

# SEJ Journal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Vol. 16 No. 2

## A dozen (or more) TV stories to sell your news manager for sweeps

By VINCE PATTON

In Miami, NBC-6 reporter Jeff Burnside thought he had a great story about the restoration of bountiful seagrass beds. But managers weren't interested.

"Later," Burnside says, "I pitched a story about steep fines for boaters running aground." That story they liked.

Little did the managers know that the fines for running aground are used to restore those very same seagrass beds.

"A victory!" exclaimed Burnside.

In TV news, the art of story telling begins with the story selling to your managers.

There are three times a year this becomes critical: during the much ballyhooed TV "sweeps" periods. Those three months, February, May and November, are when the TV-ratings services measure viewership levels. They're the closest thing television has to firm circulation numbers.

During those months TV news managers obsess over which stories will attract an audience.

Heavily hyped special reports vie for attention. Stories must be more than important. They must be "promotable."

How do you succeed in doing the stories you want and not the generic ones off a consultant's list that landed on the news director's desk?

It sounds crass, but you may need to think more like a promotions writer than a journalist. Consider whom the story appeals to most. During these three months, managers cast a keen eye toward key demographics. If your story appeals to women and children, you may increase your odds of selling the story.

Burnside concedes he hates this trend, but has learned the art of selling stories by avoiding the word "important." Instead he uses "compelling." And he often tries to find a consumer angle rather than bill it as an "environmental" story.

Avoid pitching stories about "an issue." Instead, pitch your story about people and then slide in the meaty issue in the context of the piece. We know humanizing stories is important in

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### Inside Story:

## Old-fashioned reporting turns good stories to gold

By MIKE DUNNE

Two members of the Society of Environmental Journalists honored recently for their investigative reporting efforts say that digging through records and old-fashioned shoe-leather reporting helped them make good stories great.

Ken Ward Jr. of *The Charleston Gazette* was the winner of the Scripps Howard Edward Meeman Award for environmental reporting – the third time he was so honored. His winning work focused on a coal silo permit that should not have been issued and was revoked thanks to his reporting.

Investigative Reporters and Editors tabbed *The Record* in Bergen, N.J., for its "Toxic Legacy" series, a saga of illegal dumping by Ford Motor Co., with appearances by organized crime and the impact it had on a small New Jersey community, especially a family called the Ramapoughs. Reporter Alex Nussbaum was part of the team that produced it.

How does one take a story and make it an investigative-award winner?

Ward had this to say: "Zig when others zag. Dig into the part of something that isn't getting the headlines. Don't be afraid to go dive into paper files. Read the law, and then see if what the files show matches what the law says is supposed to be done. Try to become an expert on the issues you cover. Learn to use your computer, but don't forget about calling people and looking through paper files."

Nussbaum said, "The project drove home to me how much information is hidden in plain sight – available in public documents just waiting for an enterprising reporter to ferret them out. Internal Ford memos from the 1960s and 1970s, for example, documented that the company knew long ago that its dumping had tainted a stream that flows into a major local reservoir. Another memo suggested Ford had tried to hide the extent of contamination on a property it donated to the state as parkland. Waste-hauling manifests, filed with the state environmental agency, showed that mob-connected haulers had carted toxic

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# No matter the name, the only agenda is pure journalism

By **PERRY BEEMAN**

Some years ago, a board member or two suggested SEJ change its name.

Why? Because the phrase “environmental journalists” seemed to suggest “environmentalist journalists” to some, especially those who suspect the group has some sort of environmental agenda akin to the Sierra Club’s.

The board decided to leave the name alone. Several members thought a name such as Organization of Reporters Covering the Environment (that’s ORCE, not ORCA like the whale) might be less confusing.

In a way, we are victims of our own success. Changing the name would help drive home the fact that we have one agenda – supporting quality reporting about the environment – and no position on climate change, endangered species or any other environmental policies. But our name has become much more well-known, especially in journalism and freedom of information circles. It’s hard to give up a good brand name.

Name aside, we still fight the image issue.

*The Des Moines Register*, for which I work, offers a blog for people to respond to my stories. One helpful reader had this response to an article on Iowa’s poor water quality: “Did I miss something? Are there dead bodies of children being washed ashore, all because they swam in the Raccoon River? This, like most of the *Register’s* stories, is totally overblown. This is a weak attempt by Perry Beeman to make sure that he will continue to be the President of the Society of Environmental Journalists. What is an ‘environmental journalist’ anyway? Hey *Register* and Beeman, how about just sticking to reporting the news, and let’s leave the fluff creation to the internet bloggers.”

Wow, this guy is a few ears short of a bushel. I never gave a thought to my role as SEJ president when I pointed out in print that Iowa has some of the most nutrient-rich water in the world, and some rivers that carry bacteria loads just this side of raw sewage (including the Raccoon, which also is the nation’s largest contributor to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxia problem). Also, I am in my second and final year as SEJ president. The newly elected board will elect a new president at Burlington.

Fluff? We don’t have dead bodies floating down the river, but exposing the fact that Iowa’s rivers are polluted even more than those in the rest of the Corn Belt seems a serious matter.

The central part of this guy’s message is the disturbing part. “What is an environmental journalist, anyway?” I cringe at that, because I’m sure he’s thinking “Birkenstock-wearing, tofu-eating Sierra Club member, green and left as can be.”

In our support group, I’ll say: I, too, am an SEJ member. I will add that I have never owned Birkenstocks. I have never tasted tofu. I have never belonged to the Sierra Club. I am white, not green. I am registered “no party.” I write about hog-manure pollution but eat pork. I write about synthetic-fertilizer pollution but love sodas containing corn sweeteners. I love good, corn-fed beef and flavored soy nuts. I drive a Honda Accord but not a hybrid.

We are diverse people with diverse interests and lifestyles. We aren’t an environmental group. We need to keep reminding people. Perhaps now more than ever. Some of our members may be environmentalists, some may shun that label. In either case, it is reporting about environmental issues that brought them to SEJ, not primarily their approach to environmental issues.

In this day of websites, blogs and agencies that try to track what we all do, we have to be especially careful to approach our work in a balanced manner. Pure objectivity really is a myth, because even the decision on a lede requires a certain amount of judgment. We are likely to write a lede about the 5 percent of waterways that are impaired instead of writing, “Ninety five percent of waterways meet standards, a ringing endorsement of commerce as we know it.”

But if we fail to acknowledge the benefits of an industry along with the pollution problems, or the various opposing viewpoints in a debate, for example, we haven’t done our jobs.

Assuming that we decide to stay with the SEJ name – and I don’t know of any serious attempt to change it – we must be ready to explain who we are. I like to say that SEJ is “IRE for people who cover the environment.” That tells editors, at least, that we are as serious, focused and professional as the Investigative Reporters and Editors. For broader audiences, we need to stress that we are an educational group, a nonprofit training ground that helps reporters report on environmental and science issues.

It’s good for us to remember the difference between those goals and the platform of the Sierra Club when we get together.

Our conferences feature tables and displays from industry, government, environmental groups, universities, journalism programs, etc. Our members are there to focus on journalism, and that’s what we should do. Sure, ride the energy-efficient car. But avoid using SEJ’s events as a platform for any personal campaigns you might have. We have many non-SEJers at our conference, and many actively watch for biases so they can ream us in their own blogs or publications later. They often are confused about who in the audience is a journalist and about our differing memberships.

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## Report from the Society’s President



By  
**Perry  
Beeman**

# SEJournal

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Mike Mansur

## Assistant Editor

Mike Dunne

## Design Editor

Orna Izakson

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BookShelf	Elizabeth Bluemink
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The Beat	Mike Dunne

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SEJournal accepts unsolicited manuscripts. Send story ideas, articles, news briefs, tips and letters to Editor Mike Mansur, *Kansas City Star*, mmansur@sej.org. To submit books for review, contact Elizabeth Bluemink, bookshelf@sej.org. To submit to The Beat, contact Mike Dunne, (225) 388-0301, mdunne@theadvocate.com.

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

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- Fall 2006 .....August 1, 2006
- Winter 2007.....November 1, 2006
- Spring 2007 .....February 1, 2007
- Summer 2007.....May 1, 2007



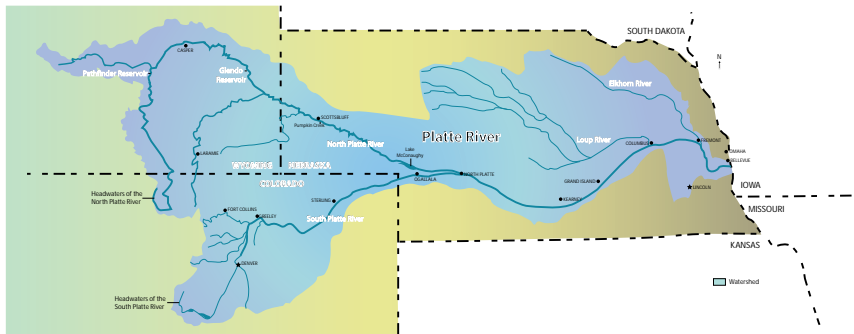
# Platte River at the crossroads

## SEJ regional focuses on spectacular wildlife migration

By WENDY HESSLER

There we were, 21 environmental reporters, freelancers, students and professors, all huddled and shivering in an unheated blind on the Platte River.

We were waiting in the breezy, 20-degree cold for thousands of lesser sandhill cranes to return from feeding in the corn fields and roost for the night on protective sandbars. Each spring, the cranes leave their southwest wintering spots and stop in central Nebraska to rest and eat before heading out to their Arctic nesting grounds.



Time passed. Our fingers and toes numbed but cameras and binoculars remained ready. We watched the bright orange sun sink below the horizon, the sky darken into night, the moon rise and the stars slowly appear overhead. Still, the cranes defied their nightly ritual and remained overhead, squawking to one another and showing no interest in resting. After almost three hours, we left the blind, cold, hungry and a little disappointed the birds had not landed.

That's how it is with wildlife. You never know. Each night is different, our guides told us. Those of us who had seen the spectacle before knew it was true. But that night's late roosting surprised even the experienced guides. The birds finally settled past 9 p.m., well after we and everyone else had left the blinds at the National Audubon Society's Lillian Annette Rowe Bird Sanctuary near Gibbon, Neb.

Our group had descended on Nebraska's Platte River valley March 23 and 24 for the "Platte River at the Crossroads" conference. The conference committee of local SEJ members, chaired by Carolyn Johnsen, pulled together a program of experts who covered a full range of

Platte River issues, starting at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) on Thursday morning and ending in Grand Island on Friday afternoon.

The regional conference was co-sponsored by SEJ and UNL's College of Journalism and Mass Communications. The university's vice chancellors for research and academic affairs provided financial support, keeping the event affordable for journalists.

A diverse batch of speakers told us in great detail about underlying issues of the three-state Platte River Cooperative

Agreement and the soon-to-be-released management plan. The agreement was signed by Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming in the early 1990s to combat loss of endangered species habitat, dwindling water supplies and increased legal battles over water.

The Platte River Valley and its neighboring Rainwater Basin host about 12 million nesting and migrating cranes, geese, ducks and other water birds every year, said Paul Johnsgard, author and ornithologist at UNL. The area he calls the avian Serengeti represents "one of the most

spectacular concentrations of migratory birds to be found anywhere in the world."

But continued loss of water – due to overuse and drought – is damaging the Platte River's unique character. The North Platte in Wyoming and the South Platte in Colorado converge in central Nebraska to flow east as the Platte and empty into the Missouri River.

Historically, the river had many channels and flowed wide and shallow. Each spring, floods and ice would flush the river, destroying vegetation and altering sandbars, channels and flow. Today, low spring and yearly flows have created a narrower and

deeper river lined in places with trees and shrubs.

