news/index2.htm](http://www.sej.org/news/index2.htm), *EJToday* is a collection of thousands of environmental stories dating from today back to Feb. 22, 2002. You can search the archives by topic, reporter name, headline, etc. Stories can be submitted for *EJToday* consideration in a simple form that takes about a minute.

**SEJ en Español:** Program associate Esteban Romero has been working with website manager Cindy MacDonald and others to build an addition to SEJ.org: [www.sej.org/international/SEJenEspañol.htm](http://www.sej.org/international/SEJenEspañol.htm). The site contains translations of many of SEJ.org's pages, as well as a growing list of Latin American resources. SEJ friend and member photos dress up the site. Check it out – it's a beauty!

**Awards:** SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment deadline is April 1, so visit [www.sej.org/contest/index.htm](http://www.sej.org/contest/index.htm) for entry forms, FAQs and complete rules.

**Conferences:** Annual conferences are heavily discounted for members. Non-member registration fees begin at \$700, but we've managed to keep member fees down to \$170. If you've never been to a conference, the agenda is set by members; panel sessions, workshops and tours are organized by members. This means annual conference programs are designed by journalists, for journalists. You will be in touch with key players in current environmental issues, listen to debates, learn the latest computer-assisted reporting techniques, spend a day in the field on one of nine concurrent tours. (See story, next page.)

Members will receive a conference brochure in April. Check the website through the months leading up to this year's conference in Burlington, Vermont, Oct. 25-29, to see emerging agenda details. [www.sej.org/confer/index1.htm](http://www.sej.org/confer/index1.htm)

**Fellowships:** Reporting fellowships are listed on the entry page of SEJ.org on the right in the yellow "Events and Opportunities" column. Look also in "Careers" in the blue nav bar at the left to find additional fellowships, contests, workshops, awards and more. SEJ's **mentoring program** can be accessed from there, too. If you're new to the beat, you may want to partner for a year with a veteran environmental reporter. And if you're a veteran to the beat, consider volunteering your time and knowledge as a mentor. [www.sej.org/careers/index.htm](http://www.sej.org/careers/index.htm)

**Membership:** Renewals can be handled online. Watch for your renewal form by mail or email – both explain how. If you're still getting your renewal form through the mail and you want to receive it by email, contact SEJ at [sej@sej.org](mailto:sej@sej.org) or 215-884-8174.

**SEJournal:** Besides the one in your hand, past issues are available on the SEJ website.

**Feedback:** Questions, comments, suggestions, pet peeves, reason to brag? Contact the SEJ office. It's a small staff, so your query may not be answered immediately, but we're dedicated to helping SEJ members—and if we don't know the answer, we

may know someone who does.

### Member user names and pass codes

Members' log-in information is included on member renewal forms, both standard mail and email versions. SEJ keeps a record of only the original pass code; any member who has changed pass code and lost that pass code will need the original reset. This takes two or three days.

Members who want to pay dues online will need their member log-in information for the renewal form. For the secure site where payment is made, separate log-in information is required. The secure site is the same one SEJ uses for annual conference registration. Members who have registered for conference online will already have a user name and pass code for this site. A reminder link exists for forgotten log-in information. Members who have never visited the secure site will need to register, a process that takes about three minutes.

*Chris Rigel is SEJ's associate director.*

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# Guns and butter

## SEJ annual conference planned for October in Vermont

By NANCY BAZILCHUK

Dairy cows that generate electricity, forests that are certified “green,” and hunters and journalists armed with loaded guns (but not pointed at each other!) are just a few of the highlights planned for SEJ’s 16th Annual Conference on Oct. 25-29, in Burlington, Vermont.

Our theme this year is “Covering Sustainability,” and we’ve organized a number of tours and panels that will use examples of sustainable development from Vermont and across the country to explore the issues surrounding this complex concept. In keeping with our theme, we’ve invited Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai to come talk about her groundbreaking work (literally!) encouraging women of Kenya and beyond to plant trees, more than 20 million at last count, to reclaim their ravaged lands.

Climate change, disaster coverage, a look at industry’s attack on scientific integrity and a “pitch slam” session for freelancers are other terrific topics and panels we’ve got on our agenda to help guarantee you’ll leave the Green Mountain State briefed on the latest news and trends and with loads of story ideas. You’ll also be able to drive into the future with a “ride-and-drive” of alternative-powered cars with offerings from Detroit, Japan, and Vermont’s own bio-diesel and hydrogen-powered vehicles.

We’re also taking advantage of Vermont’s location to reach out to our Canadian colleagues, who have invited us to visit Montreal for one of our Thursday tours. And for the first time, we’re offering a one-day pre-conference Legal Boot Camp on Wednesday, Oct. 25, courtesy of conference co-host Vermont Law School. The school’s lawyers and policy experts have planned a full day where journalists can get an inside view of how environmental law and lawyers work, and learn about a variety of new research and analysis tools that will help sharpen your law-related coverage.

We’ll open discussions on Friday with a look at “What is

Sustainability,” where we’re hoping Nobel Laureate Maathai will join speakers like Wes Jackson, president of the Land Institute, writer Bill McKibben and others to talk about their views of sustainability in the 21st century.



Saturday’s lunch plenary session will look at government openness versus national security. How much of what government wants to keep from Americans relates to legitimate protection from terrorism and how much is just covering for businesses and weak government regulation? What has happened to the free flow of information in society? Speakers including U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and NASA climate scientist James Hansen will discuss how national security and politics collides with openness in a post-9/11 world.

On Saturday we’ll have breakfast sessions on covering disasters and on how political pundits like George Lakoff, author of “Don’t think of an elephant: Know your values and frame the debate,” view the widening divide between America’s voters.

The sustainability theme will carry through several Thursday tours. One will offer a perspective on 21st century sustainable agriculture, with visits to urban farms and a farm where dairy cows not only make milk, but electricity, in an innovative approach where a methane digester transforms cow manure into megawatts.

Our forestry tour will give you a chance to look at active and recent logging operations to examine the difference between forests that are being managed for long-term sustainability and those managed for more immediate returns. The Vermont ski town of Stowe will also give us a chance to view sustainable recreational development first hand, as we look at how one of Vermont’s storied ski areas coexists with the state’s highest mountain, Mount Mansfield, which is replete with endangered species, a fragile alpine area, and a section of the nation’s oldest long-distance hiking trail.

*(Continued on page 12)*

## A guide to SEJ’s many listservs

**SEJ-Talk** is a members-only discussion listserv. You can use this list to ask other journalists questions about issues you need to cover or sources for specific issues. The list is also used to discuss SEJ issues or topics that have an impact on journalists and reporting on the environment. (Frequency fluctuates.)

**SEJ-Announce** is SEJ’s official announcement listserv, used only for important messages concerning SEJ. (Frequency: about once a week. Members only. Posting restricted to SEJ HQ only.)

**SEJ-TipSheet:** Biweekly news tips on potential environmental stories, including contact information for story sources. (Frequency: every two weeks, plus alerts.) *TipSheet WatchDog Edition* reports on environment-related freedom-of-information and right-to-know issues. (Frequency: biweekly. Members and non-members who are eligible for membership only. Posting restricted to *TipSheet* editor only.)

**SEJ-Beat:** See what your fellow reporters are covering and

share your environmental stories. This is an interactive list featuring environmental stories from across the nation and internationally. (Frequency: once a day. Subscriptions open to all. Posting restricted to Beat editor only.)

**SEJ-Mail:** A distribution of news releases and announcements of job openings, internships, fellowships and freelancing opportunities from organizations that have paid a fee to SEJ. Contents of messages distributed via SEJ-MAIL are not created by and do not reflect the views of the Society of Environmental Journalists. (Frequency: about one to four times weekly. Members only. Posting restricted to SEJ HQ only.)

An archive of all messages posted to date on SEJ listservs is maintained in the members area on [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org). You will need your member passcode to log in.

To subscribe to any of these listservs, contact SEJ at [sej@sej.org](mailto:sej@sej.org) or 215-884-8174. Some subscriptions carry eligibility criteria. Check with the SEJ office.



# From coffee-table books to new posts and science awards

By **JACKLEEN DE LA HARPE**

**Seth Borenstein** joins the Associated Press as a national science writer as of March 20. He will work at the Washington, DC, bureau and report to the national science and health desk in New York. For the last seven years and eight months he was a national reporter for Knight Ridder Newspaper's Washington bureau, covering environment, science, disasters, aviation and government contracting. Seth will be responsible for the "dry" sciences while **Malcolm Ritter** in New York continues to cover the "wet" sciences – at least that's how Malcolm explains the division of the science beat. Seth, who is usually all wet, will try to develop a dry sense of humor. As part of his beat, Seth will continue to cover global warming and hurricanes and will return to cover NASA as an agency.

**David Biello** has moved from freelancing to a full-time job as an associate editor at *Scientific American*.

LSU Press has published "America's Wetland: Louisiana's Vanishing Coast," a coffee-table book featuring the photos of SEJ members **Bevil Knapp** and writer **Mike Dunne**. Knapp is a freelance photographer in the New Orleans area and Dunne is a reporter for *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge. The book was prepared before Hurricane Katrina hit southeastern Louisiana. Several areas featured in the book were later destroyed or flooded by Katrina and Hurricane Rita. A chapter on New Orleans was prophetically entitled "America's Atlantis," and explained the loss of wetlands could help flood New Orleans during a Category 3 hurricane. It said the city could become "the site of the nation's worst natural disaster." The book was printed right before Katrina hit.

**Doug Riggs** of the *Providence Journal* had this to say about the book: "'America's Wetland: Louisiana's Vanishing Coast,' by Bevil Knapp (photos) and Mike Dunne (text), gets my vote as the year's most poignant, and prophetic, title. Published last month but written long before hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it contains warning after warning about what might happen – and then did." (See *SEJournal's* review of the book on 27.)

**Dan Vergano** of *USA Today* won the American Geophysical Union's 2006 David Perlman Award for Excellence in Science Journalism–News for his article, "The debate's over: Globe is warming," *USA Today's* cover story on 13 June 2005.

**Michelle Nijhuis** of *High Country News* will receive the 2006 AGU Walter Sullivan Award for Excellence in Science Journalism–Features for a three-part series with the overall title, "Hot Times: Global Warming in the West," front-paged in *High Country News* on Jan. 24, April 18 and Oct. 17, 2005.

And *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* will receive a special award from AGU for consistently excellent coverage of scientific research demonstrating the vulnerability of New Orleans to hurricanes and other environmental impacts prior to Hurricane Katrina. The special award to *The Times-Picayune* originated with a recommendation from AGU's Public Information Committee, which praised the newspaper's diligent efforts over a period of years to inform its readership about wetland preservation, land subsidence, levee reinforcement, storm surge and hurricane prediction.

In June 2002, the paper introduced a five-part series, "Washing Away," written by **John McQuaid** and **Mark Schleifstein**, with this banner warning: "It's only a matter of time before southern Louisiana takes a direct hit from a major hurri-

cane. Billions have been spent to protect us, but we grow more vulnerable every day."

**Adam Glenn** will serve as consulting managing editor for Columbia School of Journalism's News 21 Incubator project, part of a new summer journalism fellowship program supported by the multi-million-dollar Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education.

**Tamsyn Jones**, an environmental journalism graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia, won a Rotary Foundation scholarship to study environmental journalism at the University of Tasmania. She was inspired, she wrote, by her studies abroad in Australia in 2004 with **Dave Poulson**, Michigan State University, a program that focused on Australia's media, culture and environment. She had visited the University of Tasmania and was impressed by its program in environmental research for journalists and radio reporting and had wanted to continue her studies there. If all goes well, she should be going to Tasmania by July or February 2007 for a year of study.

**Barney McCoy**, aka **Roger McCoy**, is a new associate professor in the College of

Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. McCoy joined the UNL faculty in January after six years with WBNS-TV in Columbus, Ohio. A frequent contributor to *The Columbus Dispatch*, McCoy also worked at WKBD-TV, Detroit, Mich., KCTV, Kansas City, Mo., WILX-TV, Lansing, Mich. and WIBW-TV, Topeka, Kans. Last fall, McCoy placed second in SEJ's Awards for Reporting on the Environment in the "Outstanding Online Reporting" category. McCoy and three others were presented with the SEJ award for a report they produced for Dispatch.com and WBNS-TV in Columbus, Ohio, called "Radon in Schools: A Lesson to Learn."

**Judith Robinson's** "The Miracle Worker," a biography of faith healer Aimee Semple McPherson, will be published in April as part of Altitude Publishing's Amazing Stories series. Blind, deaf, crippled and lame all testified of being healed in McPherson's crusades. At the peak of her career in the 1920's she drew crowds bigger than the U.S. president. One quarter of the population of Los Angeles was attending services in her church, Angeles Temple.

In the Jan. 25, 2006, issue of *Arizona Capitol Times*, **Deb Krol** wrote "Tribes and Trash," a 2,000-word piece on the environmental, social and financial problems tribes in Arizona have with non-reservation people dumping everything from furniture to dogs on tribal lands.

**Dan Shapley** won the first place award for "Beat Reporting" in the 2005 New York State Associated Press Association's annual writing contest. The competition included newspapers with circulations between 25,000 and 50,000.

**James Eli Shiffer** moved from *The News & Observer* of Raleigh, N.C. to the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis in December 2005 and is now the metro life team leader.

Correction: Bill Brichard's new book is called "Nature's Keepers."

*Jackleen de La Harpe tracks the moves and triumphs of the environmental media from her home in Portland, Ore. Send her your announcement at jack@gso.uri.edu.*

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## Media on the Move

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# Studies consider coverage of biotech and environmental justice in the United States

By JAN KNIGHT

*U.S. biotech coverage presents less risk than Canadian coverage, few popular views, preliminary study suggests*

A recent study compares U.S. and Canadian public opinion of genetic technology and combines it with a preliminary study of the countries' biotech news coverage, finding that U.S. coverage focuses less on risks of genetic manipulation than Canadian coverage and fails to represent the wide range of public opinion on the topic.

Susanna Hornig Priest, research director for the University of South Carolina's College of Mass Communications and Information Studies, used telephone poll responses from 1,500 residents of both countries to questions about genetically modified (GM) foods and stem cell research, among other topics. She organized their responses into five opinion categories and found that:

- About 11 percent of Canadian respondents and 24 percent of U.S. respondents are "true believers" – those who see little risk in biotechnology.

- About 30 percent of Canadian and 30 percent of U.S. respondents are "utilitarians" – those who tend to see GM food risks as outweighing their benefits but generally support the Human Genome Project and stem cell research.

- About 25 percent of Canadian and 25 percent of U.S. respondents are "moral authoritarians" who believe that gene technology policy should be guided by ethics and decided by experts.

- About 12 percent of Canadian and 12 percent of U.S. respondents are "democratic pragmatists" who believe policy decisions should be based on risk/benefit equations rather than ethics but determined by "the people" rather than experts.

- About 13 percent of Canadian and 21 percent of U.S. respondents are "ethical populists" who believe policy should be based on ethics and determined by the people.

She found that those who see biotechnology as less risky tend to come from the United States while those who see it as morally problematic tend to come from Canada.

She noted that most of those polled did not belong to either of these two groups. But her pilot study of 144 biotech news articles showed that U.S. coverage reflected one frame more than any other – that of the "true believer" (genetic research is not risky), which she attributed to the efforts of "research advocates," including those from research-oriented organizations and institutions. Canadian coverage generally reflected a "moral authoritarian" theme (genetic research should be guided by ethics and policy determined by experts).

In contrast, although her sample of articles on GM foods was relatively small (26 articles), she also found that both the Canadian and U.S. coverage was dominated by "utilitarian" views (GM food risks outweigh their benefits), suggesting that sources favoring GM foods may have become less dominant in the press of both countries. Priest added that GM foods are less controversial in the United States than in Canada.

Priest concluded that her results illustrate "the way that media coverage consistently reflects visible events and the perspectives of vocal spokespersons rather than 'general' public opinion, while at the same time resonating with culturally significant themes that are not always fully shared."

For more information, see Susanna Hornig Priest, "The public opinion climate for gene technologies in Canada and the United States: Competing voices, contrasting frames" in *Public Understanding of Science*, January 2006 (Volume 15), pp. 55 – 71.

*Study suggests that African-American newspapers' use of identity politics might weaken environmental justice efforts*

A University of Indiana researcher recently compared coverage of environmental-justice issues in three U.S. African-American newspapers and concluded that some of their frames tend to match those of the mainstream media, offering both benefits and pitfalls to the quest for equality specifically in regard to environmental justice and generally to resisting oppression.

In this qualitative study, the researcher examined the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the *Chicago Defender* and the *Michigan Chronicle* and found that all three emphasized frames of community and racial identity. The newspapers tended to describe pollution using violent images and to "portray environmental racism as a crime against the community," the researcher wrote. At the same time, the articles did not portray community residents as helpless victims but, rather, as a "community united against a common enemy: Whites," the researcher stated.

The *Michigan Chronicle* and *Chicago Defender* also framed environmental justice as a civil rights issue, drawing on the histories of racial discrimination and poverty and helping "portray a sense of unity among 'us' against the enemy," she wrote.

Meanwhile, *The Los Angeles Sentinel* portrayed environmental justice using a broader frame to include Latinos and Native Americans, possibly reflecting the activism of Latino, Native American and African-American groups in the U.S. Southwest, she wrote.

While the coverage shows positive aspects, the researcher suggested that constructing environmental-justice issues in terms of two races continues the status quo thinking about power in the United States. Communication theorists suggest that while powerful groups hold great sway in a society, those with less power might actually maintain inequality by continuing to accord power to a dominating group via language use. In turn, groups that initially are less powerful can become an equally dominant force, in part by resisting definition of their group in terms of being something "other" than the dominant group.

"If the environmental-justice movement is to counter mainstream environmentalism's racially exclusive nature, it must also address how media coverage is often embedded in exclusive categories of community, race, and identity," she suggested.

Communication theorists resist strict classification by race into large categories such as "black" and "white" because this risks losing the diversity of voices existing within those groups.

On this point, the researcher observed, the African-American newspapers tended to seek out sources similarly to mainstream newspapers – quoting the most vocal while failing to seek out views of less visible but often more numerous members of the population, which can lead to "exclusion even within a minority group."

For more information, see Teresa L. Heinz, "From civil rights to environmental rights: Constructions of race, community and identity in three African American newspapers' coverage of the environmental justice movement" in *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, January 2005 (Volume 29, No. 1), pp. 47-65.

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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).*

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# Scientists still tracking source of 'Teflon chemical'

By CHERYL HOGUE

The so-called Teflon chemical continues to make headlines. This synthetic compound, known as PFOA (short for perfluorooctanoic acid) or C8, is found in the blood of most people around the world, including you and your audience. But just where this chemical is coming from remains an open question.

Since Science Survey last examined this compound in the spring of 2004, a lot has happened on PFOA. Perhaps most memorable was the \$16.5 million settlement, announced in December 2005, that DuPont is paying to settle allegations that it withheld information on PFOA from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. A month later, DuPont, now the sole U.S. manufacturer of PFOA, announced it would curb its worldwide emissions of the chemical 95% by 2010, based on its releases of the compound in 2000. Other companies are starting to follow suit.

A lot has happened on PFOA on the science front, too.

In February, science advisers recommended that the EPA classify the substance as a "likely" human carcinogen. This would upgrade findings in a 2005 EPA document of only "suggestive evidence" that the compound poses a cancer risk.

Meanwhile, scientific papers continue to come out analyzing human blood for the presence of PFOA and are looking into possible health effects associated with exposure to the chemical. And researchers are expanding their investigations beyond PFOA to related chemicals, called perfluorocarboxylates (also known as perfluorocarboxylic acids), which could be toxic too.

While PFOA exposure is widespread and manufacturers and makers of the chemical are working to reduce releases from factories, scientists still aren't certain just where the substance in our blood is coming from.

People living near DuPont's big plant near Parkersburg, W.Va., have a pretty good guess where the C8 in their bodies came from. Releases from that factory, which uses PFOA to manufacture the Teflon plastic used to coat non-stick cookware, entered their water supplies. Those residing near the 3M facility in Cottage Grove, Minn., that formerly made PFOA may also suspect an industrial discharge as the source of their exposure to the chemical. And folks living near the DuPont plant in Fayetteville, N.C., that has manufactured the substance since the end of 2001 are increasingly concerned about PFOA contamination of local waterways and wells.

But people living in, say, Texas, California or British Columbia who have never lived east of the Mississippi River,

much less near a plant that makes or uses PFOA, wonder how the heck this chemical got into their blood. And despite the insinuation, through the use of the term "Teflon chemical," of some environmental activists that nonstick cookware is the culprit, virtually no PFOA is found in Teflon-coated skillets and pots. PFOA is added to the industrial process for making the plastic used to coat pans but the plastic itself, polytetrafluoroethylene, is widely recognized as benign.

Beyond DuPont's version of polytetrafluoroethylene, which carries the brand name Teflon, this plastic is widely used in other brands of nonstick cookware, Gore-Tex and other breathable, waterproof fabrics, computer cables, and other applications and products made by other companies.

Scientists are beginning to fall into two camps on the source of the PFOA in the blood of the majority of the U.S. population. DuPont scientists such as Robert C. Buck say most of the PFOA in the environment comes from industrial discharges, such as releases by the West Virginia plant. They predict that efforts by chemical companies to cut releases of PFOA will stop this pollution problem.

But the uniform distribution of PFOA and compounds chemically related to it in the remote Arctic led another group of scientists to a different conclusion. That group, led by Scott A. Mabury of the University of Toronto, believes the source of these chemicals in the Arctic – and in most people – isn't all due to direct industrial release of PFOA.

Instead, Mabury makes a case that a family of chemicals called perfluorotelomer alcohols is also to blame. These substances are part of what makes Stainmaster carpets and specially treated trousers and shirts repel stains and imparts grease-resistance to the paper used to line pizza boxes and microwave popcorn bags. The alcohols are chemical cousins to PFOA.

Through laboratory experiments, Mabury and atmospheric chemist Timothy J. Wallington of Ford Motor Co. determined that these alcohols break down in the atmosphere to form PFOA and perfluorocarboxylates. In addition, laboratory studies in rats and microbes show that small amounts of the alcohols get broken down in cells into PFOA and related compounds. Some compounds formed during this breakdown process may be more toxic than PFOA, Mabury adds.

The outstanding question, according to Mabury, is how the alcohols get into the environment.

They could be emitted from industrial facilities. In this case,

*(Continued on page 16)*



## Sorting out those "p" chemicals:

**Perfluorocarboxylates:** These are chemical cousins to PFOA. They apparently come from the breakdown of perfluorotelomer alcohols.

**Perfluorooctanoic acid:** Also known as PFOA or C8, this chemical is an industrial processing agent.

**Perfluorotelomer alcohols:** Often called telomers for short, these chemicals are used to make stain-resistant carpets, clothing that repels stain, and food wraps that help keep grease from soaking through paper.

**Polytetrafluoroethylene:** Sometimes called PTFE, this is the plastic used to coat nonstick cookware, make Gore-Tex and other waterproof, breathable membranes, and produce fire-resistant computer cables. PFOA is used in the manufacture of this plastic but virtually none remains in consumer products.



# Biodiesel

## A noble experiment, but there's much to consider

By NAOMI LUBICK

Willie Nelson recently graced the front of *The New York Times* business section in a laudatory story focusing not on the singer's gambling debts or tax evasion, but rather his latest money-maker: BioWillie Diesel.

The fuel – 5 percent vegetable diesel, 95 percent petroleum diesel – powers Nelson's tour bus, as well as Bonnie Raitt's, and is sold at gas stations and truck stops in four states. Nationally, biodiesel fuels a variety of city and county fleets. Proponents call it a renewable form of energy that reduces carbon monoxide, hydrocarbon and particulate emissions with only a slight penalty in higher levels of nitrogen oxide.

Users are starting to talk about ramping up to 20 to 80 percent biodiesel. A few already are on 100 percent vegetable-based biodiesel. In Europe and in America, tax incentives are being offered to biodiesel producers and blenders.

But beware of biodiesel's downsides. It has a "negative energy balance," taking too much energy to produce to make up for the energy gained, according to calculations by Cornell University ecologist David Pimentel and geoenvironmental engineer Tad Patzek of University of California-Berkeley.

Plus, Pimentel says, the entire United States would need to be planted with soybeans to create enough fuel to feed the nation's needs. See *Natural Resources Research*, vol. 14:1, pp. 65-76; and a Cornell University press release at [www.news.cornell.edu/stories/July05/ethanol.toocostly.ssl.html](http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/July05/ethanol.toocostly.ssl.html).

Their assessment triggered a huge backlash from biodiesel proponents. The site [www.biodiesel.org](http://www.biodiesel.org) posts an industry-written attack on Pimentel and Patzek's paper. But even the National Biodiesel Board admits that in the short term, at least, biodiesel is unlikely to supply more than one tenth of the United States' needs.

Some environmentalists are gravely worried. Even before Europe mandated that biodiesel make up at least 5.75 percent of the transportation fuel supply by 2010, millions of acres of tropical rainforest had been converted to palm plantations to make palm oil in Borneo and Malaysia, according to a Friends of the Earth report. See [www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/greasy\\_palms\\_summary.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/greasy_palms_summary.pdf). The rate is expected to accelerate as Europe's palm-oil-derived biodiesel requirements skyrocket.

And there's the question of greenhouse gasses. Those equations get a little tricky, in some cases. For example, one individual's assessment (at his website "biodieselmyths," <http://home.comcast.net/~russ676/willfindmore/page2.html>) crunched the numbers to counter an assessment made by the National Renewable Energy Lab in Colorado, which found that "biodiesel is 78 percent carbon neutral," i.e. not contributing to climate change through carbon emissions. Once he tweaked the values slightly and added the oil necessary to produce the crops, among other costs, he found biodiesel was only 50 percent carbon neutral.

Nevertheless, biodiesel seems a noble effort. Even used turkey parts make good biofuel – as my editor wrote about in the same issue of *GeoTimes* in which I wrote about Tickell, Pimentel, et al.

And if you're taking on this topic in your community, you're likely to find interesting characters among those who converted their diesel cars to burn vegetables. Do-it-yourselfers are every-

where, including Tim Lindsey, who manages the pollution prevention program for the state of Illinois. He takes 80-120 gallons a week of used cooking oil from the University of Illinois residence hall cafeterias, producing 40-gallon batches for a departmental vehicle. He made a batch with a local science class at Mahomet Seymour High School for use in a school bus, which made a great story for a local newspaper.

For more quiet examples, you will find that county and local governments (including school districts) have been taking advantage of federal subsidies for biodiesel, slowly creating a tiny market for the stuff. Look for the people who are the middle-merchants for larger producers such as World Energy (Woodruff Energy in New Jersey is one such sales outlet, <http://woodruffenergy.com/biodiesel.html>).

Ask how hard to get and how expensive the fuel is. Anthony Radich of the Energy Information Agency says it's still a drop in the bucket in terms of the size of the market, and part of the reason behind that is cost. Even so, the rate of growth of biodiesel has been impressive. Its use in this country was set to triple last year, to 75 million gallons from 25 million in 2004. Bear in mind, though, that United States use of gasoline and diesel alone amounted to 180 billion gallons in 2004. That's largely transportation use, not including much of the juice used in Americans' homes and other buildings.

But many see biodiesel as just one of many ways to reduce dependence on fossil fuels that drive climate change.

"We don't get there unless we use a full portfolio of solutions, including cleaner fuels and efficiency," wrote Patrick Mazza, research director for the nonprofit Climate Solutions in Seattle, Wash. (See <http://blog.seattlepi.nwsourc.com/environment/archives/101129.asp>). "In any event we cannot throw out this valuable tool to help meet the great challenge of reducing global warming pollution. ...All the solutions must be placed in context."

*Naomi Lubick is a staff writer at Alexandria, Va.-based GeoTimes. SEJ members Jim Motavalli of E Magazine and Robert McClure of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer contributed to this Toolbox.*



### Biodiesel resources:

- "Key Differences between Pimentel/Patzek Study and Other Studies," Michael Wang, Center for Transportation Research, Argonne National Laboratory, July 19, 2005. <http://eerc.ra.utk.edu/etcf/docs/pr/MichaelWangResponse~7-19-05.doc>
- Lubick's article: [www.geotimes.org/feb06/feature\\_trashenergy.html#biodiesel](http://www.geotimes.org/feb06/feature_trashenergy.html#biodiesel)
- New Jersey forum: [http://forums.biodieselnow.com/forum.asp?FORUM\\_ID=17](http://forums.biodieselnow.com/forum.asp?FORUM_ID=17)
- New Jersey rebate program form: [www.state.nj.us/bpu/cleanEnergy/BiodieselFuelRebateProgram.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/bpu/cleanEnergy/BiodieselFuelRebateProgram.pdf)
- National Biodiesel Board, Jefferson City, Mo.: (800) 841-5849 or [www.biodiesel.org](http://www.biodiesel.org).