A big lesson learned at the conference is this: water is scarce and undervalued in the arid west and needs are great. Irrigation (up to 75 percent of the Platte River's water), recreation, municipal use, power plants, industry and wildlife compete for the limited river water and its groundwater counterpart in the dwindling Ogallala Aquifer.

Watering crops takes the heaviest toll in agriculture-heavy Nebraska, which is sec-

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### Resources:

- "Endangered and Threatened Species of the Platte River." Committee on Endangered and Threatened Species in the Platte River Basin, National Research Council, 2004. <http://fermat.nap.edu/catalog/10978.html>

- "Platte River Odyssey," University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications. Collection of stories from the year-long series published in the *Lincoln Journal Star*. \$10 from Judy Yeck, attn: Platte Report, UNL College of Journalism and Mass Communications, 147 Andersen Hall, P.O. Box 8804433, Lincoln, NE 68588-0443. For questions, contact Carolyn Johnsen at 402-472-5840 or [cjohnsen2@unl.edu](mailto:cjohnsen2@unl.edu).

- Rowe Sanctuary: [www.rowesanctuary.org/](http://www.rowesanctuary.org/)

- Crane Cam, down until 2007 spring migration: <http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/cranecam/>



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# Hopeful signs for SEJ's FOI efforts

By **JOSEPH A. DAVIS**

That old feeling of helplessness is gone. The news media and public no longer see erosion of the First Amendment, the Freedom of Information Act and disclosure requirements in many environmental laws as inevitable ... and worse, unimportant.

Or so a recent vote in Congress signaled.

On May 18, the U.S. House of Representatives voted, 231 to 187, to stop two U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposals to cut back the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI). The blank check that voters had once given industry and government to roll back the public's right to know had surprisingly bounced.

The House had reacted to a change in political winds now threatening to sweep some of them out of office. A decreasing number of elected officials now want to oppose open government in an open public vote.

What changed things: ink, votes and activism. More than 100,000 people and groups wrote comments to EPA's formal rule-making docket on the TRI proposal, almost all opposing it. Many journalists wrote articles in the previous seven to eight months explaining why it matters that people get full information about the toxic threats they may be exposed to, as well as how EPA wanted to restrict that information. Senators, members of Congress and state attorney generals – not to mention firefighters and police, labor and health officials – spoke out. Even Wall Street investors – who think they have a right to know about the environmental performance and liabilities of the companies they own – complained in significant numbers.

The idea that good journalists are obligated to stay strictly neutral on stories where public access to information is an issue had, by 2006, started to look a bit obsolete – if only because the drying up of information had made it hard or impossible to write many of the stories journalists wanted to write.

TRI is a reporting tool that environmental journalists have long understood. Since it first started to yield data in 1989, it has been a steady source of annual stories, as well as a starting point for prize-winning investigative and enterprise pieces. That has changed in recent years, as EPA's annual "public data release" has become a pale shadow of its former self, and as EPA has moved from releasing it with publicity and huzzah to releasing it almost stealthily.

But when EPA announced in September 2005 that it planned to encourage more industries to use the numberless short form for "reporting" their toxic releases and let all industries slide by reporting biennially instead of annually, it was clear that the public would get considerably less data. The Society of Environmental Journalists opposed the EPA proposals, as did a coalition of other journalism groups, and in fact many public-interest watchdog groups.

EPA showed no sign of backing down – at least, until the House fired a shot across its bow May 18. Industry groups have always asserted their right to "participate" in democracy by lobbying, often against the right of journalists and the public to access information about government decisions. Unless watchdogs "participate" by revealing the threats to these rights and arguing publicly for them, the United States may be governed in darkness.

The May 18 TRI turnaround was really just many signs of a changing mood in Congress.

That day, on the other side of the capitol, senators reintroduced a bill that would create a federal shield law for reporters protecting the identity of confidential sources. The bill (S 2831) had been rewritten from one introduced in 2005 (HR 3323) with input from many news organizations and was considered a compromise that actually had some chance of passing.

The reporter's privilege it would create is a qualified one – which could be overcome in court by a strenuous showing of need. The interesting thing was that many of the bill's sponsors were Republicans, at a time when the GOP-controlled Justice Department was jailing reporters for protecting sources and talking about criminal prosecution of reporters who revealed unlawful wiretaps and secret CIA prisons.

Still pending before Congress are a number of bills that would beef up and fix some holes in the Freedom of Information Act, the key ones crafted by Sens. John Cornyn (R-Texas) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.). These were rolled out in 2005, and none have gone the distance yet to become law. They have stalled despite the fact that virtually no opposition to them has been expressed publicly (although the Justice Department's response was frosty).

The head of political steam behind those bills was building so high that the Bush White House, according to veteran observers, acted to preempt them by offering its own, more limited, FOIA fix proposal via executive order on Dec. 14, 2005. The beauty of that strategy, from the White House perspective, was that it put off any substantive action until after the 2006 election. We can expect to see agency plans for improving FOIA response start to come (or leak) out this summer. Meanwhile, although many offices and jobs have been renamed, few reports of improved FOI performance have surfaced.

So, despite some hope, it's hardly time to stop pushing for access. Just as May 2006 was ending, the Senate Environment Committee approved a bill, nominally aimed at finding security holes in wastewater systems, which could put coverage of sewer issues back into the Dark Ages. It would authorize grants to sewage agencies to discover their vulnerabilities – most of which have been glaringly obvious for decades: chlorine gas disinfectants, flammables like gasoline going down storm drains – plus storm events and industrial discharges.

The committee, however, rejected an amendment that would have encouraged utilities to fix the biggest vulnerability by switching to safer disinfectants. The bill takes a breathtaking step beyond any previous federal law by making it a criminal act for a reporter to write about almost anything that could go wrong with a sewage plant.

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*Joseph A. Davis is director of SEJ's WatchDog Project. (Note: you can get lots more specific information about these FOI issues and events by visiting the FOI area of SEJ's website at [www.sej.org/foia/index.htm](http://www.sej.org/foia/index.htm), especially the WatchDog newsletter.)*





# From environmental fiction to top investigative awards

By JACKLEEN de La HARPE

**Katherine Beer** writes that her environmental fiction novel, "What Love Can't Do," will be published in June (Plain View Press, Austin, Texas). The novel explores family relationships against a background of environmental collapse in the 2040s. She writes that she believes it's the first novel to portray the social consequences of global warming. Her screenplay, *Home*, placed in the 2004 PAGE International Screenwriting Awards contest, and is a story about a world 250 years into the future when all life has to be contained in a giant glass dome.

**Sarah Bennett** has changed jobs and is now a full-time investigative reporter at KOKI FOX 23 in Tulsa, Okla. She was formerly a reporter/anchor for KFSM in Fort Smith, Ark.

**Jim Detjen** won one of eleven annual international awards from Michigan State University. Detjen received the Ralph H. Smuckler Award for Advancing International Studies and Programs at MSU. Detjen is the director of MSU's Knight Center for Environmental Journalism and co-founder and first president of the Society of Environmental Journalists.

**Robert Frye's** first book, "Deer Wars: Science, Tradition and the Battle Over Managing Whitetails in Pennsylvania," will be published this summer (Penn State University Press, August 2006). The book uses historical information, ongoing scientific research and interviews with more than 200 people to look at the decades-long controversy over managing white-tailed deer. This book looks at all aspects of the deer debate: the question of how many deer is enough, the relationships between deer and forestry, farming and suburbia, the future of hunting and the question of who should pay for wildlife management in North America. The book features photos by award-winning photographer **Gregory D. Sofranko**.

**Sharon Guynup's** first book, "State of the Wild 2006: A Global Portrait of Wildlife, Wildlands, and Oceans," produced for the Wildlife Conservation Society, was recently released by Island Press. It is an edited volume of original essays; Guynup managed the format, content and editing. She writes that it includes essays on some of the world's most pressing conservation issues with writings by **Bill McKibben, Rick Bass, George Schaller, Sylvia Earle, Carl Safina** and others.

**Gregory Harman** placed in the Houston Press Club's annual Lone Star Awards in the government reporting category for the *Houston Press*. Meanwhile, he moved from the *Houston Press* to freelance work and launched an environmental website dedicated to "Energy City and the South Coast" ([www.earthhouston.net](http://www.earthhouston.net)).

**Kristin Johnson**, designer and graduate student at MSU, Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, writes that *EJ Magazine* won a top regional SPJ award. *EJ Magazine* focuses on environmental journalism and is produced by students.

**Alex Nussbaum**, staff reporter for *The* (Hackensack, N.J.) *Record*, was a co-writer of the series "Toxic Legacy" ([www.toxiclegacy.com](http://www.toxiclegacy.com)) that won numerous major prizes including the IRE 2005 Medal, the top prize among about 600 entries; the Responsible Journalism/Public Service award from the New Jersey Press Association; and the 2006 SPJ top investigative reporting award (100,000 circulation). "Toxic Legacy" described the waste that continues to pollute a vast area populated largely by low-income residents more than 25 years after the Ford Motor Co. closed its plant in Mahwah, N.J.

*New York Times* reporter **Andy Revkin** has written his third book, his first for younger readers: "The North Pole Was Here: Puzzles & Perils at the Top of the World" (Kingfisher, April 2006). The illustrated book follows Revkin's trip to the shifting, melting sea ice at 90 degrees north with a climate-research team in 2003 and chronicles the evolving, and troubled, relationship between people and the Arctic. Revkin says his goal with the book is to tell the story of climate change and Arctic warming in a scare-free, spin-free way that lets the science speak for itself. It is intended for the whole family and is the first in a new line of books co-published by *The Times* and Houghton Mifflin.

**Jennifer Smith**, *Newsday*, has landed the environmental beat at the Long Island paper.

**Ken Ward Jr.**, staff writer, *Charleston (WV) Gazette*, won an Alicia Patterson Fellowship to work on his research titled, "The Curse of Coal." The fellowship began April 1 and finishes Sept. 30.

**David Wiwchar** has returned to "mainstream" reporting after eight years working in Aboriginal media. As managing editor and senior reporter for *Ha-Shilth-Sa* (Canada's oldest First Nations newspaper), Wiwchar won numerous fellowships and awards. Now, he has taken his skills to A-Channel TV News. Wiwchar will continue to cover environmental issues and events along the rugged west coast of Vancouver Island.

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*If you've taken a new job, won a big award or are about to publish a new book, contact Jackleen de La Harpe at [jadelaha@yahoo.com](mailto:jadelaha@yahoo.com).*

## Media on the Move

## Did you know...

you can find freedom of information act tips at [SEJ.org](http://SEJ.org)



## 16th Annual Conference

# Pre-conference workshops for new and seasoned journalists

SEJ's 16th Annual Conference, to be held in Burlington, Vt., Oct. 25-29, promises the same sort of story-producing tours, great speakers and informative panels that SEJ conference goers have come to expect.

But this year some pre-conference workshops – one a boot camp for journalists and the other at Vermont Law School – will offer new opportunities to journalists.

The annual conference agenda continues to flesh out as conference chair Nancy Bazilchuk, conference manager Jay Letto and the conference team of volunteers and staff are working to turn the membership's ideas into panel sessions, plenary sessions, tours and keynote luncheons. SEJ's conference agenda is posted on [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) and is updated as soon as changes are made, so check often for emerging details.

The early deadline for those who want to save on registration fees is Aug. 15.

Two pre-conference workshops will allow journalists a chance to immerse in specialized training.

The journalism boot camp is sponsored by Michigan State University's Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, in cooperation with SEJ. It will run Oct. 22-25 in Burlington, Vt.

The environmental journalism training camp is just before SEJ's national conference in the same city. Participants attend both events for a week of some of the most intensive environmental journalism training going. Details and applications are at [www.ej.msu.edu/bootcamp.php](http://www.ej.msu.edu/bootcamp.php). The application deadline is Aug. 1.

Sessions include computer-assisted reporting for environmental journalists provided by Investigative Reporters and Editors and a seminar on environmental law from the Vermont Law School. The camp targets journalists new to the beat, but seasoned reporters will also benefit.

Veteran journalists, teachers and scientists will discuss writing techniques, the latest on climate change and other environmental issues, ethics and helping readers make sense of numbers.

They'll also discuss conflicts between scientists and journalists and provide tips for mediating them.

"There is wariness there," said Rich Hayes, media director for the Union of Concerned Scientists.

"I think reporters can help scientists let their guard down," said Hayes who, with former Living on Earth science reporter Daniel Grossman, has written "A Scientist's Guide to Talking with the Media" due out this August.

"And once they let their guard down, they can talk in a way that resonates with the public."

Eight of 10 journalists want more professional development, according to a 2002 study by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation which funds journalism education efforts.

"Many fields have a need for post graduate training," said

Mark Neuzil, a former SEJ board member and an associate professor at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn. "Some have it built into the system, like nurses earning continuing education credits to keep their licenses current."

Neuzil doesn't advocate that journalists be licensed, but "the basic philosophy of keeping current should apply," he said.

The other pre-conference workshop is sponsored by the Vermont Law School, which is the first law school to co-host an SEJ annual conference.



**Shelburne Farms, site of the conference's Saturday night party. See story on p.11.**

The Vermont Law School (VLS) offers the nation's leading environmental law and policy programs, and its scenic South Royalton campus in central Vermont will be the setting for a day-long "Environmental Law for Journalists Workshop" on Wednesday, Oct. 25.

SEJ member Adam Glenn, together with VLS faculty and staff, has created an in-depth look at legal issues and sessions that will give journalists valuable new tools. As of *SEJournal* press time, the following details are available: Please refer to [www.vermontlaw.edu/media/index.cfm?doc\\_id=1221](http://www.vermontlaw.edu/media/index.cfm?doc_id=1221) for updates.

On Wednesday, the bus will leave the Sheraton Burlington at 7:30 a.m., arriving at VLS by 9 a.m. Law school faculty will join the attendees on the ride down to review a comprehensive "legal primer," which will include an overview on how the judicial system is structured.

The opening plenary session will illuminate the framework that environmental lawyers and policymakers use to solve environmental problems, providing a foundation for the day. VLS's Associate Dean for the Environmental Law Program Karin Sheldon and Professor Marc Mihaly will be joined by journalists.

Attendees can choose two of the three following sessions.

FOIA: This session will be co-led by SEJ Board Member

*(Continued on page 11)*





SEJ 16th Annual Conference  
Burlington, Vermont  
Oct. 25-29, 2006

*Co-hosted by*  
University of Vermont & Vermont Law School



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**Registration Fee Schedule**

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*Member rates apply to SEJ members only. SEJ membership is restricted to journalists, professors and students. Please visit [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) or contact the SEJ office at (215) 884-8174 or [sej@sej.org](mailto:sej@sej.org) about eligibility and to receive an application. Membership applications submitted after Oct. 1, 2006, may not be processed in time for the conference. Please see below for subscriber and non-member registration rates.*

- Member conference registration fee (by 8/15/06) ..... \$170
- After 8/15/06 ..... \$200
- Single day (Please specify which day.) ..... \$85
- After 8/15/06 ..... \$95

**CURRENT MEMBERS may renew with registration.**  
**Renewals only! To apply for membership, see above.**

- Member Dues (renewals only!) ..... \$45
- Student/Canada Dues (renewals only!) ..... \$35
- Mexico Dues (renewals only!) ..... \$30

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 Membership renewal fee: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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*Rates are for SEJournal subscribers only. To become a subscriber, include subscription fee for your category. Each subscription includes conference discounts for up to three people. (SEJ members, please use section above.)*

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- Individual subscription (personal payments only are valid) (50% off nonmember annual conference fee) ..... \$45
- By 8/15/06—Corporate conference registration fee ..... \$630
- After 8/15/06 ..... \$675
- Single Day—Please specify which day: ..... \$250
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- By 8/15/06—Non-profit/government conference registration fee ..... \$490
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- Single Day—Please specify which day: ..... \$150
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**Students**

- Student rate ..... \$65

Student registration fee: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Subtotal: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

To complete your registration, please fill out the back.

## Ticketed Events Requiring Pre-registration (No Extra Fee):

Please check all that you plan to attend. Pre-registration and tickets are required to attend. Bringing a guest requires additional fee.

	I plan to attend	with guest(s)
Wednesday Awards Presentation and Reception	<input type="checkbox"/> \$0	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$25 for each guest)
Friday Network Lunch	<input type="checkbox"/> \$0	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$25 for each guest)
Saturday Lunch and Plenary Session	<input type="checkbox"/> \$0	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$25 for each guest)

**Meal Preference** (SEJ cannot guarantee dietary options will be available at every event.)  Vegetarian  Vegan  Dairy Free  Gluten Free

Guest name(s) (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Guest Fees** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## Events Requiring Pre-registration (Extra Fee):

(For Thursday tours, indicate a first, second and third choice. Do not add money for second and third choices.)

Thurs., Oct. 26	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice
Bienvenue à Montréal! (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restoring "America's First River": Profile of a Superfund Mega-Site (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
From Cow Power to Urban Farms: Sustainable Agriculture in the 21st Century (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Conservation Movement: Past, Present and Future (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Acid Test: Camel's Hump (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Man on the Mountain (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keeping a Patchwork Forest from Unraveling (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lake Champlain: Ecosystem at Risk (full day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can Traditional Conservation and Environmentalism Coexist? (half day)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Additional Events

Wed. Environmental Law Workshop for Journalists

Fri. Breakfast Session: Capturing Climate Change

Other concurrent Fri. Breakfast Session: Covering Disasters

Sat. Breakfast Session: Covering the Big Stories

Sat. Shelburne Farms Reception

Sun. Brunch and Writers' Workshop\*

Post-conference Tour (Sun. Oct. 29-Wed. Nov. 1)\*

\* if you are attending the post-conference tour, do not pay for the breakfast.

Note: Confirm post-conference tour plan on Aug. 16 before booking flights!

Self	Guest(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$30	
<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$15 for each guest)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$15 for each guest)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$15 for each guest)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$35	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$35 for each guest)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> (Add \$15 for each guest)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$230 (includes Sunday breakfast fee)	

**Subtotal Additional Ticketed Events** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please consider making a donation to SEJ's 21st Century Fund. We keep membership dues and conference fees low to encourage participation, but dues cover less than five percent of SEJ's operating budget. SEJ's 21st Century Fund is a special endowment designed to safeguard SEJ's future by buffering it against the uncertainties of yearly fundraising. Please make a tax-deductible contribution in whatever amount you can afford.

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Make your check payable to Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ), U.S. funds only.

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How did you hear about SEJ's 16th Annual Conference?

- SEJ Web site  SEJournal  Direct Mail  
 E-Mail announcement  Word of mouth  EnvironmentalExpert.com  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for registering for SEJ's 16th Annual Conference. A confirmation form will be mailed to you upon receipt of your registration. Please check the brochure or [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) for information about the program agenda; our co-hosts, The University of Vermont and Vermont Law School; lodging and transportation; and our conference site, Burlington, Vermont.



## Conference... (from page 7)

Rebecca Daugherty, who for many years was FOIA service center director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. The session will review a compendium of the 50 state laws regarding FOIA, patterns (such as losing transparency), and what reporters can expect in a FOIA fight.

**Legal Research for Environmental Journalists:** This session will be co-led by VLS Environmental Law Librarian Christine Ryan, who has 16 years' experience teaching legal research.

**Reading Case Law for Non-Lawyers:** This session will be co-led by Ellen Swain, a former journalist who is now director of the VLS Academic Success Program.

A lunch-time presentation, "Vermont Law School Dinner Theater," will feature a live role play in the VLS Courtroom of a current environmental law case. Attendees will have a legal

expert at their disposal to interview in order to quickly come up with story leads and their second-day stories. A group discussion will summarize the activity.

The closing plenary: "Where's My Next Environmental Law Story Coming From?" will feature a panel of legal experts and journalists, offering predictions on topics that are sure to be of national and international importance.

At 3:30 p.m., attendees will board buses for Burlington.

A survey taken this winter of SEJ members indicated strong interest in the Environmental Law for Journalists Workshop. Space is limited for the workshop and registration is currently under way. For more information, please contact SEJ Associate Director Chris Rigel, [crigel@sej.org](mailto:crigel@sej.org), or VLS Director of Media Relations Peter Miller, [pmiller@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:pmiller@vermontlaw.edu).

## UVM to host Vermont-flavored hearty party

By **CHERYL DORSCHNER**

Every year that moveable feast, known as the SEJ Conference Saturday night reception, rolls out its local talent and regional cuisine. Veteran conference-goers still speak in hushed tones of the 2003 party at New Orleans' Mardi Gras World and gyrate at the thought of 2004 in Pittsburgh with "No Bad Ju-Ju."

This year, the Vermont conference team promises to take the concept of "local" to a new level, thanks to this event's sponsorship by co-host the University of Vermont.

It was Vermont resident Bill McKibben whose report on his one-year, eat-locally experiment landed in "Gourmet" magazine last July. ([www.transom.org/tools/beginnings/2006/200602\\_bill\\_mckibben/gourmet\\_article.html](http://www.transom.org/tools/beginnings/2006/200602_bill_mckibben/gourmet_article.html))

But it is University of Vermont associate professor and former director of the Vermont Fresh Network, Amy Trubek, who helped McKibben freeze tomato sauce that year and advised him on a few close-to-home culinary options. Trubek was recently described by the *Pennsylvania Gazette* as "one of the leaders of a social culinary revolution that affects not just good-tasting food, but nutrition, culture, agriculture, and food-handling. Think Alice Waters, M.F.K. Fisher, and terms like slow food, Buy Local-Buy Fresh, organic, and taste of place." ([www.upenn.edu/gazette/0905/0905pro03.html](http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0905/0905pro03.html))

McKibben, Trubek, the Vermont Fresh Network, local farmers, bakers, cheese makers, chefs and others will put their hands together Saturday, Oct. 28, to whip up a cornucopia of in-season, Vermont-grown and -made foods and drinks for SEJers.

Did I say, drinks?

Fear not, Vermont is home to at least 15 breweries including Magic Hat and Long Trail. Otter Creek Brewery even makes witbier, a Belgian style beer made from locally grown organic wheat. Vermont also makes its share of wines and ciders. And while its reputation in the cellar does not rival France's Beaujolais region, Vermont farmstead cheeses rival any in Europe. Last year, in an article on the UVM-based Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese, *The New York Times*

pointed out that Vermont has as many licensed artisan cheese makers as all five other New England states, "perhaps because it has more good alpine-like grass, perhaps because it has always been a dairying state, and perhaps because the state has done so much to help its dairy farmers."

Trust that the menu won't be all stone-ground wheat thins and farmer's cheese. In late October Vermont farms and gardens' harvest is at peak. Leaders in the "slow food" movement, food producers and experts hope to start a little dinner conversation about what the implications of eating locally are: economically, environmentally, nutritionally and culturally. Can we do without lemons when we have apples close at hand?

As sampling and dining give way to desserts and dancing, a Vermont favorite, Tammy Fletcher and her Disciples, will bring SEJers to their feet. Fletcher opened for Kris Kristofferson on April 8. The diva is known for her national anthem at Fenway Park, sold-out shows with Vermont Symphony Orchestra and pub singing from Ireland to Iceland. She's made a few grand entrances at the Shelburne Farms Coach Barn before.