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# Covering climate change

## A story that doesn't fit journalism's norms

By PAUL D. THACKER

The last 10 months have been important for Andrew Revkin, who covers climate for *The New York Times*, and those who cover environmental science. During that time, Revkin exposed a White House official who was doctoring government reports on climate change and uncovered an extensive program to silence NASA scientists from speaking to the public and media about the possible harm we might be causing our planet.

Revkin is not new to this controversy. He wrote his first article on climate change in 1988, a cover story for *Discover* magazine, and since 2000 he has written more than 250 stories on the subject for *The Times*. His second book, "Global Warming: Understanding the Forecast," accompanied the first museum exhibition on the subject, created by the American Museum of Natural History in 1992. And in 2003, he received the National Academies Communications Award for print journalism. The judges cited Revkin for his "insightful, comprehensive coverage of the complex science and policy issues of global climate change."

He has also just finished his third book – and first for 'young readers' – on the once and future North Pole. It's coming out this spring, called "The North Pole Was Here: Puzzles & Perils at the Top of the World." Because it's written for kids 10 and up, he quips, "There might even be some politicians who'll finally have a book on climate change they can understand. I haven't quite given up on grownups yet, but I'm getting close."

And so Revkin finds himself as probably the nation's most influential journalist on a topic that most scientists rank as our greatest environmental threat. In this interview, he speaks with the *SEJournal* about how he thinks the media has covered climate change and offers some advice for future stories.

**What first grabbed your interest about climate change?**

**AR:** It all really started with something that's nearly the opposite of global warming: nuclear winter. My first cover story on climate was a long piece for *Science Digest* on the notion that soot from all the urban fires after a nuclear apocalypse would cause a followup apocalyptic big chill of sorts. My awareness of the complexities of climate science came when Steve Schneider and others at the National Center for Atmospheric Research did some fresh calculations and proposed it would be more like "nuclear autumn." You didn't see much more of nuclear winter in the press after that. Important lessons there stuck with me, and the story fetched me my first award from AAAS.

**How has the media's coverage changed over time? Is the media getting more savvy about the stories they write?**

**AR:** Coverage of climate change has pulsed and ebbed as new pegs arise, whether political or scientific, and then fade.

There has been a very, very slow shift toward conclusiveness about a human link to rising temperatures. But in some ways that's led to a false sense that certain scenarios for the future are also confidently understood. The scientists closest to questions such as Greenland ice loss, ocean-hurricane links, and the like recognize the error bars are very large. But the mainstream press is still quick to jump on the latest bandwagon, be it abrupt cooling around the North Atlantic or the Arctic melt.



Photo courtesy of PETER WEST/NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Revkin at a cold (but warming) place.

**With so much controversy, what do you use as your reference point of scientific credibility? The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)?**

**AR:** The IPCC is a vital benchmark. Even though its summary for policymakers is the result of a huge amount of political tugging and warring and the process is laden with a range of scientists, from brilliant to incompetent, tracking its contents over time really does provide a marker for understanding key concepts (sea rise, temperature range, etc.).

**How do you stay on top of the issue – which journals do you read? How do you keep track of them?**

**AR:** I read *Science*, *Nature*, *PNAS*, the AGU journal summaries and get input from a variety of scientists and climate mavens. In free moments, I try to think about what facets of the issue I haven't written on or reviewed of late and send queries to people in those areas.

**So many scientists and government agencies are involved, how do you weed out which science or experts are good or bad?**

**AR:** Time and experience do the weeding. I also watch for scientists who are not afraid to have their views evolve. Tim

(Continued next page)

## Revkin... (from page 11)

Barnett, at UCSD/ Scripps, is a prime example of someone who was a pretty staunch skeptic on significant human climate influence and now is a strong believer. That tells me he's not locked in or driven by things other than the data.

**ExxonMobil has funded a campaign designed to highlight points of controversy in the science. How do you think this has affected media coverage?**

**AR:** The documented efforts by various industry-funded groups to dust the discourse with just enough uncertainty and confusion to make the public go "never mind" and the press snooze have been extraordinarily effective. They simultaneously exploit innate characteristics of science, where uncertainty is actually normal, and the media, which crave clarity and loathe the incremental. This is a recipe for stasis.

**Scientists consistently complain that the journalistic practice of "balance" allows skeptics to gain an unfair toehold in media coverage, which ignores consensus in favor of controversy. Do you agree, and do journalists need to rethink their approach to covering complex scientific issues?**

**AR:** Balance is a necessary evil, a crutch, particularly in daily journalism, but only works with coverage of the science-policy interface if the journalist works hard to label the voices in a story to reflect what they represent (a consensus or knowledgeable minority) and certainly to reflect their motivation or potential conflict (paid by industry? on staff at an environmental group?). When I'm writing strictly on a scientific finding, I avoid voices from anyone other than scientists. When I'm writ-

ing on policy, I'll quote those with an agenda, but only if I label their agenda.

**What's the biggest mistake you ever made, maybe writing about a study that ended up being wrong or following a line of research that never panned out?**

**AR:** I failed to fight hard enough when senior editors at *The Times* killed a series we were assembling on climate in 2003. It was largely unavoidable in the end, reflecting the change in leadership after the Jayson Blair fiasco more than anything else. But I still feel we missed a big opportunity to explore the climate story in fresh ways.

It was really focused on how we know that there is a human link to global warming. We don't know how big it is, but the uncertainties are about the outcomes to the planet. What in society and policy has created a stasis even though the science is clarified?

No matter what you do with emissions in the short term, you still have to have a profound shift away from emitting sources of energy by the mid century, or you're toast. A lot of that gets at the whole energy paradox and how we're so dependent on fossil fuels and how hard it is given current technologies to either substitute for them or capture the emissions. There are a lot of possibilities but it will take work.

**The European and British press seem to never play up the controversies in climate change like we do here in the United States. Any ideas on why that is?**

**AR:** They play up the direst scenarios instead, it often

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## Vermont... (from page 5)

It may be a dangerous idea to give reporters guns, but that's just what one of our tours will do. We will look at the tensions between America's traditional conservationists – hunters and anglers – and modern day eco-warriors in green sneakers. Participants get a chance to visit the sublime Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge on the shores of Lake Champlain and also to shoot skeet and talk with hunters, anglers and trappers.

No visit to Vermont would be complete without a walk in the woods, so we've planned a hike up Camel's Hump, Vermont's signature mountain (just look at the Vermont quarter), to see how acid rain and other forest assaults have played out in a mountain landscape. For others, Vermont is synonymous with American history, so we've also designed a trip to the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, where participants can visit the first national park in the country that focuses on the history and evolution of land conservation in North America.

If water is your interest, you'll want to take the boat trip on Lake Champlain to examine water quality and the effects of invasive species, or journey to the Hudson River to our west, where we'll look at the mother of all Superfund cleanups as General Electric Co. dredges PCB-laden muck out of the riverbed. Urbanites will want to sample the French delights of Montreal, as our Canadian colleagues tour us around one of North America's oldest cities and we see the fascinating research being conducted at the Biosphere and the Montreal Botanical Gardens.

Saturday's mini-tours will include a visit to our co-host University of Vermont's Proctor Maple Research Laboratory, where scientists plumb the sweet secrets of Vermont's most famous tree, and several walking tours of Shelburne Farms, the 1,400-acre former estate of Dr. William Seward and Lila Vanderbilt Webb, now a non-profit environmental education center with a working dairy and cheese operation. Saturday night will be capped by a savory slow-foods event at the Coach Barn at Shelburne Farms – which also happens to be a great place to dance.

We'll cap our five-day extravaganza on Sunday morning with readings by New England environmental writers in the elegant surroundings of UVM's Billings Student Center. And, for those who still didn't get enough, this year's post-conference tour will take attendees to "The Wild, Wild East," New York State's Adirondack Park, where you'll kayak and hike and learn how a park with 150,000 residents within its boundaries can still claim to be "forever wild." So clear your calendars, keep an eye on SEJ's website at [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) for further developments and start planning now for this not-to-be-missed event in the Green Mountain State.

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*Nancy Bazilchuk, formerly of the Burlington Free Press, is a science writer and editor in Trondheim, Norway. She is chair of SEJ's 16th Annual Conference.*

seems. I really think we could use a dose of their editorial courage in giving climate a lot of space and play, and they could use a dose of skepticism.

**Has there been anything in your coverage that you think you've missed?**

**AR:** Well...I think there are ways I could have pushed to get the coverage outside the science section. There were some pretty great pieces on things like the Greenland puzzle and the whole abruptness issue, but those were always Science Times pieces and I guess that is a ghetto, ultimately. A bunch of readers won't get to see it.

There was a point at *The Times* when I was merely happy that I had the space in the Science Times and thank God we have it. Nobody else has that sort of thing to fall back on, but it is ultimately something of a ghetto.

**Do you think that climate change is covered adequately by the media? I mean, what kind of job do you think they're doing?**

**AR:** It's certainly a decent amount of coverage these days, but I still...I don't think people are covering it wrong. It doesn't fit the norms of journalism. The heft of the story is not conveyed. Either the uncertainties make us all fuzz out and look at something more germane like a new explosion in Iraq or the latest scandal in Washington with lobbyists. So we turn away from it. Or we latch onto some new finding that feels like news (abrupt change) and our endless sift for the "front-page thought" makes us minimize the uncertainties.

But it's not just a journalism problem. After covering it for twenty years...you can write the perfect story capturing both the gravitas and the uncertainties of human-induced climate change, perfect on every level, and it won't change things.

We are not attuned to things on this time scale and with this level of uncertainty. Partly because of our political system being so short term, our business cycle being so short term, and because our concerns are focused mainly on what affects my family, then what affects my community, then what affects my state, then what affects my country, and *then* what affects my globe.

This is last on the list. It's just not registering. And maybe it can't yet.

**Often it appears as if the arguments about climate change keep shifting. First it was, "Is it happening?" Then it became, "Okay, but is it caused by humans?" Now we're arguing over hurricanes.**

**AR:** Well it keeps getting ever grayer. Just think of the IPCC cycle. For thirty years, there has basically been a range of 1-5-degree Celsius for doubling of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. And that has not budged. And one focus of the next IPCC is to get a probability built into that. There's a higher probability of there being 3 degrees or whatever. But that's really difficult science, and we'll never get away from this murk.

It's the same with hurricanes. No one disagrees that later this century hurricanes are going to be a little stronger than they are right now. But frequency is a total toss up.

**What do you think will be the next big battle or new science?**

**AR:** Unfortunately, I don't suspect we'll see in the next IPCC (2007) or some new paper in *Science* anything that lays it out in a way to fundamentally change the discourse. We have to

accept the idea that whatever decisions get made, they will be made in the face of persistent uncertainty.

When will we begin to apply the hedging behavior that we do routinely in our life like buying fire insurance? You don't buy



Photo courtesy of THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Revkin reporting during Hurricane Ivan.**

fire insurance because you know your house is going to burn down. But we do it routinely and our banks require us to do it. When are we going to realize that we need to apply this to other parts of our life?

**How do you make sure you separate the scientific squabbles from the political fights?**

**AR:** The interface between complicated science and the policy arena is a horrible place. It's just...everybody is in the room. Even if you have clarity on the point that humans have started ratcheting up the thermostat for the globe, every lobbyist, every politician will find something to grab onto when there is nuance in the science.

**What about the economic forecasts?**

**AR:** I've written a bit about the economics. The Energy Department cherry-picked the information that allowed President Bush to abandon his campaign pledge to regulate CO<sub>2</sub> from power plants. And EPA and others protested this and were ignored. There has been an inadequate focus on the quality of the economic analyses and forecasts. They are highly suspect and have far more wiggle room and error than any climate model.

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# Has balance warped the truth?

By PAUL D. THACKER

In February of 2005 year, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a front page story attacking the research of Michael Mann, the director of the Earth System Science Center at Pennsylvania State University.

The article cited a science journal study that questioned Mann's research. But this study critical of Mann was done by someone who had decades of experience, not in climate change, but in business. More important, I later found that he had ties to an energy company that had gone unreported by other journalists.

Mann became quite famous in the late nineties for publishing a couple of papers showing that temperatures have been fairly constant for one thousand years until the 1900s when they began a sharp rise. When you plot these temperatures on a graph, you see a flat line for hundreds of years (the shaft), until 1900 when the numbers begin to rise (the blade). Because of how it looks, the graph was nicknamed the "hockey stick."

The hockey stick graph was quite revolutionary and was quickly glommed onto by a number of government entities to prove that global warming was happening. Numerous scientists later replicated Mann's results, but critics and climate skeptics have continuously attacked the hockey stick study. The apparent

hope is that undermining Mann's work will bring down the whole science of global warming.

In this case, *The Wall Street Journal* based its front-page feature on research by Stephen McIntyre, a businessman not a scientist. Nonetheless, the story caught the attention of Congressman Joe Barton, a Texas Republican who later kicked off an unprecedented investigation into Michael Mann's research, data and funding. For good measure, Barton made similar requests to the National Science Foundation.

Before running for office, Barton worked in the oil and gas industry and he continues to rank as one of the top five elected officials to receive campaign money from oil and gas, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. For instance, CRP report that Barton received \$224,398 from oil and gas for his 2004 reelection.

Barton's investigation caused an uproar in the scientific community and numerous opinion writers and scientists criticized him for attempting to intimidate researchers. But the whole chain of events, kicked off by a newspaper article, raises serious questions about how poorly we journalists have covered global warming by constantly peppering articles with the thoughts and opinions of people who have no expertise in climate change.

*(Continued next page)*

## Revkin... (from page 13)

But how many times did the President or one of his minions talk about – what was it 4.5 million jobs and something like \$450 billion in lost economic annual output if we signed onto Kyoto? Well, there are aspects of that analysis that are highly criticized. But for some reason, we in the journalism field latch onto numbers fairly quickly.

**What would be the key points you'd stress with other journalists about climate change? What subjects should they hit?**

**AR:** Not just for climate change, but just in general. When you can step back, whether it's sprawl or nonpoint source pollution or climate change, there are things going on around you that are profound, that are transforming landscapes. And we ignore them because they are happening in this incremental fashion that journalism just does not recognize.

And it's not the kind of thing that you can do daily or maybe even yearly. But once in a while, when there's a slow news cycle, step back and see how many houses are being built on steep slopes, or how much leakage there is from underground gas tanks. Or what ecologists and biologists are saying about the way a valley, watershed or coast will be transformed over the next century and how does that relate to the surrounding institutions?

A perfect example is coastal development and sea level rise. One of the firmest things coming out of any climate model is that rising seas are the new normal for centuries to come. So if you are a journalist on the coast, this immediately starts a series of stories to see what is being done to reflect that.