The century-old, impeccably restored Coach Barn on the former estate of William Seward and Lila Vanderbilt Webb is the setting for SEJ's big night. The 1902 barn once stabled horses and an extensive collection of carriages and sleighs that were lowered to the main floor by a hand-cranked elevator.

Once the pastoral playground and experimental farms of the "new aristocracy," today the 1,400-acre working farm and environmental education center preaches place-based practices from forest to furniture and farm to fork. The nonprofit operates camps, educational programs and tours at the national historic landmark on Lake Champlain's shores. For more information on Shelburne Farms visit [www.shelburnefarms.org](http://www.shelburnefarms.org).

*Cheryl Dorschner is senior communications specialist in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at the University of Vermont.*



# Media hype's impacts on disaster victims and endangered species

By JAN KNIGHT

*After a disaster, news coverage can amplify risk, create new health syndromes, study shows*

Disasters and their aftermaths can have repercussions that reach beyond the days or weeks that follow, and news reports can strongly impact public reaction to related risks, even contributing to increased reports of health-related problems that may not be linked to the disaster, a recent study shows.

Researchers examining published studies of the news media's impact on how people perceive their health and personal well-being after a disaster also found that most studies portrayed the media as "sensation-seeking, enlarging anecdotic stories, especially on who is to blame; being in the way of rescue workers; repeating the same images ... over and over again; separating the physical and mental health consequences of the disaster (with no attention paid to the latter); and creating new syndromes."

The researchers specifically focused on news coverage of a 1992 plane crash in an Amsterdam, The Netherlands, neighborhood known as the "Bijlmermeer," killing 39 residents and four crew members. Although mechanical problems were quickly established as the cause of the crash, rumors of a "secret" toxic cargo abounded and received much media attention over the years. In 1998, the rumors were supported by a controversial study showing that traces of uranium had been found in rescue workers' blood and feces and by news reports that the plane carried components of the nerve gas sarin. News media reports of these events created a "toxic agent cover-up" frame, the researchers wrote. Further, the number of people claiming health problems linked to the disaster was associated with the news coverage. Namely, "each time after a media hype, new groups of people reported suffering from 'Bijlmermeer-related' health problems," the researchers wrote, with numbers growing from 611 reports in 1998 to 6,430 in 1999, after a parliamentary inquiry and related news articles.

"In this case, there is reason to believe that the intensive media hypes contributed to the development of a new functional somatic syndrome," the researchers stated, adding that "in their stories, many Bijlmermeer victims directly referred to messages in the media about the link between health problems and the disaster."

"Media hypes are media-generated news waves reinforcing over and over again one specific frame while ignoring other perspectives," the researchers stated. "Such news waves can fuel fear and anxiety among people involved in one way or another in the aftermath of disasters. People tend to adopt the explanations offered by the media and integrate them into their story about their own health complaints."

For more information, see Peter Vasterman, C. Joris Yzermans and Anja J.E. Dirkzwager, "The Role of the Media and Media Hypes in the Aftermath of Disasters" in *Epidemiologic Reviews*, Volume 27, 2005, pp. 107-114.

*Shark coverage shifts to focus on recovery, but the "man-eater" label persists, study shows*

News coverage of the grey nurse shark shifted over a 34-year period to focus less on its undeserved reputation as a "man-eater" and more on its threatened status, but alarmist language used to describe the shark persisted, a team of Australian

researchers has found.

The researchers conducted their study based on the premise that the news media "are central in reflecting broad attitudes and can act as a powerful force in influencing individual attitudes and, furthermore, wildlife policy outcomes."

The grey nurse, also known as the spotted ragged-tooth or sand tiger shark, can be found in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans. In Australia, it is listed as critically endangered in the east and vulnerable in the west, and globally it is listed as vulnerable by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals.

Its ferocious appearance may have contributed to its reputation as a human predator and to its near-extinction via indiscriminate killing by spear and line-fishers, according to the Australian Department of the Environment and Heritage. In 1990, the grey nurse was firmly established as a docile animal that poses no threat to swimmers or divers unless provoked.

The researchers examined 41 articles about the grey nurse appearing in 15 Australian newspapers between 1969 and 2003. Nearly half of the articles (49 percent) offered positive coverage, while 39 percent portrayed the shark in neutral terms and 12 percent focused on the shark's alleged ferocity, according to their study. From 2000 to 2003, the coverage became strongly positive, focusing on recovery plans and netting, a major threat to the grey nurse. Previous coverage tended to focus on grey nurse sightings and what are now believed to be incorrect attributions of grey nurse shark attacks.

The study included a strong focus on language used to describe the shark, finding that even positive news articles used negative terms, such as the headline, "Bid to save a 'man-eater.'" It also showed that the shark's appearance made its way into many news stories, whether positive, negative or neutral, including descriptions of the shark's "frightening dental work [and] soul destroying glare."

This study was similar to one that examined news coverage of the California cougar, which also showed that the animal's appearance and related but undeserved reputation were difficult to shake and appeared commonly in news coverage.

"Terms such as 'serial killers,' used to describe the California cougar and 'savagely killer,' to describe the grey nurse shark are vividly alarmist terms that evoke images of both the California cougars and the grey nurse shark as vicious and indiscriminate killers," the researchers wrote.

"Thus, the underlying implication is that animals that the media refer to as 'killers'" don't deserve public support or protection, they suggested.

For more information, see Marie-France Boissonneault, William Gladstone, Paul Scott, and Nancy Cushing, "Grey Nurse Shark Human Interactions and Portrayals: A Study of Newspaper Portrayals of the Grey Nurse Shark from 1969-2003" in *Electronic Green Journal*, December 2005. Full text available at <http://egj.lib.uidaho.edu/>.

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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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# Bird flu: The coming pandemic or much less?

By **CHRISTINE HEINRICHS**

Highly Pathogenic A (H5N1) Avian Influenza (AI) is killing birds and occasionally infecting and killing humans. This story continues to develop as both breaking news and a continuing story involving commercial poultry industry, ethnic differences, rural life, Third World poverty, and global and domestic preparedness for a disease pandemic.

“There is no evidence it will be the next pandemic,” Dr. Julie Gerberding, head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, said of avian flu at a recent conference in Tacoma, Wash.

Gerberding added there is “no evidence it is evolving in a direction that is becoming more transmissible to people.”

Avian flu stories can be localized since many readers, viewers, and listeners care about the birds in our midst: small flocks of chickens, pet birds, and migratory birds. Scientific investigation has turned up little H5N1 in those groups, but they are frequently cited as carriers and hosts of the virus. Owners of small flocks of chickens dot the United States. Some are back-to-the-landers raising chickens for their own use and income from farmers’ markets, some are selling to niche markets in organic and heirloom breed fowl, some are hobbyists. Youngsters who are in 4-H and Future Farmers of America still raise and show poultry. And cock fighting remains a large underground gambling practice.

H5N1 avian influenza has been around for years, possibly as long as 40. It came to attention in 1997 when infected chickens began dying in Southeast Asia. The response of governments was to kill all the chickens within a certain radius of a confirmed case of H5N1. The theory was that the virus would be stopped if there weren’t any birds to catch it or pass it on.

The reality under that policy is that not all birds get killed. In countries that have feral populations of chickens, birds evade capture. Rural farmers conceal their birds. Government workers charged with this onerous task don’t always follow through with biologically secure methods of disposal of the avian carcasses. Trucks used to transport dead birds may not be disinfected, making them carriers of the disease they are intended to end.

Occasionally, a person catches the flu from a bird. Since

1997, more than 100 deaths have been reported. The virus appears to be highly lethal to humans. However, a study in the January issue of *The Archives of Internal Medicine* suggests that in Vietnam, more people may have been infected and recovered than have been officially reported.

The public health concern is that this virus will mutate into a form that is easily transmissible among humans, swirling around the globe leaving devastation in its wake. After the spectacle of disasters like the 2004 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, disaster preparedness has piqued more interest from audiences.

*New York Times* reporter Gina Kolata’s 2001 book, “Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic” awakened interest in pandemics. *The Times* published a major takeout on avian flu in its Science section March 28. It examined reports circulating about major bird die-offs in China and

Mongolia, determining that they are either unsupported or far less devastating than rumored. One of the veterinarians quoted said, “The disease is self-limiting in wild birds.”

Besides killing off domestic flocks when infection strikes, some governments are opting to prevent the spread of avian flu through the vaccination of poultry. Vietnam, China, The Netherlands and France have begun vaccinating commercial birds and recommending vaccination for small flocks as well.

Merial, a joint venture between Merck & Co. and sanofi-aventis, is one of the companies manufacturing vaccines against many forms of avian influenza. Merial’s Trovac AIV H5 vaccine is recognized by the U.S. government as an effective vaccine against the H5N1 virus. According to company spokesman Steve Dickinson, the company has the capacity to produce 50 million doses a month, if the U. S. government decides to use vaccines to contain H5N1 instead of mass culling. Merial bid unsuccessfully for the French contract.

“Every decision to use vaccine is driven by the containment strategies of the government,” he said.

Vaccination of poultry is controversial. The most commonly used method to detect H5N1 involves a test for antibodies to the virus. Thus, both vaccinated and infected chickens test positive.

*(Continued next page)*



Photo courtesy of Andrea Heesters

**Blood samples are taken from this bantam Buff Orpington rooster as part of a vaccination project.**

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## Bird flu... (from page 13)

This has implications under international trade rules for monitoring and eliminating avian influenza, which ban imports of poultry that tests positive for antibodies. A new method of testing, the Rapid Polymerase Chain Reaction, can differentiate between infected and immunized birds, but RPCR is not in general use for poultry yet.

Countries are responding in a variety of ways to control avian influenza. In the wake of devastating culling episodes, Vietnam and China began vaccinating, despite trade concerns. The action has significantly curtailed the outbreaks in those countries.

France has introduced mass vaccinating with no further outbreaks. Dutch officials, meanwhile, are unwilling to exempt vaccinated poultry from culling in the event of a confirmed H5N1 case – and this policy is slowing vaccination in The Netherlands.

How H5N1 spreads is in dispute. At Quinhai Lake in China, migratory waterfowl were investigated as possible victims and carriers of H5N1. But the lake has many commercial poultry operations on its shores along with a fish farm where chicken manure may be used as fertilizer and feed, according to a paper published by GRAIN, an international NGO promoting sustainable management and agricultural biodiversity ([www.grain.org](http://www.grain.org).) GRAIN and BirdLife International, a global partnership of conservation organizations ([www.birdlife.net](http://www.birdlife.net)),

### Resources:

- Gary Butcher, University of Florida, (352) 392-4700 ext. 5695, [ButcherG@mail.vetmed.ufl.edu](mailto:ButcherG@mail.vetmed.ufl.edu)
- Tracy S. DuVernoy, DVM, MPH, Dipl. ACVPM, USDA, APHIS, VS, Emergency Management, 4700 River Road, Unit 41; 5D16, Riverdale, MD 20737-1231, (301) 734-7781, cell: (240) 508-8619, [tracy.s.duvernoy@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:tracy.s.duvernoy@aphis.usda.gov)
- The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, organization of professional organizations, (515) 292-2125, [www.cast-science.org](http://www.cast-science.org)
- International Society for Infectious Diseases, [www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org)
- Merial, Steve Dickinson, (678) 638-3682, [Steve.Dickinson@merial.com](mailto:Steve.Dickinson@merial.com)
- [www.grain.org/briefings/?id=194](http://www.grain.org/briefings/?id=194)
- [www.theregister.co.uk/2006/03/22/bird\\_flu\\_receptor/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/03/22/bird_flu_receptor/)

offer research that shows H5N1 spreading along major roads and rail lines, following commercial distribution rather than migratory routes.