You have to look at the world and ask, "Do our institutions

reflect, are we still granting flood insurance to low lying areas?" It can lead to these types of stories.

On the mitigation side, college activism is exploding now. When I went to Montreal to cover the last round of climate-treaty talks the only people there who seemed to be talking sense were the youngest ones.

**Will you still be covering the topic, or are you thinking of changing your beat?**

**AR:** At times I feel like that character from "The Godfather" where he says, "I keep trying to get out and they keep pulling me back in." It's almost unavoidable. What I'm hoping to do soon is get out of the daily grind for a bit and look a little bit more at what will happen in the 21st century. Will we be able to start integrating more long-term risks? Katrina is a classic example where the risk was sitting right out there. This is a sub sea level city and you know there are big storms, which means problems. But we didn't react right.

So can we grow up as a species? Right now we are in our teens, locked in this exuberant adolescence for the last 150 years. See that forest? Let's take it down and make paper.

With science we can look forward and see if our actions are reckless. Basically my orientation as a reporter and a human being is to focus on avoiding or mitigating irreversible losses where they can be anticipated. Extinction and long-term climate change are the two biggies in the environment arena. And that shows no sign of changing.

*Paul D. Thacker is an associate editor at Environmental Science & Technology in Washington, D.C.*

## The tip that started it off

In late June, I got a call from a scientist who told me that Congressman Barton had just launched an investigation into the work of Michael Mann. “This is really scary and intimidating,” he told me.

I thought it was a great story because Barton was asking to see Mann’s raw data and financial records. My first call was to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, which Barton chairs. I was put in touch with a spokesperson who, in typical Washington manner, did not want to be identified.

I pointed out that Barton’s letter asked to see the raw data of Mann’s study. “Do you guys have any scientists on staff?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” the spokesperson responded.

“Do you think this might have a chilling effect on scientists?”

“I don’t know.”

I then called around to a number of top scientists in climate change who all complained that Barton was interfering in science since both of Mann’s research papers had been peer-reviewed and replicated by other scientists. But what I thought was really odd was when my sources also complained that *The Wall Street Journal* was at fault as well. Thinking that they were referring to the *WSJ*’s conservative op-ed page, I just wrote it down and moved on.

About two weeks after my story, *The New York Times* finally wrote something about the Barton investigation. When I checked *The Washington Post*, they also had a story that same day as did *The Wall Street Journal*. Curious, I read all three stories and was struck how the Wall Street Journal gave so much credibility to Stephen McIntyre when every scientist I interviewed questioned McIntyre’s credentials. In *The New York Times*, Andrew Revkin described McIntyre as a person “with no expertise in climate change.”

Some people I called told me they had never even heard of McIntyre and lauded Mann as a great researcher.

What was going on at *The Wall Street Journal*?

## Starting to dig

At this point I became very intrigued and started looking into the background of Stephen McIntyre. I confirmed that he wasn’t a scientist. And I discovered he had ties to CGX Energy, Inc., an oil and gas exploration company. The company’s 2003 annual report listed McIntyre as a “strategic advisor.” When I called CGX up and asked to speak to McIntyre, a secretary told me I could leave my contact information and he would get back to me. McIntyre later acknowledged to me that he “occasionally consults” for the company.

On his website, I noticed that McIntyre had published two studies in the journal *Energy & Environment* and one in *Geophysical Research Letters*. But *Energy & Environment* isn’t even a science journal. It’s a social science journal found in only 25 libraries worldwide. Michael Mann had published his research in *Nature*, a top journal in science that can be found in over 125 libraries in Texas, Barton’s home state.

Digging further, I found that *Energy & Environment* often published studies by climate skeptics that were then used by politicians, such as Sen. James Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican, to knock down the science of global warming during debates in Congress.

“Most people in my field have never even heard of this journal,” Kevin Trenberth, a climate scientist at the National Center on Atmospheric Research, told me. “We certainly don’t read it.”

Just to put things in perspective, there are dozens of journals that might publish studies about climate change and hundreds of researchers are working in this field. The *Journal of Climate*, for instance, is the main journal in this field and publishes around 20 articles every two weeks, for a total of about 1,000 studies a year. Working with some scientists, I did some rough math and calculated that scientists annually publish at least 3,000-4,000 peer-reviewed studies on climate change. From the perspective of any scientist, relying on one study to insinuate that global warming is not happening is absolutely bizarre.

“In science, you never only look at one paper,” Jay Famiglietti, the editor of *Geophysical Research Letters*, told me.

Plus, the scientists I was interviewing were telling me that McIntyre’s study was not really all that great and had its own problems. Famiglietti said that he had received four different letters criticizing the study.

Choosing to write a story about a businessman doing climate change research and then putting this story on the front page may be dismissed as mere contrarian journalism. And when you consider the audience of the *Journal*, which is the business community, you can perhaps see why this story was highlighted. But Frank Allen, a former environment reporter for the *Journal*, was far from pleased, calling the story “strange”, “weak” and a “public disservice.”

In October, the *Journal* published a story attacking McIntyre’s research. The story ran on page B3.

Yet, the businessman’s Page-One story had already had its impact. It had set off a congressional investigation that apparently continues today.

## Numerous pitfalls

There are a number of other reasons to question the attention that *The Wall Street Journal* gave McIntyre. First, it’s best to not grab onto studies that run counter to the consensus within a field. Sometimes, such a study might be right. If so, wait until the field has had a chance to settle down on a new consensus.

Second, during my own interviews, I heard from a number of scientists who had warned *The Wall Street Journal* that McIntyre’s work was not that great. But the story ran anyway. Why this happened, I don’t know. *The Wall Street Journal* reporter and his editor refused to do an interview with me.

Editors at *The Wall Street Journal* responded to inquiries by the *SEJournal* by defending the fairness and accuracy of the story.

The former *Journal* reporter and Page One editor, Frank Allen, now directs the Institutes for Journalism & Natural Resources in Missoula, Mont. I had him read the *WSJ* story that kicked off the Barton investigation and explained that the reporter and editor were condescending when I had asked questions, and were now refusing to talk with me.

“Your hunch is correct,” Allen said. “It’s a strange and weak story and I don’t know who’s doing the editing there anymore.” He added that the *Journal* would probably just ignore me and hope that the controversy would go away.

My investigation into *The Wall Street Journal* and Stephen  
(Continued next page)

## PFOA... (from page 8)

McIntyre went on the Internet in August. It contained a quote from Mann's colleague Raymond Bradley, a professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In a letter written to Barton he tried to explain to the congressman that criticisms such as McIntyre's often appear within the scientific literature. "That is the nature of scientific activity. We publish a paper and others may point out why its conclusions or methods may be wrong," Bradley wrote. However, he noted, "[Science] does not move forward through editorials or articles in *The Wall Street Journal* or *USA Today*."

The final odd event in the whole McIntyre/Mann manufactured controversy occurred in early November when President Bush's Climate Change Science Program held a meeting in Washington. When I showed up at one session, I found hundreds of posters discussing future impacts to the United States from climate change. The topics ranged from redesigning conservation strategies for wildlife in the face of climate change, to the impacts of global warming on New York City's sewers, to how climate change will affect fisheries and the New Jersey shoreline.

But the first person I saw when I walked into the room was Stephen McIntyre. He was presenting a poster purporting to find errors in yet another global warming study. It was such an odd juxtaposition. A global warming skeptic was surrounded by research explaining what will happen because of global warming.

### Time to move on

Hopefully, the profile of Stephen McIntyre by *The Wall Street Journal* will be the last dying gasp of the skeptics. These people were created by industry money, but only flourish because of the ethic of "balance" that exists in journalism.

But scientists and experts are finally beginning to realize that the traditional journalistic sense of balance – including one voice from both sides – simply doesn't work. Jim Detjen, director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism at Michigan State University, says that the balance model works well for political reporting but fails on complex science issues and does not serve the best interests of readers. He says that the coverage of global warming brings to mind how the tobacco companies kept a debate spinning for decades on the health implications of smoking.

"You can make a similar case that the same thing is going

on with global warming," he told me. "If you keep it in the mind of the public that there is still significant debate going on, then you can make the argument that you can't move forward to take action."

Numerous scientists have complained to me in similar fashion, saying that journalists are simply getting it all wrong by going for "balance" instead of truth. John Holdren, a public policy professor at Harvard and director of the Woods Hole Research Center, told me that Americans have been getting a slanted view of climate change because of poor journalism. I have heard similar comments from other scientists.

"The media's penchant for balance has failed us," he says. "They fail to point out the consensus on climate change, and any disagreement is pointed to as evidence that we scientists don't know anything."

In fact scientists are now publishing articles on this very subject. The journal *Global Environmental Change* has published a study by Max Boykoff, a graduate student at UC Santa Cruz called "Balance as Bias." Another article by another graduate student, Liisa Antilla, examined newspaper coverage of climate change in a study that recently appeared in the same journal.

Antilla says that after looking into the media's handling of global warming that the best, most factual coverage actually occurs in the United Kingdom. "Outside of the United States, the scientific consensus is understood, and the skeptics don't have the voice in the media that they do over here," she says.

Having looked into the issue for almost a decade and with two books on the topic under his belt, Ross Gelbspan says journalists have not gotten the story right because all the lobbyist-front groups and industry-funded scientists created a controversy where none exists. Journalists, he says, "never got off their asses, so they just ran stories with opposing quotes."

Like other observers, he notes that the oil and gas industry never wanted to win the debate. In the face of scientific consensus, creating the illusion of a debate is itself the ultimate victory.

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*Paul D. Thacker is an associate editor at Environmental Science & Technology in Washington DC.*

## PFOA... (from page 8)

efforts by companies that make the alcohols to rein in emissions could stop the contamination. DuPont and Ciba Specialty Chemicals have pledged to curb their releases of these alcohols, and other manufacturers of these chemicals are deciding whether they will follow suit.

But stain- and grease-resistant carpets, paper, and fabric also could release the chemicals after they are on store shelves or in consumers' homes, according to Mabury. Also, when carpets age, stain-resistant pants get worn and pizza boxes get discarded, they may also release the alcohols, he says.

Additional scientific studies are under way to determine whether substances used to impart stain- and grease-resistance break down into PFOA. As part of its settlement with EPA, DuPont will sponsor tests, to be conducted in private labs not

owned by the company, to evaluate whether nine DuPont chemicals might break down into PFOA.

Meanwhile, academic scientists and chemical companies are developing replacement compounds to make the products that now contain the alcohols. Some are already on the market.

The pieces of the PFOA puzzle are beginning to fall into place. But what the emerging scientific information will mean to the health of you and your readers, listeners, and viewers with PFOA in your bodies, remains to be seen.

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*Cheryl Hogue, a reporter for Chemical & Engineering News, won't buy stain-resistant carpet or clothing but makes a mean stir fry in her non-stick skillet.*



# Environment and science on screen at Sundance

By JOANN VALENTI

Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival celebrated its 25th anniversary of supporting independent film in January, and for the fourth year, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation handed out a \$20,000 award for the film best communicating science or portraying scientists. Sundance has no designated award for films featuring environment issues, but from this year's screenings, there may be no special need to encourage environmental topics.

From last year's Sloan Award winner, "Grizzly Man," to this year's triple-whammy documentaries, "Clear Cut: The Story of Philomath, Oregon," "Who Killed the Electric Car?" and "An Inconvenient Truth" featuring Al Gore's traveling lecture on global warming ([www.participate.net](http://www.participate.net)), Sundance films tackle many of the stories found under the bylines of environmental journalists. The medium may differ but the challenge of delivering the message seems much the same, perhaps imbued with more overt passion.

Since 1992 I had regularly exposed my Brigham Young University students to the excitement of the nearby festival, a sometimes risky undertaking given the unrated nature of the films premiering from all over the world. This year's films came from 32 countries – from Argentina and Australia to Thailand and the United Kingdom, with countries from every continent in between. For 10 years, I held my breath not over country of origin, but over the raw truth and colorful language ever present in independent films, even those with apparent environment themes. I never regretted the course's "optional" attendance at the films, and nary a student walked out...or reported me. Attending this year as credentialed press to cover the Sloan Award was a real treat for a retired professor.

Redford's vision to promote the "indie" world and diversity in films has moved from humble beginnings – how do you get people, especially from L.A., to trek to the mountains during winter's peak to watch grainy non-studio pictures – to goliath proportions. This year more than 46,000 industry reps, talent agents, celebrities, fans, and some 1,500 members of the press converged on Park City, Utah. By diversity, the Sundance folks mean films about issues and cultures generally considered too risky, or not marketable enough for Hollywood. At the opening press conference Redford said his focus now is on short films highlighting voices from around the world that might not otherwise be heard.

More than 40 of this year's programmed screenings involved gay/lesbian stories; other films featured contemporary Iraqi, Palestinian, Mexican border, South African or other political hot topics. Musicians and their music, from Neil Young and Leonard Cohen to rap artists, were the subjects of films. Health issues – ALS, eating disorders, cancer – were the focus of documentaries and features. And then there were maybe four of the over 100 selected for the ten-day event that clearly met the Sloan science standard.

Unlike other award categories at Sundance, contenders for the Sloan Award are not announced, nor were the award jurors named until the reception when the winning film was announced. No reason given. Judges change each year. This year's panel included three scientists: Dr. Antonio Damasio, director of the University of Southern California's Brain and Creativity

Institute; Dr. John Underoffler of MIT; and Dr. Martha Farah, cognitive neuroscientist from the University of Pennsylvania; plus filmmakers Greg Harrison and Lynn Hershman Leeson.

Watch for the winning film, "House of Sand" from Brazilian director Andrucha Waddington. "Special" starring Michael Rapaport and "Right At Your Door," both picked up for U.S. dis-



Photo courtesy of JOANN VALENTI

**SEJournal film correspondent JoAnn Valenti at the movies.**

tribution; and "The Science of Sleep," a hilarious English/French/Spanish creation from Michel Gondry who also directed the commercial hit "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." If you're lucky enough to live in a market where these small films play, they are certainly worth a look, and there is science embedded in each.

"Science is a way of understanding nature," said Doran Weber from the New York-based foundation. "The Disney-fication of nature is dangerous." The Sloan Award aims to encourage the telling of stimulating stories about real scientists – portrayals of people involved in engineering, math or technology. The foundation funds programs at six university film schools and several other film festivals. "Our capital is ideas," Weber said. "The public is not stupid; they want intelligent [films], not being talked down to, but entertaining."