In much of the world, small-scale poultry operations are an important part of the economy for rural poor, providing nearly a third of the protein in the diet. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, a

### Websites of interest

- [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)
- [www.pandemicflu.gov/](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/)
- [www.cdc.gov/flu/avian](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian)
- [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)
- [www.oie.int/eng/en\\_index.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/en_index.htm)
- [www.who.int/disease/avian\\_influenza/en](http://www.who.int/disease/avian_influenza/en)
- [www.docuticker.com/2006/03/avian-flu-crisis-economic-update.html](http://www.docuticker.com/2006/03/avian-flu-crisis-economic-update.html)
- [www.nal.usda.gov/awic/aflu/Avian%20Influenza.htm](http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/aflu/Avian%20Influenza.htm)

British medical journal, notes that little of the funding pledged is dedicated to education or compensation to farmers for dead birds. GRAIN has issued a report on the effects on rural economies (see [www.grain.org/articles/?id=12](http://www.grain.org/articles/?id=12)). Meanwhile, Gary Butcher, professor of poultry diseases at the University of Florida, has seen poultry consumption plummet, even in countries that have not reported any cases of AI. He consults in the Middle East and Asia on poultry diseases, including AI.

Books are appearing on the subject and provide a trove of scientific background. Dr. Marc Siegel, associate professor at New York University School of Medicine and a practicing internist, followed his 2005 book, “False Alarm: The Truth about the Epidemic of Fear” with “Bird Flu: Everything You Need to Know about the Next Pandemic” this year. It includes a bibliography. Lindsey Hillesheim has written “Dead Birds Don’t Fly: An Avian Flu Primer for Small-Scale Farmers,” for the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy ([www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org).)

Everyone is a stakeholder in an influenza pandemic, as we all are in global warming. The varied economic and social strings that connect us require broader and deeper information to inform decisions that will protect us all.

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*Christine Heinrichs is writing a book about small flocks of chickens, due out in Spring 2007. She lives in Madison, Wisc.*

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## Name... (from page 2)

We need always to make sure people know what our group is. And what it is not.

If you receive this before the deadline for candidates, I would like to encourage you to think about running for the SEJ board. A large number of board seats are up for election this year. It’s a good time to step up. We’re in for quite a ride as SEJ morphs to serve journalists whose businesses are quickly changing.

Seats now held by active members Jim Bruggers, Dina Cappiello, Christy George, Don Hopey, Robert McClure, Vince

Patton and associate member Rebecca Daugherty are up for election.

Also, if you have a nomination for the Stolberg Award, which honors our volunteer of the year, please contact Chris Rigel at [crigel@sej.org](mailto:crigel@sej.org).

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*If you haven’t figured it out by now, Perry Beeman covers the environment for The Des Moines Register.*



# The case against fluoride mounts

By **BETTE HILEMAN**

Until very recently, the mere mention that fluoridated water might cause adverse health effects was likely to be met with deep skepticism, even derision. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention still calls water fluoridation the greatest health triumph of the past 50 years.

But those attitudes are beginning to change.

In March, the National Research Council (NRC) released a report saying the maximum level of fluoride the Environmental Protection Agency allows in drinking water – 4 milligrams per liter, or 4 parts per million (ppm) – harms teeth and bones. About 200,000 people in the U.S. consume water with natural fluoride levels of 4 ppm or higher. But about 65 percent of the U.S. population drinks water artificially fluoridated at a much lower level – about 1 mg per liter or 1 ppm.

Ten percent of children exposed to the maximum contaminant level of fluoride of 4 ppm develop severe dental fluorosis, a permanent condition characterized by brown stains and pitting of the teeth, the report said. Severely affected teeth are likely to decay and often must be capped.

In addition, populations with lifetime exposure to water fluoride levels of 4 ppm or higher are likely to experience more bone fractures than groups exposed to 1 ppm fluoride or less, the NRC reported.

Studies conducted in the 1940s suggested that drinking water with 1 ppm fluoride reduced tooth decay 50 to 65 percent. But by today's standards, those studies were poorly designed.

More recent research indicates that ingested fluoride plays little or no role in preventing tooth decay. But topical fluoride exposure from toothpaste probably does help. The most convincing evidence: Over the past 50 years, the reduction in tooth decay in Europe is about the same as that in the United States, yet very few Europeans drink fluoridated water. Diet improvements, such as eating more fresh food, may have played a large role in improving teeth in both continents. Fluoridated toothpaste and rinses may also provide some benefit.

Health risks of water fluoridated at 1 ppm are less definitive than those associated with 4-ppm water. But for infants, the risks are fairly straightforward. In 1997, the Institute of Medicine set a safe upper limit of 0.7 mg of fluoride a day for children under 6 months of age. Yet in 25 of the 28 largest cities of the United States (most with fluoridated water), at least 15 percent of formula-fed infants are exposed to excessive levels of fluoride from tap water used to mix the formula, according to calculations by the Environmental Working Group. For example, 61 percent of the formula-fed babies in Boston ingest too much fluoride, EWG says, based on fluoride levels published by water utilities and the average amount of formula consumed by babies.

For older children and adults, health risks still are being

debated. About one third of children who live in areas with fluoridated water develop mild dental fluorosis. The teeth appear to have white patches – actually areas of incomplete mineralization.

One of the most worrisome, and possibly widespread, effects of water fluoridation is skeletal fluorosis. This is because on average, half of the fluoride ingested over a lifetime is stored in the bones.

Skeletal fluorosis has three stages: mild, moderate, and severe. The symptoms of mild and moderate skeletal fluorosis are the same as symptoms of arthritis. The only way to diagnose these stages and distinguish them from arthritis is to take a bone biopsy, an invasive procedure not usually performed. Crippling skeletal fluorosis is more easily diagnosed because victims have difficulty walking. Very few Americans develop this, but in regions of India where water has high natural fluoride levels, the disease is fairly common.

The NRC report also notes a growing body of scientific research linking fluoride to disruption of the nervous and endocrine systems, including the brain, thyroid, and pineal gland. Many Americans living in areas where the water contains 1 ppm or more of fluoride now receive doses of fluoride associated with thyroid disturbances. Even very low levels of fluoride exposure seem to suppress thyroid function.

The NRC report says: "In humans, effects on thyroid function were associated with fluoride exposure of 0.05-0.13 mg/kg/day when iodine intake was adequate, and 0.01-0.03 mg/kg/day when iodine intake was inadequate. An adult who drinks 2 liters of water, or other beverage made with fluoridated water, would receive an exposure of 2 mg per day (or 0.03 mg/kg/day for an adult weighing about 167 lb)."

NRC panel member Kathy Thiessen, a former senior scientist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, told the *Portland Tribune*: "The potential is there" that water fluoridation is unhealthy. In her personal opinion, "most people should minimize their fluoride intake, which includes avoiding fluoridated water." Thyroid suppression can result in fatigue, obesity and harm to fetuses.

Consumers should consider that virtually all soft drinks, juices prepared from concentrate, and canned soups are made from fluoridated water. Also, pastas and rice – and all foods that

absorb water – contain fluoride if cooked in fluoridated water. The only food that absorbs a significant amount of fluoride from the soil is tea.

For the individual, there is no easy

way to remove fluoride from water. Rather than a simple charcoal or Brita filter, removal requires reverse osmosis or distillation. Most bottled waters do not contain fluoride unless it is added deliberately. However, a few brands are made from fluoridated tap water, but this is not usually noted on the label.

*Bette Hileman is senior editor at Chemical & Engineering News.*



## Fluoride resources:

- NRC report: [www4.nationalacademies.org/news.nsf/isbn/030910128X?OpenDocument](http://www4.nationalacademies.org/news.nsf/isbn/030910128X?OpenDocument)
- Bette Hileman stories: [www.fluorideaction.net/hileman.htm](http://www.fluorideaction.net/hileman.htm), [www.fluoride-alert.org/NIDR.htm](http://www.fluoride-alert.org/NIDR.htm)
- From Rachel's Democracy and Health News: [www.rachel.org/bulletin/bulletin.cfm?Issue\\_ID=2001](http://www.rachel.org/bulletin/bulletin.cfm?Issue_ID=2001)

# Climate-change skeptics in Europe? Mostly missing in action

By PAUL D. THACKER

Where are the global warming skeptics in Europe?

If you canvas a wide variety of news (what journalist doesn't?) and read some newspapers in Europe, you'll notice something about their coverage of global warming: no skeptics. That's right. The media coverage of high-profile global warming skeptics is pretty much an American phenomenon, according to some noted journalists who cover the issue outside the United States.

The *SEJournal* discussed the differences in global climate change coverage in the United States and Europe with two journalists who have extensive experience on both continents.

Mark Hertsgaard is an independent journalist and author of two books that have spirited him around the globe. In his 1998 book "Earth Odyssey," he traveled to 19 countries documenting the planet's environmental problems. Mark recently wrote *Vanity Fair's* cover story on climate change titled "While Washington Slept." In the article, Hertsgaard detailed the career of one of America's most respected scientists, Fred Seitz, as he evolved from a former president of Rockefeller University to a denier of the negative health effects of second-hand smoke and, finally, a global warming skeptic at the Marshall Institute.

Fiona Harvey is the environmental correspondent with the *Financial Times*, Europe's paper of record for the business community and government officials. For the last two years she has covered everything from chemical regulation to new low-carbon technologies and, of course, to climate change. In her travels for the uniquely pink broadsheet, she has also made numerous trips to Washington, D.C., and New York, and she has journeyed to Canada and across Latin America. Her work regularly appears in the *Financial Times's* U.S. edition. Before taking on the environment beat, she spent four years on the newspaper's science team writing about new technologies.

Here's our discussion:

**SEJ:** There seems to be a difference in how the press covers the environment in the United States and how it's covered in Europe. And it seems that the biggest divide can be seen in coverage of global warming.

**Hertsgaard:** I think it's absolutely true that the discussion in the U.S. media is very different on global warming compared, not only to Europe, but overseas in general – though in the last six to eight weeks we have finally begun to turn full attention to the subject. We've seen *Time Magazine's* cover story and ABC World News Tonight did five nights in a row, 60 Minutes did an important profile of Jim Hansen at NASA. Even Fox News...which traditionally reflects the right-wing opinion that global warming is a hoax...even Fox News has done a fairly straight documentary on the subject.

So it's changing, but I still think we're years behind what's done in Europe.

**Harvey:** Well, I agree with Mark. We have seen a bit more coverage lately in the U.S. And I wanted to ask Mark if he felt that was largely the result of Hurricane Katrina. I think that has brought the issue a bit more into focus.

**Hertsgaard:** Yes, I think that's about right.

**SEJ:** You know, it's funny. I was talking on the phone with my mom and she said that she started paying attention to global warming because of Hurricane Katrina. And I told her, "Mom, you can't really say that global warming caused Hurricane Katrina." People are starting to get the message, but probably for the wrong reasons.

**Hertsgaard:** Yes, I would say there is a dichotomy here. When Katrina hit there was almost no mention of the potential role of global warming in that regards. Certainly not on television. But I think that Fiona is right that Katrina has led to some new coverage. Maybe before, reporters were too nervous or couldn't sell their editors on it. Of course you can't say that any single weather event is because of global warming, but you can fairly and responsibly point out that it fits the pattern of what we will expect in the future.

I suspect that editors and executive producers looked at Katrina and thought, "Oh well, maybe there is something going on with this global warming stuff. Maybe we'd better look into it." And once you do look into it, and you're an honest reporter, you realize that 99 percent of the scientists find that global warming is real and very serious.

**SEJ:** Fiona, when you see how our press consistently amplifies the uncertainties, what happens amongst you? Are you guys wondering, "What is going on with American journalists?"

**Harvey:** [laughs] Well, the coverage in Europe...For starters, there has been a lot of more it. There is a lot more written and that's been going on for years. It's not seen as some new thing that has just come to people's attention, although the amount of coverage has been getting bigger and bigger.

This issue is understood, so it's quite rare to get pieces questioning the science of global warming. The science is so overwhelming. So these fringe voices who still manage to get themselves heard in the U.S. press are not quoted in the mainstream stories in Europe. You will see them occasionally, but usually they just write angry letters saying, "You're all wrong."

They are regarded here as what they are: fringe voices without a great deal of substantial scientific backing.

**SEJ:** The thing I noticed after looking at your coverage is that you don't quote any of these people. In the United States you would probably have some editor asking, "Now, where's the balance?"

**Harvey:** Well, that's the thing, and this is a key point. The reason we don't have these voices in Europe is not because we aren't balanced. We do try to be balanced. But most journalists and media outlets in Europe have taken the view that putting in a voice that is right out on the wildest extremes does not represent mainstream science. And by putting them in the story and giving them equal space and giving them equal validity, you're suggesting that they're equivalent. And they're not.

**SEJ:** What's odd is that you two are saying the same thing. Here's Mark who writes for *The Nation*, which is considered on the left in America, and you write for the *Financial Times* which is written for the business community. This doesn't mean it has a

(Continued next page)

conservative slant, but it probably has a conservative sort of focus. That strikes me as very odd. [laughs]

**Harvey:** [laughs]

**Hertsgaard:** I don't think it's odd. I think it's because we're both honest reporters looking at the same body of evidence. And I don't mean to flatter either myself or Fiona. We're just average reporters doing our job conscientiously. The reason it seems odd is only...only because of this propaganda campaign that has been mounted by special interests in the United States. Secondly, I have to say, it's because our...media outlets are too sensitive to that stuff. We have been essentially taken in by this nonsense for fifteen years.

Had we listened to the scientists such as Jim Hansen, instead of the scientists like Fred Seitz who I call the \$45 million man, we wouldn't be in this situation. Had we just let journalists do their jobs, look at the facts, interview the scientists, and report it honestly, we wouldn't be having this conversation today.

**SEJ:** There was a situation about a year ago when one of these skeptics named Myron Ebell came over to the UK and then there was a move to censure him, I believe, by some members of your Parliament?

**Harvey:** That's right. I've met Mr. Ebell a number of times both here and in the United States. But to go back to what you were saying, I have written about the skeptics. I did this long piece last summer where I examined some of the skeptics and I did a number of interviews with Ebell and others. That piece delved into their arguments and then came out the other side. It was "that's what they say, but then mainstream scientists say something different."

So we haven't completely ignored them. We've given them the time. We've done that and we don't need to put these fringe people into mainstream articles anymore.

Back to Ebell, he said that Sir David King, Britain's leading scientist, didn't know anything about climate change. It came across very rudely and there were a small number of (members of Parliament) who put a move in the House of Commons to censure him. But then I think that is Mr. Ebell's tactic, is it not, to go around saying very provocative things? That's what he's paid to do.

**SEJ:** Myron comes out of the Competitive Enterprise Institute and Steve Milloy used to be at Cato, and I've noticed that these free-market think tanks seem to be attempting to create an alternate forum for science. Mark, do you find this in Europe and Fiona, what have you found? Do they exist in Europe?

**Harvey:** Yes, they do. I get their communications quite regularly and many of them have strong ties to the same think tanks back in Washington. But they don't tend to have much effect because they're running so far contrary to not only scientific opinion but public opinion.

That's a very interesting question, actually, because it came to light last year that a number of lobbyists from these groups had come to Europe in an effort to drum up support for their views. I believe that the Competitive Enterprise Institute had met with a number of power companies.

**Hertsgaard:** That's correct. It was Chris Horner who was

behind that initiative.

[Note: The story on the Competitive Enterprise Institute's strategy to bring together think tanks, companies and journalists to defeat EU support for Kyoto ran on Dec. 8 in *The Independent* (London) <http://tinyurl.com/7cab5>]

**Harvey:** But it didn't really work, though, did it? Because the power companies themselves came out and said, "No, what they're saying isn't true. It's all a bunch of rubbish."

**Hertsgaard:** Well actually, I do know about this, if I could

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Here in Europe ... the issue is much less politicized. In the U.S. there is this tendency to divide along party lines and that isn't the case in Europe. Some of the more conservative members were the first to recognize climate change. In a sense, a lot of the heat was taken out of the debate because it never became a tenet of a belief system of a political party. It was simply regarded as a scientific matter.

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jump in. Chris Horner, he later said that the only reason this was discovered was because people went into his trash. But he admitted that it happened and he was only sorry that the companies didn't agree with him. What he was trying to do was set up the same propaganda campaign that has been used in the United States to rebut the science.

Here's something that the SEJ readership should know about. Greenpeace was the group that got the information, and I think they gave it to the *London Independent*.

**Harvey:** Yes, they did give it to us as well, but we didn't view it as much of a story that a group like that would try to come over to Europe with the same tactics as they've been using in the U.S. For us, it would have been much more of a story if they had actually achieved something. But they didn't, did they? The companies they approached were far too sensible, I suppose, to take on some folks like that who would be viewed as cranks, really, in Europe.

**Hertsgaard:** Now Greenpeace tried to give that story to major U.S. outlets, including I believe, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, but it ran over in the United Kingdom.

**SEJ:** A producer for "NOVA" said that he had to release a slightly different version of his documentary on climate change for the United States because so many here reject the science. He thinks this is partly because of the "particular understanding of prosperity and freedom." Do you think there might be an underlying difference between how we Americans approach the issue of science and the environment?

**Hertsgaard:** I have to say I don't share that view. It's plausible except for the fact that there's a much more immediate explanation for why there is a lack of understanding on global warming in the U.S. – the deniers have been putting out their message through the mainstream media for the last fifteen years and then you've seen that message amplified in the last six years in Washington thanks to the ruling party. So you've got leading members of Congress such as Senator James Inhofe calling glob-

(Continued next page)



## Skeptics... (from page 17)

al warming a liberal hoax. And when you've got the media reinforcing that message it's not surprising that there's confusion in the American public.

So perhaps this documentary maker sees the effects but doesn't understand the political dynamics and proffers this philosophical explanation.

**Harvey:** I think the difference here in Europe is that the issue is much less politicized. In the U.S. there is this tendency to divide along party lines and that isn't the case in Europe. Some of the more conservative members were the first to recognize climate change. Margaret Thatcher, who was leader of the conservative party, spoke up very strongly about climate change. We've also seen that in conservative leaders in places like Germany, France and Spain. In a sense, a lot of the heat was taken out of the debate because it never became a tenet of a belief system of a political party. It was simply regarded as a scientific matter. That's been a key difference.

**SEJ:** So why do you think that it's been politicized here in America?

**Harvey:** It's very difficult to know. I suppose an obvious answer is that companies seem to have more political power in the United States. But I'm not sure if that's true. Maybe people in the U.S. are just generally more optimistic and unwilling to believe in something so grim.

**SEJ:** Even if we move away from global warming and go into other issues like REACH, which is legislation in Europe to

further regulate chemicals, we see that America is moving in a different direction.

**Harvey:** Yes, that's true. Global warming is widely accepted, but REACH is still highly controversial. Some politicians recently spoke out against it. So there isn't some sort of blanket approval of environmental issues.

**Hertsgaard:** I would offer one thought. I think that part of the reason is the takeover of the Republican party by the far-right. There was a recent talk by six former directors of the Environmental Protection Agency. All six said that global warming is a real issue that needs to be dealt with. Five of the six were Republicans; not one of them would have been appointed as head of EPA under George W. Bush. I think that's a good part of the reason why the debate has gotten so political.

**SEJ:** So you think, Fiona, that this is an issue that is just focused on global warming?

**Harvey:** Well, there is a lot of support for environmental issues in Europe. But it's not universal. For instance the new leader of the Tory party just started a new campaign, "Vote Blue" the color of the political party. And the slogan is "Vote Blue. Go Green." And he's hanging all the local elections on environmental issues, and that's unheard of.

**Hertsgaard:** That's pretty stunning.

**Harvey:** Yes, and even in the rest of Europe where environmental issues are important, but this is still an astonishing thing to do. It's happening this May.

**Hertsgaard:** I think it also gets to how America and Europe look at the role of government. First, it's no longer just a collection of countries, but the E.U. Look at antitrust. General Electric and Microsoft, both powerful multinationals based in America were stopped by antitrust rulings in Europe. And they were not only shocked, but downright indignant. For the last 25 years, also during the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, there have been no real restrictions on corporate power. And part of that, I think, goes back to Europe's much stronger tradition of social democracy and the welfare state. While in the U.S. we have a very strong strain of individualism.

And then in recent history, there is the role of the Green Party in Germany. Germany is the largest economy in Europe and the Green Party has a strong influence on its politics. Now even conservatives in Germany are pretty green.

**SEJ:** I recently spoke with an expert on science policy who believes that the adversarial system of government we have here, the two-party system, inevitably causes science to get distorted as the two sides pick at facts.

**Harvey:** Well, that's a difficult one. In some countries there are adversarial forms of government. I think it comes down to how it was presented to people. When people first heard about global warming, it wasn't from politicians; it was from scientists through the media. So we got the scientific view before any politics got attached to it.

**Hertsgaard:** I think that's critical. Right on point.

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*Paul D. Thacker writes for Environmental Science & Technology and is a member of the SEJournal editorial board.*

# Big News

## AAAS Science Journalism Awards Call for Entries

The AAAS Science Journalism Awards honor distinguished reporting on science by professional journalists. The awards are an internationally recognized measure of excellence in science reporting for a general audience. They go to individuals (rather than institutions, publishers or employers) for coverage of the sciences, engineering and mathematics.

### U.S. CATEGORIES:

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### INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY:

Open to journalists worldwide, across all news media.

### Children's Science News

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## Gold... (from page 1)

industrial waste across New Jersey. And while government press releases over the years had conveyed nothing but assurance that Ford was clean, internal memos from EPA and other agencies showed there had been more uncertainty behind the scenes.

“There’s no doubt other stories are hidden in government warehouses and reading rooms, and I think environmental journalists would do well to devote the time to look into them,” he said.

“The Ramapoughs’ experience also showed me how sloppy cleanups can be, intentionally or not. It’s a subjective, inexact science, at best. The cleanups are largely organized and conducted by polluters and their consultants. Even where strong laws are in place, government agencies are often too understaffed to provide serious oversight,” Nussbaum said.

*SEJournal* put the same set of questions to both award winners about how they put together their stories:

First, Ken Ward Jr.:

**Q:** How did your story begin? How did you know it would be worth the time and energy?

**KW:** My story began with two events. First, I had heard that West Virginia’s Gov. Joe Manchin had a private meeting with a number of environmental activists who were upset with a Massey Energy coal waste impoundment in Raleigh County, and that the governor had promised to investigate their concerns.

Then, our state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) turned around and issued new permits for the facility, and for a new coal silo closer to the school – before the governor’s investigation even began. I wrote a story about that, and it prompted the grandfather of one of the Marsh Fork students to stage a one-man sit-in on the state capitol steps. That really got me interested.

So, I went and looked at the permit maps. In order to be legal, these silos – and the rest of the facility – had to be in existence and within a permit area that existed at the time the Surface Mining Act was passed, in 1977. Otherwise, they were prohibited by a 300-foot buffer around schools and other public buildings.