Along with the annual award at the festival, this year Sloan also announced an ongoing competition for scripts incorporating science. Winning submissions receive a significant monetary

*(Continued on next page)*

## Sundance... (from page 17)

grant to begin production and are assigned a science adviser.

Moviemakers have the advantage of time and potential reward over those who toil in the fields of daily reporting, but for these mostly young, first-time writers and directors, the risks seem greater

Moviemakers have the advantage of time and potential reward over those who toil in the fields of daily reporting, but for these mostly young, first-time writers and directors, the risks seem greater and an audience less certain. Telling important stories, regardless of medium, requires talent, persistence and, sometimes, just plain good luck.

and an audience less certain. Telling important stories, regardless of medium, requires talent, persistence and, sometimes, just plain good luck. "Film is the medium through which you experience ultimate reality," one young filmmaker told the panel of scientists.

Along with the three documentaries already mentioned, soon arriving on your television screen or at your local theatre from this year's Sundance festival: "An Unreasonable Man" ([www.anunreasonableman.com](http://www.anunreasonableman.com)), an attempt to redeem the life of Ralph Nader; "The Hawk is Dying" starring Paul Giamatti as a Florida cracker obsessed with falconry; and "The Darwin Awards" starring Winona Ryder and Joseph Fiennes in a hilarious

escapade through risk-taking, based on the annual awards named after the evolutionary theorist. The filmmaker's thesis: some folks just need to be culled from the herd.

A front-page story in *The New York Times* during the festival (Jan. 21, Michael Janofsky byline) was headlined "1 Indicted in Cases of Environmental Sabotage." Sounds like the basis for a future indie film. And surely, in the wake of "March of the Penguins," Marla Cone's powerful book "Silent Snow" will compel a story of vanishing polar bears but with no fear of referencing global warming.

In 1994, SEJ held its annual conference at Sundance. Redford shared his mountain resort with us and thanked attendees for their reporting. The two cultures – journalism and filmmaking – obviously share topics, communication skills, audiences and more.

Find more at [www.sundance.org](http://www.sundance.org).

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*JoAnn M. Valenti is emerita professor at Brigham Young University and a member of the SEJ editorial board. Contact her at [valentijm@yahoo.com](mailto:valentijm@yahoo.com) for more about Sundance or to hear her story about dropping nine days of notes down the toilet.*



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## Walleye... (from page 1)

America's tuna companies to take steps to protect consumers from high mercury levels.

Recently released studies seem to bolster the newspaper's findings.

The series resonated with readers, Roe and Hawthorne said. And, it shows that just because a story has been written about in other newspapers, reporters can still break new ground and advance an important story, Roe said.

To find out how the duo researched and reported on this story, *SEJournal* interviewed the two to get the Inside Story:

**How did you conceive this project? What was it that made you think this would be a great in-depth story?**

**Michael Hawthorne (MH):** We came at it from similar but different means. We both were looking at this as something that would be a good thing to look into more in-depth. We both knew a lot has been written about this, at least if you look at what has been written in environmental journalism. But, it seemed like nothing had really changed – that the policies hadn't changed. I was really struck by all of this that had happened in the early 2000s and there was a lot of criticism out there....It would come up when I would write about things like pollution coming from coal-fired power plants or other environmental hazards. It just kept coming up.

**Sam Roe (SR):** When my wife became pregnant a couple of years ago, she did some research and saw where she needed to limit her intake of fish. One of my duties was to go to the grocery store during that time and make sure I was not getting too much yellow-fin tuna or tilapia or whatever and as I am weighing this stuff I think: "This is outrageous. How did we get to this point in this country where we have to watch how much fish we eat?" And like Mike said, a lot has been written on mercury, but it seemed not enough. When we told the editors here that we wanted to do something on mercury – and I hate to give editors too much credit, it sounds funny – they came up with a brilliant idea: Why don't we go out and test our own fish. Some have done that, but on a limited level.

It did two things: It gave us an automatic consumer-public service kind of story to work with. We could publish our findings and it would be simple to report and it would be a real public service. Secondly, it gave us an entry point into this massive topic. This is a massive topic. What do you write about? Do you write about the international problem or do you write about the pollution in your own local river? What's the entry point? Testing gave us that entry point.

There was a researcher at Rutgers University who had just

published something in one of the scientific journals right when we started looking at this. I went back and looked at a lot of the other things this researcher had done and it was quickly apparent she was one of the only people in the country trying to do a systematic, scientifically-based look at mercury levels in different types of fish. As both of us said, a lot of good stuff had been written on mercury, but often times it is a television station or a newspaper running out to the store and buying a couple of fillets and saying this is what we found. We wanted to try to make it as close to scientifically valid as possible, to give it a little more



Photo courtesy of the CHICAGO TRIBUNE

**Delaney, 6, helps mom Rhona Dubow stock up on canned StarKist Solid White Albacore Tuna in Water, which tested high for mercury content.**

oomph. We spent a good deal of time just in preparation, just getting the methodology we would use. We based it in large part on what the folks at Rutgers had done, and they ended up doing the testing for us.

We wanted it to hold up to scrutiny afterward and that was why we wanted it to be scientifically valid. We knew the industry may come back and criticize the way the study was done, or did we test enough fish, or how did you get these fish? It took a long time to do. It made the project take two extra months, but I am glad we did it that way.

**MH:** That had two benefits: Nobody could say we picked on a particular grocery store or something like that because we did a random sampling from supermarkets and area codes around the Chicago area. It made it scientifically valid because of the randomness of it. But also, from a newsroom perspective (to poke a little fun at the editors), it prevented that anecdotally driven element where some editor comes by and says, "What about my supermarket? What about the place I go get fish or what about this particular fish?" So, we went through a process to settle on which fish do we want to test and we held fast to our guns that we

*(Continued next page)*

# Walleye... (from page 19)

were going to pick randomly selected supermarkets. There are two dominant chains in the Chicago area and most of the places we went were one of those two chains.

**How did you pick out which fish to test?**

**SR:** Based on our preliminary reading, we knew that swordfish tended to be high – it is on the FDA-EPA warning as something women of child-bearing age and young children should avoid. But, we found it everywhere we went. We found it at every store we went to with no warning label on it. That was one type of fish we had tested. We also looked at the testing the FDA has

approximately \$8,000. And then we did a second round with gourmet canned tuna. That cost about \$1,500. So we are thinking with shipping costs, and some little equipment here and there – boxes and icepacks – the whole study cost us about \$10,000.

**I noticed you had a lot of history of FDA dealing – or not dealing – with mercury and the like. How did you find that information? Can you talk about some of the sources of information that you used?**

**MH:** We started with the basics. We did Nexis searches going back to the '70s or as far back as we could. And that was basically a place to look at whether there was a reference to some kind of document. If there was, we got the source document. We had a couple of FOIAs (Freedom of Information Act requests) with FDA and there were various places where we found documents in the public record – the *Federal Register* and other things like that. It's like any other investigative work – you are peeling back the layers of the onion. You find one thing and that leads to something else, you go find that document, and it leads to something else, and the next thing you know, your desk is more cluttered than it usually is and it is all about one subject. We supplemented that with interviews. We tried to find people who were around at the time. Of course, some people didn't want to talk about it. Some of them, unfortunately, are dead. One thing very helpful to us to piece together how the government was, at one point, very aggressive and then was not. We went to a federal records repository in Atlanta and copied the case file from this trial in 1977 when the swordfish industry fought the FDA in court. It was kind of the zenith of the agency's effort to crack down on mercury in seafood. And, the industry won that case. There is a little bit of that that the government won....Overall, the government lost that case and from what we could tell through interviews, they (the FDA) just gave up.

**Now you have a desk full of information on one topic. How did you organize and sift through all that material?**

**SR:** The key to this was to sort of outline the series early and often and even outline each section of each day (of the series). Early on, we saw there were two big questions we needed to address: One, how big is the problem in the Chicago area and that would be our testing and what would scientists say about the harm mercury causes, et cetera? And, two, who is responsible for this? Like I said, I was in the grocery store thinking, "How the heck is this going on?" So we thought the first day would be very consumer-oriented and the second day would be why the FDA hasn't done more on this issue. So, we did see this as a natural two-day series and we started to divide up the work into sections.

But so much for planning. It turns out the Chicago White Sox were in the World Series last fall for the first time in nearly a century and the *Tribune* spent a lot of time and a lot of space on the White Sox. So, there was not much space left for projects, especially in December when this ran. Instead of running this two-day series, we split it into three smaller days, which actually worked out best for the long run because it allowed us to really explore canned tuna in a more meaningful way. After the White Sox won the World Series, it turned out that we did find out more about what goes into canned tuna. So, as it turned out, we had a three-

*(Continued next page)*

Courtesy of the CHICAGO TRIBUNE



**The government advises consumers to limit eating “white” canned tuna. Some scientists believed that there should be a similar advisory on “light” tuna.**

done. Its tests have shown orange roughly is pretty high, but there is no warning about orange roughly. We chose salmon, in part, because we knew it tested low. We wanted to be able to point people in the direction of a fish that is low, at least in mercury. We also chose tuna because it is such a huge part of the seafood we consume and it has been a real bone of contention for many years between public health advocates, industry and the FDA....There were some other fish that didn't make the cut because we had a limited budget and we had only so many fish we could do. One we did do was walleye, a fish that is very popular in the Midwest. If you are a freshwater fisherman in Lake Erie or you go to some of the lakes and streams in Michigan, you are likely going after walleye. And there is a warning on walleye when you go get your fishing license but there isn't anything about the commercial walleye you buy at the supermarket, although we found it can come from the same place, which is Lake Erie.

We wanted to test some of the fish the government hasn't tested. So we'd be adding to the debate a bit. But, those were tough decisions to make. You can only have a certain amount of money to spend – so much so you have to roll the dice a little. You want to make sure you can pick fish that are popular and you can find in any supermarket, but you also want to pick fish that you can have something to say about. But, you are not really sure what that is until you do the testing. We were not sure what we were going to find in some of those fish. We didn't know if walleye was going to come in high or low or what.

**Can you talk a bit about the cost?**

**SR:** In the first round, we did 144 samples and that cost

day series and the third day turned out to be a pretty strong package. But, with any series or project or investigative piece, you can sit down and force yourself to outline it like you would outline a school paper. If it doesn't fit the outline, even if it is interesting, you put it aside for a later story or for a later date.

**MH:** We were fortunate enough that the editors were really behind the whole idea and they were involved from the very beginning. So, we were routinely talking to them and going over where we thought the reporting was going and when we started writing where the writing was going. If you look at the final product, I wonder was that the fifth draft or 20th draft? How did it end up that way? It is that natural editing process you go through a little more intensely when you have a project.

**I noticed that the victims of mercury poisoning were not from Chicago. I know my editors would want someone local. Did you have a problem finding someone local?**

**SR:** We did have trouble finding local victims. I am not sure why that is. It may be that it is an emerging issue. Doctors across the country really don't know too much about this low-level mercury poisoning, or maybe we just didn't do a good job of finding local folks. We did convince the editors we had victims and this is a national story and it really didn't matter where they lived. If we had a lot of local victims, we certainly would have used those.

**MH:** If you look at the scientific literature out there, at least in terms of studies of mercury in America, there really hasn't been a lot of it in terms of actual clinical work of individuals. Or, if it has been done, it has been done blindly, so finding the actual participants in these is difficult. There is a physician in San Francisco who has enough patients who have been willing to come forward. We have heard there are other physicians who have taken interest in this, but it is one of these things where, as some people have described it to us, it is like lead was years ago. There are a lot of research scientists working on it, but it has not necessarily settled down to the clinician level. As a result, finding those local people that most papers would want was difficult. The testing sort of took care of that (local angle) for us.

**What kind of response did you get?**

**SR:** The response from readers was really encouraging. It was very immediate and immense and sometimes it was overwhelming. We were finishing up day three of the series, and we would get an email almost every minute. It was really nice. I have written investigative pieces before where you get no response and you wonder what's the point of that? But, people really care about what's in the food they buy, especially when it is common food like tuna, or canned tuna. They really care, and in many ways,

this was a story that resonated with readers. As far as the government response, it has also been pretty good so far. We have gotten response at the local level, the state level, even the national level. We even got some action out of Canada. So, it has been encouraging. It has been a little more than I expected. Would you agree with that Mike?

**MH:** I would definitely agree with that. It is one of those things, in part because of the Internet and in part because we are fortunate to work for a newspaper that is part of a chain that has its own wire service. So, these stories were filtering throughout the country and on the Internet for some time after we initially wrote them. I'll get an email once a day, even still now – some-



Photo courtesy of the CHICAGO TRIBUNE

**At Omstead Foods in Ontario, Tracy Siddall separates ice chunks from freshly caught walleye so it can be weighed before shipping to the processing plant. Most of the fish are exported to the United States and Europe. Walleye, called pickerel in Canada, is fished in the rich waters of Lake Erie.**

body who had read the stories in some other part of the country and they have a question or a suggestion about something. There was that initial flurry of emails, but it is continuing. It does seem to resonate more so than a lot of things we tend to do. We always write as if someone is going to be moved by what we write about – or we like to think about that. I think we are still surprised in some way when you get that response and people thank you. I get tired of reading on Romanesko or somewhere else that newspapers are dead. This gives you an idea that newspapers may stick around forever. Newspapers can do this kind of thing. Who knows if you change anything, but at least you've woken up some people enough so they send you email to say what else should I do, what more can I do? That's what good investigative journalism is all about.

**If someone wanted to do a similar story, what advice would you give them?**

**SR:** When I started this, I had some reservations about getting into the whole topic of mercury because so much had been written about it. There have been some reporters out there who have done some great work – Ben Raines at the *Mobile Register*

*(Continued next page)*

## Walleye... (from page 21)

in Alabama comes to mind, the folks out at the *San Francisco Chronicle*. One thing I learned doing this is just because a topic has been well-known and well-pursued doesn't mean you shouldn't write about it. I think sometimes, investigative reporters in particular, want to write about something that has never been covered before. You want to reveal something that is totally new, but it might not touch a lot of folks' lives. If the topic is as important as mercury, why not find a way to advance the story? Maybe we should take that attitude with some other bigger stories – you know, global warming or crummy schools, the war in Iraq, whatever it may be. I would encourage folks not to shy away from a story that has already been covered.

Secondly... I was a little amazed at how easy it is to get a lab to test something. Once you find an accredited lab, even if you don't have a lot of money to spend on a testing program, even just a couple of hundred dollars, you can go out and grab a handful of anything – it could be McDonald's French fries or a Whopper or fish or whatnot. Once you test something and find something, it opens up all these other avenues. What else is out there? What do the companies know about this? What do consumers say about this? Why hasn't the government been doing more testing? I don't think you need to do a lot of testing to real-

ly cover an issue and to really open up avenues to do some additional reporting.