I spent some time looking at the maps, and it really didn’t take very long to see that the permit area had changed since the original permits. So, I spent a little more time examining all of the maps ever filed by the company. And, I had some overlays made at a local blueprint shop so I could compare the maps submitted from various years. That’s how I drew my conclusion that the silos were not going to be within the original – and legal – permit area.

**Q:** How did you frame or scale the story?

**KW:** Well, that changed. We had a Sunday story about ready to go about what we had found. But, I was still trying to get reaction from the state DEP to the maps. They kept putting me off. And, in the end, they announced on a Friday – just hours after meeting with me to finally discuss the maps – that they were revoking the permit. We had to run a daily story, because of their press announcement, and that forced us to rewrite the Sunday story somewhat too.

The daily story was basically, “DEP is revoking this permit because they discovered – after we told them – that the maps



**Mike Stefancik (here with granddaughter, Angel) has been living in Upper Ringwood for over 60 years. A Native American, although not a Ramapough, Stefancik’s wife is and they live among the mostly Ramapough Indians.**

showed the silos outside the permit area.” The Sunday story was a more detailed account of the changes in the permit over the years, and DEP’s refusal to investigate this very issue when citizens raised it more than a year before.

**Q:** What’s the most important thing you did to take your story from an idea into print?

**KW:** I guess it was a simple matter of doing some legwork – old-fashioned looking at files in a government agency office. That, and this – the citizens didn’t like this silo, and they just felt there was something wrong about putting it this close to a school. But, they did not have the time or expertise to examine the permit files and figure out if DEP had really done anything wrong in

*(Continued next page)*

# Gold... (from page 19)

permitting it. That's my job. Rather than being a story-telling exercise about folks who are upset about some environmental problem – the typical narrative reporters look for – this was old-fashioned investigative reporting that gives people information they need to be a vital part of their democracy. Without the information I gave citizens about this map, they really didn't have a leg to stand on in arguing with DEP.

**Q:** Great stories like yours seem to put people, like victims, into it. How did you find them?

gotten better in the last year, in part because I raised the issue on up to the governor's office, where folks said they didn't want to appear to be hiding anything.

Also, I think, Secretary Timmermeyer has become more comfortable being in the spotlight and more comfortable talking to me personally. I hope so, anyway. DEP has generally had good PR people, and they always try to help get information. But sometimes they also try to be minders to listen in to what I'm being told. Mostly, folks at DEP will almost always talk to me, though. They're proud of the work they do, and don't mind explaining things to me.

In this case, though, it took me a while to get the new mining director at DEP, Randy Huffman, or anyone else there, to sit down and look at these maps and answer questions about what I had found. Once they did, though, Randy was pretty open that I had caught them in a mistake and he was going to try to fix it.

I think part of dealing with agencies like this is being around for a while and getting to know people, and having them get to trust you and that you're giving them a fair shake.

**Q:** What do you look for in an investigative story?

**KW:** I try to look at problems that people in my community – West Virginia – identify in the environment around them, and then try to look at the system that is supposed to control or prevent those problems and see why it isn't working.

**Q:** Basically, you are a beat reporter. How did you get the time to do your stories? What happens to the beat when you are busy doing your story?

**KW:** *The Gazette* is a locally owned paper that has always been – and is still – a reporters' paper. By that, I mean that the upper management and the line editors will give reporters lots of time to look into big issues and write big stories about them. We're a small paper, but I put our substantive coverage of a whole range of issues up against any paper in the country.

Now, Alex Nussbaum:

**Q:** How did your story begin? How did you know it would be worth the time and energy?

**AN:** "Toxic Legacy" grew out of the work of two of our local reporters, Jan Barry and Barbara Williams. For years, they'd been covering Ford's cleanup of a Superfund site in North Jersey and the health problems the pollution had allegedly caused for neighbors living on the site. Jan and Barb had written plenty of dailies and enterprisers on the cleanup, but as they spent time in the community, they realized there was a larger tale to be told. They heard locals' stories of bizarre illnesses and high death rates. Jan, tipped off by the residents and local activists, hiked the surrounding woods and canoed streams and rivers in the area. What he found – big pools of hardened paint sludge, stacks of industrial barrels – made clear that the site hadn't been cleaned up despite the

*(Continued next page)*



Courtesy of THE RECORD/Thomas E. Franklin

**Donald Dutch Smith, the retired manager and next-door neighbor of the Wallkill Landfill in Wallkill, N.Y., recalls trucks dumping toxic lead paint sludge. The landfill has been capped and closed for years, but there were many illegal toxic dumpings at the site.**

**KW:** Well, the main one I talked to, Ed Wiley, was just this grandfather who showed up on the state capitol steps a couple blocks from my office. He wasn't hard to find. The others are just folks I know from living here and working here for 15 years.

**Q:** At what point did you contact the targets of your investigation? How cooperative were they?

**KW:** Well, I guess there were two targets. The company, Massey Energy, has a corporate policy of not talking to my newspaper because they don't like what we write about them. They've also sued us. My standard practice is just to put in the paper that they won't talk to *Gazette* reporters. However, I make it a point to always read their filings in court cases and listen to arguments their lawyers make in open meetings, and I try to give them their say that way, even though they won't talk to me.

The state Department of Environmental Protection here is another story. Our DEP has a ton of great people working for it who want to do a good job. But like most such agencies, they are run by political appointees who don't always have the same agenda as the career staff. Over the years, some DEP directors have been better than others in talking with me and allowing staff there to talk to me. The current DEP secretary, Stephanie Timmermeyer, is not a big fan of my work, and doesn't always respond well when DEP staff give me information or answer my questions. That has



assurances of Ford and the federal EPA. This wasn't just a potential threat to the local community – the industrial waste sat in the watersheds of a major reservoir, so the drinking water for 4 million people in New Jersey also seemed at risk.

At the same time, the community itself offered an intriguing story – a low-income, Native American enclave with deep ties to the land in the midst of the wealthy, go-go New York suburbs.

Our projects editor, Tim Nostrand, a veteran Jersey journalist, was the first to ask questions about organized crime. The mob had a chokehold on waste hauling in New Jersey for much of the last century, so it made sense to ask whether they had a hook into Ford's assembly plant as well. We took documents the company had handed over to the EPA, cross-referenced them with court records and the investigative reports of the State Commission on Investigation, and started to see connections.

With strains of race, class, pollution, disease, organized crime and government negligence, if not outright corruption, it was clear we had the makings of a bigger, richer story.

**Q:** How did you frame or scale the story?

**AN:** We decided early on to frame the story around Ford's old assembly plant in Mahwah, N.J., which produced much of the industrial waste dumped on the Ramapoughs' neighborhood. The Ramapoughs were the tragic heart of the story, certainly – the reason for readers to care – but we wanted to go beyond their plight. We also wanted to tell the story of a plant that was an economic pillar of the region in its time but also bequeathed an environmental disaster on some of its neighbors. So the plant would be a character, as would its workers, the executives in Detroit, politicians in Trenton and the shady haulers who deposited its waste across the landscape – not just in New Jersey but also across watersheds in upstate New York. So we decided to organize the story around the history of the plant itself, from the day it opened in 1955 through its environmental impacts today.

It was an ambitious plan, but the newspaper was willing to devote the time and resources. The cleanup had been bungled in such massive proportions, the suffering of the Ramapoughs was so acute and the potential impact to the regional water supply was so serious that the top editors felt it was a tale worth going at in a big way.

The key, I think, is to frame your project early on. Have a firm idea of the story you want to tell and what sources you're going to need. Maybe even write an outline or a lede at the start of the process to give you an idea of where you're trying to go. Keep an open mind, of course. The story will change. But a strong focus will rescue you when you wander down the inevitable blind alleys and dead ends of reporting.

**Q:** What's the most important thing you did to take your story from an idea into print?

**AN:** We couldn't have done a story of this scale without the newspaper's commitment of time and resources. The project team included the two local reporters, two health reporters, our one full-time environment reporter (me) and one of our two law

enforcement reporters. Each of us spent six months or more devoted almost exclusively to this story. *The Record* also spent about \$10,000 testing soil, water and the sludge itself.

That said, any environmental journalist could do this type of reporting. I find it funny sometimes to have won an "investigative" reporting award because the journalism we practiced was simple. This was basic, shoe-leather reporting. We spent months poring through government documents and knocking on doors across North Jersey and upstate New York. There was no "Deep Throat" involved, no special investigative training necessary.

**Q:** Great stories like yours seem to put people, like victims, into it. How did you find them?



Courtesy of THE RECORD/Thomas E. Franklin

**Mickey Van Dunk has a rare and devastating disease called hidrenitis suppurativa, which has left him with significant scars from skin graft operations.**

**AN:** We knew where the Ramapoughs were, of course. Gaining their confidence was the challenge. This is an insular group that's suspicious of outsiders. They opened up to us only after seeing us in their community, day after sweltering summer day, knocking on doors and slowly drawing out people's stories. Two of our reporters, Barbara Williams and Mary Jo Layton, all but moved in with the Ramapoughs, spending about two months in the neighborhood. It allowed us to get the small details that helped portray this mix of suburban and native culture, where animal pelts hang in backyards next to SUVs hulking in the driveway.

We insisted on documenting the Ramapoughs' claims of illness. HIPPA, the federal law protecting medical privacy, was a real obstacle here. Many hospitals were reluctant to cooperate, even after we obtained written permission from patients to discuss their cases. In some cases, we drove people to doctors' offices and clinics to obtain their files. It took a lot of time, but we knew we'd have to address skeptics who wondered if other factors were responsible for the Ramapoughs' illnesses or if they were exaggerating the problems to win a big pay day from Ford.

*(Continued next page)*

## Gold... (from page 21)

Tracking down workers from the old Ford plant, and the haulers who dumped their industrial waste, was a challenge. The plant had closed in 1980 and many potential sources had died or moved. We culled names from government documents, old clips and word-of-mouth. After we had a few names, it was just a matter of using Nexis and other databases to track people down. As often happens, one source led to another, which led to another.

we filed a series of FOIA requests anyway. We wanted to trigger the legal expectations and requirements that go along with such requests. That way, any agency that wanted to withhold information wouldn't just be giving a reporter a hard time; they'd be in violation of the law.

**Q:** What do you look for in an investigative story?

**AN:** Complexity, depth, richness of subject matter and good characters to interest readers – a story that can't be told properly without the extra time and space. Documentary evidence also helps – something that takes it beyond the typical he-said she-said story. The human element is key. Why spend six months on a 300-inch epic that no reader will care about?

**Q:** Basically, you are a beat reporter. How did you get the time to do your stories? What happens to the beat when you are busy doing your story?

**AN:** I focused solely on this story for about four months. Fortunately, *The Record* has another, part-time environmental reporter. But stories did fall through the cracks. I've done two long-term projects now (the last one a 2003 series on air pollution and the asthma epidemic). In both cases, I found my coverage didn't suffer much by missing some of those daily stories. I realized how many bureaucratic pronouncements, activist press conferences and ponderous "thumb-suckers" we cover as habit that don't add that much to the conversation. I never heard readers complain about missing that coverage. But many have praised our series.

Toxic Legacy: [www.toxiclegacy.com](http://www.toxiclegacy.com)



Courtesy of THE RECORD/Thomas E. Franklin

**Paul Van Dunk Sr. with a photo of his late daughter, Pauline, who died of cancer. Van Dunk attributes her death to the environment in her neighborhood, which has seen a great deal of dumping.**

The truck drivers and landfill workers involved in the illegal dumping were surprisingly willing to talk – perhaps because much of the activity occurred 30 or 40 years ago. I think most people want to tell their stories to someone. Show a little interest, politely, and they're likely to open up. I did as little reporting as possible over the phone, figuring it would be harder for people to say "no" to me in person. But we had a few doors closed in our face.