The Mercury Menace: [www.chicagotribune.com/news/specials/broadband/chi-mercury-htmlstory,1,3096866.htmlstory?coll=chi-newsspecials-hed](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/specials/broadband/chi-mercury-htmlstory,1,3096866.htmlstory?coll=chi-newsspecials-hed)

*Michael Hawthorne has been the Chicago Tribune's environment reporter since 2004. He has written about the potential dangers of a chemical used to make Teflon, air pollution from coal-fired power plants and threats posed by invasive species, among other topics. Hawthorne previously worked as the environment reporter for The Columbus Dispatch.*

*Sam Roe has been a projects reporter at the Chicago Tribune since 2000. Before that, he was at the Toledo Blade. He has twice won the Scripps Howard Meeman Award for environmental journalism for reporting on the hazards of the metal beryllium and for a series on Supercar, America's failed effort to build an 80-mile-per-gallon car.*

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

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# Blogosphere... (from page 1)

filtering function for their readers. The web has been, in effect, pre-surfed for them. Out of the myriad web pages slung through cyberspace, weblog editors pick out the most mind-boggling, the most stupid, the most compelling.”

In a way blogging is a little bit like my stint years ago at United Press International – you dash off something based on what somewhat else has reported. In this world, you can do as much or as little of your own reporting as you would like. Original reporting is the most satisfying, of course – but also the most time-consuming, which is a consideration for journalists who typically have lives steaming ahead at a million miles an hour already.

What we offer is perspective and analysis to inform readers quickly about developments that are intriguing or important or – yes, it’s a big part of the blogosphere – at least a little funny.

As a longtime environment reporter for regional newspapers, blogging has been liberating, horizon-wise. When Lisa and I called it Dateline Earth, I don’t think either of us realized how much we would end up dealing with issues as far-flung as climate change, global fisheries, aquaculture, biodiesel, Canada’s Great Bear Rainforest and even NASCAR races.

It’s true that Seattle readers have long sought information on the global environment. But the website encourages us to – with a Seattle view – look beyond Seattle. A huge chunk of our readers live outside the Seattle metro area, with much of it a national audience.

Probably the most gratifying aspect of blogging is the informed feedback we get from readers on some posts. The blow-by-blow, fact-for-fact jousting match following my posts on biodiesel proved positively gripping. (I know – that sounds so geeky. But it’s true!)

I’m also learning about the kinds of errors a blogger has to guard against.

Some are just stupid or lazy, like the time a blogger reported that SEJ member and *Charleston Gazette* reporter Ken Ward Jr. was a longtime environmental activist. (As it turns out, the activist the blogger was referring to had been doing his activist stuff for something like 25 years, which would mean SEJ’s Ken Ward would have had to start at about the same time he was learning his junior high school locker combination.)

Other errors can creep in because we tend to dive in a little more quickly and, yes, with less research on a blog than we would on a news story. The key is to correct any errors that may crop up quickly and transparently.

If you haven’t seen many environmental blogs, check out SEJ’s website listing of them at <http://groups.blogdigger.com/groups.jsp?id=2046>. That’s just a sampling of what’s out there. Also see [www.globeofblogs.com](http://www.globeofblogs.com)., [www.weblogs.com](http://www.weblogs.com).

Probably the biggest “internal” challenge so far is the same as the one that’s draining all those readers away from newspapers – time. If you start blogging, remember that it’s basically an add-

on to whatever else you’ve been doing. Editors have been cognizant that we’re blogging – but really, the requirements for copy production haven’t eased much. That’s just the way it is.

After a few months in the blogosphere, I’m figuring out that the really important thing is to get people to read your blog, and to comment on it. That’s what blogs are ideally supposed to do, after all – get people talking to each other and engaging on issues in a way that sheds lots of light without too much heat. In that

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“Weblogs provide a valuable filtering function for their readers. The web has been, in effect, pre-surfed for them. Out of the myriad web pages slung through cyberspace, weblog editors pick out the most mind-boggling, the most stupid, the most compelling.”  
.....

.....  
– Rebecca Blood, an early blogger  
.....

respect it’s very much what journalists have been doing forever. It just takes a different form.

On this challenge I’m again blessed with the resources of the SEJ community, and on this topic few know more than Amy Gahrn, our own “info-provocateur.”

Amy offers this advice: Don’t think of your blog so much as a publishing vehicle. Think of it as a contribution to the public conversation. Read other blogs with themes akin to yours, and contribute there. Link back to stuff you’ve written that’s relevant.

“I call this ‘strategic commenting,’” Amy wrote in giving me advice. “You’re not spamming, but you’re advertising your site by adding value to an existing conversation. So you’re attracting and leveraging an existing conversation.”

That’s new web-speak for what got me into journalism in the first place: engaging with my fellow citizens in hopes of making a difference.

So, yeah, I’m blogging.

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*Robert McClure blogs as much as possible when not covering environment for the dead-tree product of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer or writing about covering the environment for SEJournal.*

**Want a mentor?**

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**Sign up at [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org)**

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# The joy of a personal blog, or becoming a ‘blog mama’

By WENDEE HOLT CAMP

And so it was, I found myself in May 2005 a Ph.D. candidate at a prestigious university with a new full-time research job, a super-cute surfer-mountain-climber boyfriend and a 10-year freelance writing career under my belt.

Then the boyfriend cheated. I became the whistle-blower at my job and was unceremoniously forced to resign. I took a leave of absence from my doctoral studies. I sat crying in the Starbucks parking lot and took stock of what remained: my two glorious children and my drive, talent and desire to take my already successful writing career to the next level, self-sustenance. I decided I’d take it to the blogosphere.

When times get tough, writers write. Life’s most gut-wrenching experiences create our best material, beef jerky for our brain. I’m a heart-on-my-sleeve kind of gal anyway, so a personal blog seemed a great way to engage in belly-button gazing in a public forum. I didn’t do it for money or prestige, but as an outlet for my inner angst and a way to give my friends, family, colleagues, and even editors, insight into this writer’s life.

I first caught the blog bug from a shark biologist friend, who blogged through grief after her husband’s untimely death from gastric cancer at age 37. During breaks at the conservation workshop where we’d met, she’d receive emails from people around the world sympathizing and relating their stories. Blogging seemed a gratifying way to release emotions and connect with like-minded folks.

My own blog started months later as a sort of post-divorce metamorphosis journal, a way to write transparently, with a little bit of snark (“sarcastic, wisecracking, or cynical”). It was not, by any means, an intentional marketing strategy.

I dubbed my blog Bohemian Adventures, since I grew up in an intellectual hippie household, with a father who built the log cabin himself, with wood stoves for cooking and heating, kerosene lanterns, an outhouse and a huge veggie garden. And now that I think of it, what were those herbs always hanging from the rafters?

I fully embraced the anti-establishmentarianism of my childhood. Question authority! Question everything! Several definitions of Bohemian grace my blog’s façade, including:

\Bo\*he”mi\*an\:

- a nonconformist writer or artist who lives an unconventional life.

- Bohemia is a district ... bordered on the north by cold, on the west by hunger, on the south by love, and on the east by hope.

- Bohemians express themselves without regard for social convention. They attempt to experience the mysteries of life through their unique perspective.

My nearly-year-old blog has since followed me through many compromising positions: My colonoscopy. My two-week stint writing a book proposal in an off-the-grid New Mexico cabin where I contemplated the nature of frozen pee in the out-

house, dangled my feet off a cliff, and gagged on maggot-infested chocolate. My writing travels and adventures – kayak fly-fishing on Texas’ San Saba River, and prowling for gators in the coastal marshes. Sharing dark memories from the date rape I endured at age fifteen and the subsequent self-loathing and suicide attempt. Lamenting divorce after a 10-year marriage, transparently addressing my own failures, and continually striving for self-improvement. Getting snarky over intelligent design creationists’ stupidity and pondering how to balance my evolutionary biology education with my Christian faith – the focus of my book proposal.

It’s not your average ordinary blog, but it’s my ordinary life, laid bare for all to see.

Even the most personal blog has professional benefits. It can showcase your off-the-cuff writing style and reveal the breadth and depth of your personality – if you’re brave (or stupid) enough to go there.

I can’t pin my blog to any particular assignment, but editors and colleagues definitely read it and comment. In the past months, I’ve been called quirky, creative, and a free spirit – not to mention hyperactive (no less than three times). I personally prefer when SEJ veteran writer Roger Witherspoon told me, “as a freelancer you’re amazing!” Sometimes I do worry if I’m embarrassing myself by my transparency, but then again, my friend and SEJ colleague Ken Olsen reminded me of Natalie Goldberg’s wisdom: what is most personal is most universal.

One of the most gratifying aspects of having a blog, besides the positive feedback from web wanderers and colleagues, is becoming a blog mama. Several friends and fellow writers said my blog inspired them to follow suit, including SEJ member Miranda Spencer who started the Green Goddess Gazette (<http://green-gazette.blogspot.com/>). After we roomed together at the SEJ conference last fall, Spencer saw my blog and thought, “if she can do it why can’t I?”

Besides being fun to write and easy to set up, blogs have other benefits. “The joy is total self expression, to know I’m writing about something important and meaningful that will be published because I’m going to publish it,” says Spencer. “I get the same feeling from this as I did when I learned how to report and edit a TV segment at my local university station: it’s not brain surgery, just do it! It’s very empowering.”

Spencer initiated her blog more as a marketing tool than I did, a sort of mini-webzine, a hybrid personal-journalism blog on the things she finds most appealing: women’s issues, media and environment, with a little bit of snark. She attended the SEJ conference seminar by Contentious blog-owner (<http://www.contentious.com>) Amy Gahrn and realized blogging was both easy and vital, career-wise. Blogging keeps an otherwise stagnant website current, lively, and dynamic. It keeps people coming back. Blogs allow you to share one’s unique interests, expertise, and perspective with the world.



“When you get a response or see that people all over the world are reading it, you have contributed to the world conversation on important matters,” Spencer explains. Lately, her blog has started generating attention. “People from significant organizations are contacting ME and telling me about themselves as something I might want to write about or link to. It has also helped me become a faster, better writer.”

**Some practical advice for the would-be blogger.**

I use Google’s blogger.com. It’s mind-numbingly easy to set up, offers a variety of templates, you can upload photos, and in thirty minutes or less you can be blogging away.

When you visit blogger.com, you first set up an account, choose a blog name, and then select your template. The default URL for your new blog will be <http://your-blogsname.blogspot.com>. So my Bohemian Adventures blog is at <http://bohemianadventures.blogspot.com>. You don’t necessarily have to title your blog the exact name as the domain name, but it helps people remember it. Underneath the title itself, you describe the blog. Think like an editor: come up with a snazzy, catchy tagline.

Once you sign up, you’ll face an array of templates that turn your blog into a personal statement: different colored backgrounds, fonts, and layouts. You can always change the template, but once you get several posts, changing the template can mess up the general look and I don’t recommend doing it. By all means, change the template upfront to see which you prefer though.

As soon as you set up your blog, blogger will take you to the “Create Post” section. Before you type a post, I recommend selecting the “Settings” tab on top. This lets you give your blog a description (tagline), and change various default settings about how the blog looks. There’s not a whole lot the beginning blogger needs to change. If you select the Template tab, you’ll see the actual HTML – which can be dizzying if you’re not a computer programmer. I had a head start because I ran a web design company for a few years when the internet began and you had to know HTML.

The only thing you may need to modify in the template is the blog’s sidebar. The side bar shows the profile you set up in blogger.com, and you can link to other blogs or websites, or you can get fancy and add blog gadgets, like maps and counters. A hint: To find where to modify web links in the dizzying mess of code, select Ctrl-F (or Edit/Find) then type Edit-Me in the box. This will take you to the links, where you will see Google as a web link included in every new blogger.com blog, plus two links that say “Edit-Me.”

One critical factor if you use blogger.com: back up your writing somewhere else because if their server ever crashes, you could lose the whole shebang. I keep a copy of my blog entries in a Word document. Though you can compose on the fly in blogger.com, you might benefit by writing first in a separate document, then copying/pasting over to your blog so you always have a back up.

If you’re going to start a blog, stick to it. There’s nothing more frustrating than a blog that dies mid-stream. If you’re like most writers, jettisoning words from the mind onto paper (or in this case, virtual paper) is almost a necessity to maintain one’s sanity, so that part shouldn’t be difficult. I find time for it the way I would a personal journal. It’s a gift to myself, a way to unwind and catalog my life for future reference along with quirky photos and even, occasionally, advice to the world.

You can set up Google AdSense, where you place conspicuous, or tiny, ads on your blog. While some have made a fortune

**Blogging is both easy and vital, career-wise. Blogging keeps an otherwise stagnant website current, lively and dynamic. It keeps people coming back. Blogs allow you to share one’s unique interests, expertise, and perspective with the world.**

from blog revenue, don’t count on it. You don’t get into personal blogging – or news blogging for that matter – for fame and fortune. If it happens, you’re perhaps a more savvy blog provocateur than I. I was pleasantly surprised to find revenue on my latest bank statement from Google AdSense: \$0.30.

Blogs get more visitors with frequent – or at least regular – but short entries rather than long entries few and far between. I tend not to heed this advice. I post regularly but at sporadic intervals, and they tend to be a bit on the long side. Remember that I like to break rules? Question everything? The great thing about a blog is it’s all yours – your ticket to publish whatever you want for all the world to see. And just maybe, you’ll find like-minded folk who think you’re snarky and hip, they’ll click on your Google ads, and you’ll make a (very) small fortune.

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*Wendee Holtcamp is a Houston-based freelance writer who has written for Audubon, Sierra, Discovery Channel Online, NPR’s All Things Considered and others. She teaches an online writing course and is working on a book: “The Fish Wars: How Evolution and Christianity Can Make Peace.” Visit her website: [www.wendeeholtcamp.com](http://www.wendeeholtcamp.com).*

**Helpful links:**

- ClustrMaps offers a very cool (free) map you can put on your blog that shows globally where people visit your site from; <http://clustrmaps.com>.
- Google’s Blogger Help Forum: <http://groups.google.com/group/blogger-help>
- LiveJournal is another place you can set up a blog, but you’re on your own. I couldn’t figure it out. Then again, I’m impatient and didn’t try very hard: [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com).
- Gather is a new site where you can set up free blogs: [www.gather.com](http://www.gather.com).

## Home-grown activism, changing climate and remaining wetlands

In a small shrimp town, a tale of an activist's adventures

**AN UNREASONABLE WOMAN: A TRUE STORY OF SHRIMPERS, POLITICOS, POLLUTERS AND THE FIGHT FOR SEADRIFT, TEXAS**

By Diane Wilson

Chelsea Green, \$27

Reviewed by ELIZABETH BLUEMINK

Hell hath no greater fury than a maverick Texas shrimper lady who gets her hands on a TRI report.

Blame it on an Associated Press wire story, but the simple facts laid out about her country's industrial emissions created an activist out of Texas coastal native Diane Wilson.

"An Unreasonable Woman" is the colorful and entertaining tale of the evolution, misadventures and short-lived triumphs of a unique, grassroots environmental activist.

Wilson's story is sure to pluck chords with environmental journalists who have known and worked with homegrown activists, or have themselves sniffed blood on the trail of large, polluting corporations.

The tense meetings, the huge phone bills, the anonymous tips – it's all here in this rich tale.

Like any good storyteller, Wilson has the advantage of knowing exactly what she is trying to teach her audience. She gives a compelling portrait of her home – the small shrimp town of Seadrift, Texas – and she sticks to the essential crazy element of her quest to protect the bays around home. It's worth reading her story if only to be reminded that environmental stories and the people who are in them need not be dry.

Seadrift is populated with characters with hilarious nicknames, like Howdy Doody, the local banker, and Deputy Dawg, a shrimper. But you don't need a wild name to get up to all sorts of mischief in Seadrift or a sleek corporate boardroom in Houston.

Once she connects the dots between industrial chemicals and the slow, ugly death of Lavaca Bay, Wilson begins fomenting a storm from Seadrift to boardrooms in Taiwan.

Wilson has a frustrating tendency to ignore dates and other facts useful in non-fiction accounts. She tells her story as a series of events that build on one another and one has little sense of the

spread of time between them. Regardless, it all fits together pretty seamlessly.

The action begins after Wilson reads an AP story about industrial emissions in her county. She calls a big-city lawyer and organizes a local meeting about the local emissions. Local leaders try to persuade her to back off. Wilson holds the meeting anyway and starts burning up the telephone lines at the dilapidated fish plant she manages. Wilson and her fierce sidekick Donna Sue get a visit from Froggy, the plant owner, and Wilson's brother, who just wanted to check out "two women loose as cannons."

When she finds out about a new permit proposal for a Union Carbide plant, Wilson asks for a hearing. That really sends up red flags with her industrial neighbors.

Pretty soon, local honchos and strangers in suits start showing up at the fish plant. Wilson learns to her amusement that if she agrees to tone it down and works under consensus agreement, maybe she can get her own community group, and a salary to go along with it. That sends her into gales of laughter, she reports. On the other hand, her relationship with her husband begins to suffer due to her new dedication to pollution.

As in any struggle, Wilson faces plenty of agonizing decisions that could compromise her ethics or her lifelong loyalties (for example, forming an alliance and taking donations from the "damn sportsmen"). Refreshingly, Wilson doesn't flinch from pointing the mirror at herself as much as the next guy.

One notable exception, however, is the shrimping industry. In her book, Wilson lets plenty of others accuse the commercial fisherman of looting, overfishing, etc., but she doesn't respond frankly to the criticism. Gulf Coast shrimpers have one of the worst rates of bycatch – unintentional catch of non-targeted species – of any fishery in the United States. But Wilson doesn't roll out the shrimping industry's sorry environmental record.

*Elizabeth Bluemink is natural resources reporter for the Juneau Empire and editor of Bookshelf.*



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(Continued next page)

**Hot topic (global climate) book makes the familiar come alive**

**THE WEATHER MAKERS**

By **Tim Flannery**

Atlantic Monthly Press, \$25

**Reviewed by JIM MOTAVALLI**

The night before I finished Tim Flannery's "The Weather Makers," I happened to see another Australian export, the film "Undead." It's a zombie movie with a twist: A race of benevolent aliens come to earth to save us from the living death brought on by the power of stray meteorites. They even build a huge wall to contain the plague.

It's possible that the Bush administration policy of ignoring climate change and hoping it will go away is informed by secret knowledge that we're going to be bailed out by space beings, but don't count on it. As the science so ably corralled in Flannery's book makes plain, we're running out of time as the planet warms, and there are no white hats on the horizon. The only possible solution involves a drastic reduction in carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions, and that means the kind of sacrifice the United States (and Australia) are not willing to make.

Much of what Flannery, a science writer and professor at the University of Adelaide, includes here is not new. But the way he reports it is very fresh indeed. Too many books on global warming are dense academic tomes with complicated charts and graphs. They might be red meat for the scientific community, but it's the general public that has to be convinced of the danger ahead. As Flannery reports, the common view is that global warming is a problem for future generations, when in fact it is already, today, having dramatic effects on life on earth. I know, because I was part of a team, including several SEJ writers, that compiled just such effects – from rising waters, migrating species, melting ice and disappearing krill – for the book "Feeling the Heat."

Flannery's writing is consistently engaging, backed up with solid science and never dull or dry. He uses his observations, new perspectives and comparisons from common experience to make this familiar turf come alive. Here are a few illuminating passages:

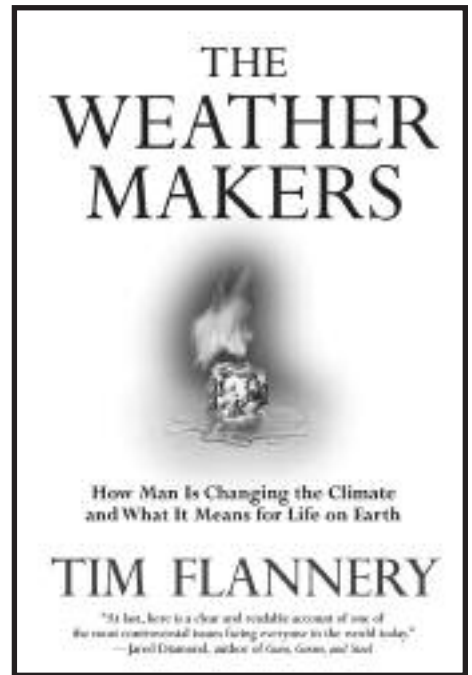
- On carbon: "Fossil fuels—oil, coal and gas—are all that remains of organisms that many millions of years ago, drew carbon from the atmosphere. When we burn wood we release carbon that has been out of atmospheric circulation for a few decades, but when we burn fossil fuels we release carbon that has been out of circulation for eons. Digging up the dead in this way is a particularly bad thing for the living to do."

- On climate change: "Global warming changes climate in jerks, during which climate patterns jump from one stable state to another....The best analogy is perhaps that of a finger on a light switch. Nothing happens for a while, but if you slowly increase the pressure a certain point is reached, a sudden change occurs, and conditions swiftly alter from one state to another."

- On the urgent need for action: "The best evidence indicates that we need to reduce our CO2 emissions by 70 percent by 2050. If you own a four-wheel-drive and replace it with a hybrid fuel car, you can achieve a cut of that magnitude in a day rather than half a century. If your electricity provider offers a green option,

for the cost of a daily cup of coffee you will be able to make equally major cuts in your household emissions."

Flannery offers a comprehensive survey of the threats we face: from hungry polar bears to the loss of the Gulf Stream and bleaching coral reefs. But he is light on the kind of international political analysis that informs Ross Gelbspan's "Boiling Point," and includes only 10 pages on the Kyoto process. His view is primarily from Down Under, and he does excoriate the Australian government for failing to sign the Kyoto treaty and for releasing an energy policy that "enshrined coal at the center of the nation's energy generation system."



In its last section, "The Weather Makers" considers solutions and Flannery ranges wide here, weighing the advantages of wind and solar expansion, presenting the arguments for and against nuclear expansion (he's against it, but understands why Gaia advocate James Lovelock and others are for it), and wading in, albeit only to shallow water, on the massive subject of our transportation future.

It was here, as a writer on the auto industry, that I caught the careful Flannery in his only wrong turn. Despite his encomium, it is unlikely that our highways soon will be filled with the "exciting" technology of cars running on compressed air. A French effort to market such vehicles has made little headway. A major reason is that compressing air uses a lot of energy and delivers a mediocre result. Dave Hermance, an environmental engineer with Toyota, told me such a car would probably have a range of only 10 miles. Accepting compressed air as the fuel of the future, he said, would require "a complete rethink of everything that ever was."

*Jim Motavalli is the editor of E Magazine.*



**Wetlands book offers historical record of Louisiana coast**

**AMERICA'S WETLAND: LOUISIANA'S VANISHING COAST**

Photographs by **Bevil Knapp**, text by **Mike Dunne**

Louisiana State University Press, \$39.95

**Reviewed by MARK NEUZIL**

The coffee table book "America's Wetland: Louisiana's Vanishing Coast" (LSU Press, 2005) has been blessed and  
*(Continued next page)*

cursed by Hurricane Katrina. Blessed because the Category 4 storm brought unprecedented international attention to the region that the book describes in its beautiful photographs and informative text; cursed because a good part of the text was

world's largest port system, and a national economic engine – under as much as 17 feet of water.”

We don't have to imagine; it happened. And as a prediction, that's not too far off.



The book is divided into seven chapters, plus an introduction. It was published in cooperation with a group called America's Wetland: Campaign to Save Coastal Louisiana; proceeds from its sale will fund national public education efforts about wetlands conservation. There is a "for more information" page as a type of appendix with contact details for conservation, education and government groups.

Chapter 4, titled "America's Atlantis," is the most prophetic. One reads it and is reminded of the other early warnings struck by local media, like the *New Orleans Times-Picayune's* series on the subject that used many of the same sources. There's even a photograph of the Superdome as part of a downtown landscape taken from above Poydras Street and a second shot of the infamous sports stadium/soon-to-be refugee shelter surrounded by (dry) freeways. How many times, in the fall of 2005, did we see that photograph of the same scene with parts of the Superdome roof torn away and the streets flooded? Here's what it looked like before.

rendered old news almost overnight by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The hurricanes hit about two months before the scheduled publication date.

What is a publisher to do? The book now has a tinge of nostalgia about it; the sections that are not nostalgic are accurately and jarringly predictive. SEJ member Bevil Knapp's photographs, particularly those of the barrier islands and shorelines, are now important sources of historical data: here's what the place looked like before the hurricanes of '05 hit. The text, written by *SEJournal* associate editor Mike Dunne, becomes an important source of background information on what conventional wisdom was like pre-Katrina. For example, Dunne writes:

"The biggest threat is to the city of New Orleans and its suburbs. Most of New Orleans is actually below sea level, and it is protected from hurricane storm flooding by protective levees and walls. That system is designed to stave off a Category 3 hurricane, one with winds of 111-130 miles per hour. Computer models show that a stronger or slower-moving hurricane could put New Orleans – the home of Mardi Gras, Creole cooking, the

Knapp has a good eye for photographing people, capturing their faces and giving a peek into what they might be like. There are also a series of images of the once-endangered brown pelican that are particularly good. One quibble: Some shots are of the same scene, taken from different angles. Those could have been dropped and replaced with a wider variety of images.

As I read the text and gazed at the photographs, the biggest question in this reader's mind was "what became of these people whose stories are told here?" You get a brief glimpse of their lives – fishing, eating, playing music – and know that it has since been changed forever. Those that have followed the story closely, for example, know that one community in these pages, Shell Beach in St. Bernard Parish, was blown off the map. Perhaps it would be in the publisher's interest to create a "where are they now" website to help answer that inevitable question.

*Mark Neuzil is associate professor of journalism and mass communication and environmental studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.*

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# Mercury- and fish-contamination stories dominate recent coverage

By MIKE DUNNE

The *Chicago Tribune's* series of mercury in seafood (see page 1) was not the only fish story in the news in the past several months. Stories about the safety of seafood ran across the United States and Canada.

**Jerry Hirsch** of the *Los Angeles Times* reported on Feb. 27 that shoppers who browse the seafood counters at Holiday Quality Foods' 19 grocery stores in rural Northern California find a new Safe Harbor brand, the nation's first line of low-mercury fresh fish.

The label is part of a market test by the supermarket chain and Pacific Seafood Group, one of the nation's largest fish wholesalers, to see whether customers would buy more fish if they had more information about its mercury content. Holiday is using a new technology, developed by a high-tech company in San Rafael, Calif., that takes just minutes to measure the mercury concentration in fish rather than days.

**Marla Cone**, also of the *Los Angeles Times*, reported on Feb. 9 about a new study of more than 6,000 people who sent hair samples to researchers to provide insights into the extent and causes of mercury contamination. "Experts say that mercury exposure has little to do with proximity to pollution sources. Instead, it is determined by diet. Mercury concentrations in the study were strongly linked to how frequently the volunteers ate fish and other seafood, a finding that has been documented in other studies worldwide," Cone wrote. For volunteers who ate no fish, the average mercury level in hair was 0.06 parts per million, while those who consumed eight or more servings per month averaged 0.90, just below the federal government's health guideline of 1 part per million.

Mercury wasn't the only question being raised about fish safety.

**Peter Calamai** of the *Toronto Star* wrote about the conflicting messages on eating salmon. "Science can't seem to decide. A new report from U.S. researchers concludes that, for most people, the potential cancer risks of eating salmon containing toxic chemicals out-

weigh the benefits gained from also consuming the fish's heart-friendly omega-3 fatty acids," he wrote on Jan. 6. However, on the other hand, the risks from eating salmon may be worth it for people who are prime candidates for heart attacks, the detailed report in *The Journal of Nutrition* also concludes, he wrote.

And, **Lynette Wilson** of the *Pensacola News-Journal* wrote Dec. 27 that mullet caught throughout the bay system tested above federal-health safety levels for polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs. The highest levels were found near a proposed \$800,000 habitat-restoration project, according to researchers at the University of West Florida.

Wilson quoted Dick Snyder, an estuarine and marine ecologist working on a study at UWF's Center for Environmental Diagnostics and Bioremediation, as saying, "The mullet was a big surprise for us, not just in PCB concentration but because of the amount consumed locally... There's not a single sampling location in the bay system that doesn't exceed the health-safety level."

**Warren Cornwall** of the *Seattle Times* wrote Feb. 16 about the results of state health officials' testing of fish bought in groceries – and raised some more red flags. Some fish sold at Washington groceries contains so much mercury or PCBs that people should limit their consumption, a study by the state Department of Health has found.

Even so, the first state survey of grocery fish also found that many other kinds of fish are safe to eat in moderate amounts, and state health officials highlighted that in a continued push to get people to eat fish regularly, Cornwall wrote.

"Fish are great food. We want everybody to be eating the recommended two meals a week. But there are contaminants," said Jim VanDerslice, a Health Department epidemiologist.

Fish, of course, live in water and there were a lot of stories on its quality.

A joint effort between a science-writing class at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the *Lincoln Star-Journal* is looking at the threats to the Platte River.

Carolyn Johnsen, the teacher, said each year the school "does depth reports on a timely topic. With the drought gripping the state, water issues were making front-page news almost every day. With much of the state's irrigated farm land located in the Platte Valley, water issues related to the river made a logical choice for an in-depth report."

The newspaper's "editors enthusiastically backed the idea and offered to send reporters to edit the science-writing class. That arrangement offered students opportunities to talk with working reporters as peers – a good motivation to get the students involved in the project," said Johnsen, who had covered the environment for Nebraska Public Radio for 10 years.

Students "learned about the topic, learned to report as a team and had lots of pride in seeing their stories published in the newspaper." The project continues and can be found at: [www.journalstar.com/special\\_reports/platte\\_river](http://www.journalstar.com/special_reports/platte_river).

**Brian Rademaekers** of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on water pollution from trace amounts of pharmaceuticals and other chemicals flushed down toilets or flowing from farms' animal waste. "Until recently, those pollutants had been virtually undetectable because the concentrations are so low. But instruments now can identify substances in parts per trillion – each part equivalent to a grain of sand in an Olympic-size swimming pool," he wrote on Feb. 27. The Philadelphia Water Department is participating in a \$1 million national study to measure pharmaceuticals and other chemicals in drinking water, he reported.

Four of the nation's top 10 chicken producers have virtually ended the practice of feeding broiler chickens low doses of antibiotics to make them grow faster and stay healthy, reported **Elizabeth Weise** of *USA Today*.

In a Jan. 24 story, she said Tyson Foods, Gold Kist, Perdue Farms and Foster Farms said they stopped using antibiotics for growth promotion. The four companies also have severely limited antibiotic use for routine disease preven-

(Continued next page)

tion, though antibiotics are still used to treat disease outbreaks.

**Martin Mittelstaedt** of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* wrote that despite decades of effort cleaning up the Great Lakes, industrial discharges of water pollutants into the lakes are rising in both Canada and the United States. A new report from Environmental Defense and the Canadian Environmental Law Association said between 1998 and 2002, discharges rose 23 per cent at U.S. companies and 13 per cent at Canadian ones, according to the story that ran Feb. 10.

**Rex Springston** of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* wrote about the dirty waters of Virginia's rivers. Nearly two-thirds of the river miles the state monitored are polluted. The General Assembly plans to consider creating a steady source of money to clean the rivers and the bay. The projected cost: \$2.3 billion over several years, he wrote Dec. 22.

**Perry Beeman** of the *Des Moines Register* wrote Dec. 30 that state environmental officials knew for seven months that livestock manure was polluting several creeks that feed the water supply for the metro area. But until four manure spills in two weeks, one which caused a fish kill along 15 miles of one stream, state investigators said they were nearly powerless to do anything to stop the polluters. The spills were traced to several small cattle feedlots suspected of not having adequate manure-holding structures.

**Sally DeFreitasand** and **Jeff Alexander** of the *Muskegon Chronicle* in Michigan wrote about how a new arsenic standard for community drinking water supplies is causing problems for hundreds of municipalities, schools, mobile home parks and businesses. According to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, 450 of the state's 3,000 regulated water systems exceed the new arsenic standard. One, the village of Pentwater, found meeting the standard would cost it hundreds of thousands of dollars, they wrote on Jan. 23.

**David Nakamura** of the *Washington Post* continues to follow the issue of lead in the drinking water supply. On Jan. 26, he wrote the EPA has been slow to force states to collect and report required data on lead levels in drinking water. It has little information on schools and child-care facilities, according to a study by the

Government Accountability Office. The study found that the EPA's database does not include recent test results on more than 30 percent of community water systems and lacks some data on more than 70 percent. The problems in data collection "may be undermining the intended level of public health protection," the GAO said.

**Peter Lord** of the *Providence Journal* reported on Feb. 23 that a jury in Rhode Island has found three paint companies liable for hundreds of millions in potential health damages to residents in thousands of homes. The three companies made lead-based paint years ago. Sherwin Williams' stock plunged almost 18 percent by the end of trading on Feb. 22, he reported. Lord has been following lead paint litigation for several years.

**Tammy Webber** of the *Indianapolis Star* continues to cover air pollution problems in that town. On Feb. 10, she wrote that emissions from a Citizens Gas & Coke Utility plant near an eastside school raise the long-term odds that nearby residents will develop cancer, according to state environment officials. The study found that most of the risk comes from benzene. Breathing the chemical over a long period of time has been linked to leukemia and lung cancer. The study was prompted by concerns about potential health effects of the coke plant on children attending Indianapolis Public School 21, next to the plant.

**Dina Capiello** of the *Houston Chronicle* reported that air-pollution monitors show 11 hot spots in the Houston area, including places like the Lynchburg Ferry, which people use to commute. There and elsewhere the levels of toxic chemicals in 2004 exceeded state odor thresholds or health guidelines, according to the latest air pollution data from the state. Most of the hot spots are along the industrial Houston Ship Channel. "There, concentrations of hazardous air pollutants recorded by state monitors reached levels high enough to create sickening odors or increase the chances of getting cancer if an individual were exposed over a lifetime," she wrote in early January.

Meanwhile, several reporters around the country wrote about EPA's proposal to relax reporting of pollutants by cutting back the annual Toxics Release Inventory to once every two years. **Tom Meersman** of the *Minneapolis Star*

*Tribune* wrote that several dozen Minnesota companies would no longer need to file detailed annual reports about hazardous chemicals they use or emit, according to Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) officials.

**Lois M. Collins** of the Salt Lake City *Deseret Morning News* wrote about what many see as the death of the National Children's Study. She said that Salt Lake City was one of the sites for the study, which "may be dead before the first child is enrolled." The president's FY2007 budget doesn't contain a penny for the study, which would be the first large-scale longitudinal study of children's health issues in the nation's history. The budget not only has no funds, it directs that the study be closed down, Collins wrote Feb. 8. Congress created the study in 2000. The study was to enroll about 100,000 children from before birth to age 21, tracking psychological, social, environmental and genetic factors.

**Robin Lord** of the *Cape Cod Times* wrote Feb. 12 about a state health department report on childhood cancer in Sandwich and announced it was launching a more thorough probe into unusually high rates of the disease in the town. Activists who pushed for the study felt both a victory and anger that it took so long. Two women documented childhood cancer cases all over the Cape in the past few years.

**Christine Stapleton** of the *Palm Beach Post* wrote about pesticide exemptions in Florida, where emergencies are declared to allow use. Critics say "the so-called emergencies aren't really emergencies and the state agency responsible for protecting the public, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, rarely inspects how growers use the unapproved pesticides," she wrote on Dec. 19.

On Dec. 13, the *New York Times'* **Gina Kolata** wrote about the difficulty of pinning cancer on trace levels of poisons in the environment or even in the work place. There has been recent progress in addressing the issue, but the answers that many people believe must be out there remain elusive.

A Mississippi judge dismissed 4,202 claims of a rare occupation-related respiratory disease after a federal judge from

(Continued next page)

Texas questioned diagnoses in those cases and others, wrote **Jerry Mitchell** in the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* on Dec. 5. The order signed by Noxubee County Circuit Judge James T. Kitchens left the silicosis claims of 79 plaintiffs remaining from litigation filed by the Campbell Cherry law firm from Waco, Texas, he reported.

A lot of reporters wrote about plans by the Bush Administration to sell off more than \$1 billion in public lands over the next decade. **Janet Wilson** of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote on Feb. 11 about the plan, which includes about 85,000 acres of national forest in California. She wrote that Congress must approve the plans, which several experts said would amount to the largest land sale of its kind since President Theodore Roosevelt established the U.S. Forest Service in 1905 and created the modern national forest system.

**Diane Jennings** of the *Dallas Morning News* wrote on Feb. 3 about drought in East Texas. Despite a weekend of light rain, the diagnosis for East Texas was upgraded from “extreme” – the worst rating on the Palmer Drought Severity Index – to merely “severe.” Annual rainfall maps show much of the region was 20 inches or more below normal in the past 12 months.

**Cheryl Hogue** of *Chemical & Engineering News* wrote Feb. 27 about the newest international environmental agreement, completed in early February, which lays out how chemicals can be managed safely. While this voluntary accord is aimed primarily at developing countries that lack established regulatory systems, the deal may factor into future international trade disputes. For instance, the European Union might cite its compliance with the agreement as it defends its tough new regulatory system for chemicals from an expected attack by the United States at the World Trade Organization. The Bush Administration, backed by some factions of the chemical industry, fought hard to prevent the chemicals management accord from factoring into trade disputes. See it at: <http://pubs.acs.org/cen/government/84/8409gov1.html>

**Tom Henry** of the *Toledo Blade* reported Jan. 21 that FirstEnergy Corp.’s nuclear subsidiary will pay a record \$28 million fine to avoid being criminally prosecuted for lying to the government about the dangerous condition of Davis-

Besse’s old reactor head. U.S. Attorney Greg White said the subsidiary gets 60 days to pay that amount. It must cooperate with the government in the prosecution of three former Davis-Besse employees who have been indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of making false statements to a federal agency. The \$28 million fine is in addition to a \$5.45 million civil penalty from April 2005, which the company already has paid. The latter had been the largest fine ever imposed in U.S. nuclear history until the new fine. Neither of those fines can legally be passed on to ratepayers, Henry wrote.

**David R. Baker** of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote about the resurgence of nuclear power on Feb. 12. “Credit a strange mix of politics and environmental desperation,” Baker wrote. He outlined how the nuclear industry has found allies in environmentalists concerned about global warming from greenhouse gases. “There’s no way that solar panels or windmills can do it themselves,” said Patrick Moore, one of the founders of Greenpeace who now runs an energy consulting firm and works with nuclear industry groups, Baker quoted.

At about the same time, also on Feb. 12, **Mark Bixler** of Cox News Service wrote one of several stories about evangelical Christians and their role in fighting global warming – and how the issue is creating a split in their ranks. Eighty-six prominent evangelicals urge the federal government to curb emissions blamed for climate change. Other leading evangelicals say scientists disagree about global warming.

**Alexander Lane** of the *Newark Star-Ledger* also wrote about the issue on Feb. 12.

On Feb. 16, **Antonio Regalado** and **Jim Carlton** of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that after a growing outcry from climate researchers in its own ranks, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration backed away from a statement it released after last year’s powerful hurricane season that discounted any link to global warming. “The change is part of a high-stakes fight over the issue of global warming, and what some scientists complain is a widening gap between what their research shows and White House climate policy,” the reporters wrote.

**Paul D. Thacker** wrote a story in *The New Republic* exposing Steven Milloy,

science columnist for Fox News and proprietor of junkscience.com. Milloy has written numerous columns blasting the science and scientists who have found that smoking is bad for you. Thacker found a Philip Morris budget document from 2001 that showed Milloy has been a consultant for them. Thacker confirmed with Altria, the parent company of Philip Morris, that Milloy was a company contractor until Dec. 31, 2005. The story ran Feb 6.

**Ken Ward Jr.** of the *Charleston Gazette* in West Virginia has been writing about mine safety since the nation’s attention was captured by the Sago coal mine disaster. On Feb. 5, he wrote that the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration ignored a 1969 federal law authorizing – and encouraging – it to require mines to install rescue chambers with air and food supplies.

**Robert McClure** of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote about how the failure of upwelling ocean currents may be causing a disruption in the food supply for seabirds. Breeding failures in the summer were preceded by tens of thousands of birds washing up dead on beaches in Washington, Oregon and California, he wrote on Jan. 30. For example, at Washington’s largest colony of glaucous-winged gulls, where 8,000 chicks normally fledge, only 88 did last year.

**Curtis Morgan** of the *Miami Herald* wrote about some of the changes – and conflict – that are part of a plan to restore the Everglades. He focused on plans to change a canal called C-111 that had helped drainage but made some bays too salty and some waters too fresh and helped dry out parts of the gigantic wetland system.

He wrote on Feb. 12 that the South Florida Water Management District is preparing to fix the C-111 with a \$40 million diversion designed to restore natural flows into the bay. But some activists argue a potential rerouting of an environmentally friendly replacement canal and other cost-cutting changes will compromise a key part of the \$10.5 billion Everglades restoration project.

*The Orlando Sentinel* ran a five-day series, “America’s Battered Gulf,” on the health and future of the Gulf of Mexico. It began Dec. 11.

In part 1, writers **Michael Cabbage** and **Kevin Spear** looked at how a series of strong hurricanes has battered the gulf and

## The Beat... (from page 35)

whether it is wise to extend oil drilling activity, with the tanks and refineries that come along with it, to be closer to Florida.

Other parts looked deeper at oil production and chemical plants that dot the rim of the gulf could affect the ecosystem, the impacts of coastal development, and how storms can impact the economy.

Other writers included **Jim Stratton**, **Tim Barker** and **Joe Newman**.

Hurricane Katrina follow-ups continued along the Gulf Coast. **Mike Keller** of the *Biloxi Sun Herald* wrote on Jan. 18 that eight plants that handle hazardous waste or chemicals and were directly in the path of Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Coast did not release those chemicals into their surroundings, according to a new EPA report.

Investigators took soil and sediment

samples around the eight sites and compared the amounts of chemicals in those samples to known levels before the storm. They also compared the results to guidelines developed for lifelong exposure deemed by officials to be safe for people, he wrote.

**Jim Bruggers** of the *Louisville (Ky.) Courier-Journal* wrote on Feb. 21 that the federal government is looking around for sites to locate a replacement of the nation's premier animal disease lab at Plum Island, off the coast of Long Island. A number of states are expected to seek the new lab, which would likely be for studying the riskiest of diseases, those needing what's called bio security level 4. Kentucky and Tennessee were the first to come forward with a proposal, which would be located in Kentucky near the Tennessee border, in

the congressional district of the politically powerful Rep. Hal Rogers, he wrote.

On Feb. 8, **Ben Shouse** of the *Sioux Falls (S.D.) Argus-Leader* wrote about South Dakota's first biodiesel plant, which sits in a former corn storage barn. The plant's components include a boiler from a defunct dog track, some obsolete dairy tanks and at least four items scrounged on the Internet. Fifty-three other U.S. plants already make soy biodiesel, a renewable fuel that can be used in any diesel engine. An equal number are in the works, according to the National Biodiesel Board, he wrote.

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*Mike Dunne is associate editor of the SEJournal and reports for The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La*

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