**Q:** At what point did you contact the targets of your investigation. How cooperative were they?

**AN:** We'd been covering the Superfund cleanup for years, and our requests for documents made it clear to regulators and Ford early on that we were working on something in-depth. But we didn't request our big, sit-down interviews until late in the process, after we had an idea of where the story was going. The EPA and New Jersey's environmental commissioner each sat with us for more than an hour, not counting countless follow-up calls. Ford declined our requests for a face-to-face interview and then refused to answer most of a list of e-mailed questions.

The EPA and state regulators were generally cooperative, but

*Ken Ward Jr. is a staff writer for The Charleston Gazette in Charleston, W. Va., where he has covered the environment and the coal industry for 15 years. He is a native of Piedmont, in Mineral County, W. Va., and a graduate of West Virginia University. Ward is a three-time winner of the Scripps Howard Foundation's Meeman Award for Environmental Journalism and, among other awards, received the prestigious Livingston Award for Young Journalists for his coverage of mountaintop removal coal mining. He is currently reporting on mine safety and the coal industry as part of a fellowship from the Alicia Patterson Foundation. Ward is also chairman of SEJ's First Amendment Task Force.*

*Alex Nussbaum is a senior reporter covering the environment for The Record of Bergen County, N.J. His work on asthma and air quality, mercury pollution and a fatal dormitory fire at Seton Hall University have won top honors from the Association of Health Care Journalists, the New Jersey Press Association and the Society of Professional Journalists. He graduated in 1992 from Cornell University.*

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

## Sweeps... (from page 1)

the writing; follow the same advice as you pitch them.

Adopt a broad definition for your beat and increase your odds of getting stories chosen. "Environmental" news could include health, weather and science reports. Everything from asthma, Teflon, smog and hurricanes can fall on your beat.

This is not about dumbing down your coverage. It's learning the art of the "story pitch" than can help you keep getting your stories on the air. Remember, stories that matter and stories that get watched are not mutually exclusive. You can achieve both.

Don't give up. Keep fighting for stories that matter.

Here then, are some successful environmental stories that you might localize in your market, along with a useful web link or tip to get you started:

**SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD:** Which restaurants are selling Chilean sea bass, orange roughy, wild shrimp, swordfish, beluga caviar, etc.? And which chefs have made the decision not to offer unsustainable seafood? Provides a great venue to examine over-

fishing issues in any city. See [www.usatoday.com/tech/science/2006-04-02-sustainable-seafood\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/2006-04-02-sustainable-seafood_x.htm)?  
POE=TECISVA

*Quick Tip:* Consult restaurant suppliers and chefs. Check out [www.seafoodwatch.org](http://www.seafoodwatch.org) to download the latest version of the Seafood Watch guide. These are also available as wallet/pocket cards and make a great resource to make available directly to viewers through your website.

**CHEMICAL COCKTAIL:** What's in your garage or under your sink? Regulators require tests of all chemical products. But no one knows the result of infinite combinations of these chemicals. The scientific concern continues to rise. What could manifest itself in 20 years, or in your future offspring? There's no better way to get 'endocrine disruptors' onto a local newscast.

*Quick Tip:* Consult researchers at your nearest teaching hospital or medical research center. Poison control centers have basic information on single products.

**WILDLIFE OFFICERS:** These guys are starving for media attention. Build trust and they'll take you out on stakeouts and undercover assignments busting illegal fishermen, hunters, poachers, polluters, etc. Caviar poaching in Oregon/KGW-TV: [www.kgw.com/news-local/stories/kgw\\_030205\\_news\\_cavair\\_ring.fc836b01.html](http://www.kgw.com/news-local/stories/kgw_030205_news_cavair_ring.fc836b01.html).

*Quick Tip:* Check with your state Fish and Wildlife agency as

well as State Police. Both may have game wardens and undercover wildlife crime investigators.

**WATER THEFT:** One of the SEJ award-winners last year was a Denver TV station that staked out trucks that made nightly, post-midnight raids on municipal fire hydrants, stealing tens of

thousands of gallons of water. Water Thieves in Denver/KCNC-TV: <http://cbs4denver.com/video/?id=2192@kcnc.dayport.com>

*Quick Tip:* Check with your local water, fire and police authorities on similar investigations.

**DYING TO BREATHE:** WTAE in Pittsburgh investigated the fine particle air pollution often thrown off by power plants. Particulate matter pollution can be found in many parts of the country. Dying to Breathe in

Pittsburgh: WTAE-TV: [www.thepittsburghchannel.com/news/4211977/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/news/4211977/detail.html).

*Quick Tip:* Check with your state environmental quality commission's air office. Consult the EPA's Toxics Release Inventory for air emissions in your region. Consult local universities who might have scientists investigating these local issues.

**ENCROACHMENT AT SOURCE OF DRINKING WATER:**

As populations grow, many cities are finding development getting closer to the source of municipal drinking water. This is especially compelling with sole source communities. How have the analyses of your local drinking water changed over the decades?

Has additional filtration been added as a result of encroachment? How much do these expensive additions cost taxpayers? Are cities considering alternative sources, such as deeper aquifers or desalinization plants?

*Quick Tip:* Consult local planning & zoning officials, water bureaus and advocacy groups who champion clean water.

**EARLIER SPRING/LATER FALL:**

Use local data to show when ponds freeze over, when the dogwoods bloom, when hummingbirds arrive, when the maple syrup starts to run. This is one that either a reporter or an on-air meteorologist can do.

*Quick Tip:* Check with the local Audubon Society, University Extension offices or state Departments of Agriculture.

**TAP WATER TEST:** Using proper protocols, collect dozens of tap water samples in various water treatment areas and have a lab test them (they have standard lists of 12 and 42 tests for differ-

(Continued next page)





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## Sweeps... (from page 23)

ent elements). If budget allows, do the same test weeks later to have more than a snapshot. While you're at it, have several bottled waters tested to see how they compare to local tap water. We found bottled water was 4,266 times more expensive than tap water. (Be prepared to run a story that finds that tap water is perfectly fine. Don't nuke the story if you don't find "bad" results. It can be just as illuminating when you find the opposite.) Water Testing in Miami/NBC-6: [www.nbc6.net/news/2618635/detail.html](http://www.nbc6.net/news/2618635/detail.html)

*Quick Tip:* Contract with a local food analysis laboratory.

**ZOO ANIMALS:** Which animals from your local zoo are taken from the wild? Is there a depletion issue for that species? Is there a moral distinction between a captive-bred zoo animal and a zoo animal taken from the wild?

*Quick Tip:* Consult conservation experts in local universities.

### WHAT DOES YOUR FIRE DEPARTMENT KNOW?

Does it know enough to fight a chemical fire at the big factory? The chemical industry clamored for years to roll back disclosure laws, and after 9/11, they've largely gotten their wish. Oh, and then there's the evacuation thing.

*Quick Tip:* Consult state and local departments of emergency management. Look for private security consultants based in your area. Plus, look for retired FBI agents with security expertise; these sources can become a gold mine for the long term.

**SALT WATER INTRUSION:** Coastal communities are seeing rapid growth, and stress on water supplies. Many places, particularly in the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, run the risk of sucking salt water into the aquifers they depend on.

*Quick Tip:* Consult local water bureaus and state departments who regulate aquifers or water quality. This may be the state health department in addition to environmental quality commissions.

**HOUSEHOLD POLLUTION:** Spread some fertilizer on the lawn and water immediately. Wash a car in the driveway. Take samples of the runoff hitting the gutter and have it analyzed for phosphorous, nitrogen and sediment. Odds are you'll get spikes and it'll illustrate what we do daily at home that then runs directly into storm drains and into rivers, often untreated.

Pollution at home: [www.kgw.com/homegarden/stories/kgw\\_092105\\_env\\_environmental\\_lawns\\_.7e650f97.html](http://www.kgw.com/homegarden/stories/kgw_092105_env_environmental_lawns_.7e650f97.html).

*Quick Tip:* Consult your states environmental quality commission; they might even offer you a lab to do the testing. Or hire a water analysis lab locally.

**RECYCLING:** Where do the plastic grocery bags, the newspapers, and the other stuff that's hauled off for recycling really go? When the market sags for newsprint or plastics, there's a chance it goes straight back to the landfill.

*Quick Tip:* Consult city recycling programs and regional or state environmental quality commissions. Track down the companies that receive your local recyclables to learn about their supply cycles. Examine contracts between cities and waste haulers. Do they allow them to dump recyclables when market rates dip?

**SEPTIC TANKS:** EPA estimates that 25 percent of all residential septic fields leak. Many find their way into drinking water supplies, but in most jurisdictions, there's little ability for monitoring or enforcement.

*Quick Tip:* Consult EPA in your region. Find local inspection results through state DEQ or health departments.

**SPRAWL FROM SPACE:** Google Earth is everywhere. And the ill-kept secret of the satellite/high altitude photography business is that its biggest clientele is the real estate industry, which uses the photos to help select the next location for a Wal-Mart, a Wendy's or a subdivision. As a result, a lot of cities have a 30-year set of data, via satellite shots, of how the cities have sprawled. Use the before-and-after pics to see the trees disappear, the houses expand, and more. [www.yubanet.com/artman/publish/article\\_34978.shtml](http://www.yubanet.com/artman/publish/article_34978.shtml)

*Quick Tip:* Consult local planning and zoning officials and major developers. Also track down your local arbor society or "Friends of Trees" advocates.

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*Vince Patton is an SEJ board member who works as an environmental reporter for KGW-TV in Portland, Ore.*

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## Dams, more on climate change, and a long-forgotten river trip

Exploring the legacy of dams and human delusions of grandeur

**DEEP WATER: THE EPIC STRUGGLE OVER DAMS, DISPLACED PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Jacques Leslie

Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, \$15.75

Reviewed by **NANCY BAZILCHUK**

A dam may not be forever, even if constructions like the Hoover Dam are expected to survive for a thousand years. A dam's environmental and social impacts, though, are enormous, extensive and essentially irreversible.

As described by Jacques Leslie in his recent book, "Deep Water: The Epic Struggle over Dams, Displaced People and the Environment," dams are arguably "at the core of conflicts throughout the world involving water scarcity, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, development and globalization, social justice, the survival of indigenous peoples, and the growing gap between rich and poor."

Each one of those topics could comprise an entire book, but fortunately for his readers, Leslie tackles the challenge in a compelling and impressively integrative way, portraying three protagonists in their interactions with dams.

Thus we meet Medha Patkar, an Indian activist who is literally willing to drown herself in the rising waters of the Narmada River as it backs up behind the Sardar Sarovar dam; Thayer Scudder, an American anthropologist who believes in the development benefits that dams can bring, but whose lasting achievement has been to stop the damming of the Okavango Delta in Botswana; and Don Blackmore, an Australian water resources manager struggling to make the Murray River, Australia's largest, into "a healthy working river" while meeting the agricultural demands of the world's most arid continent.

Leslie, an ex-war correspondent and magazine writer, discovered "Deep Water"'s protagonists by spending a month at the World Commission on Dams, in Cape Town, South Africa, an independent panel of twelve commissioners created by the World Bank in 1997. The commission, now disbanded, was assigned to evaluate all large dam projects (not just ones financed by the World Bank) for both their positive and negative effects, and to provide guidelines for future construction projects. What made the commission unique was that its members represented the "pro-dam," "anti-dam," and "mixed" camps in equal number.

Much to everyone's amazement, this balance of strong opinions didn't stalemate the commission's work; instead, in 2000, the commission issued its opus, "Dams and Development: A New

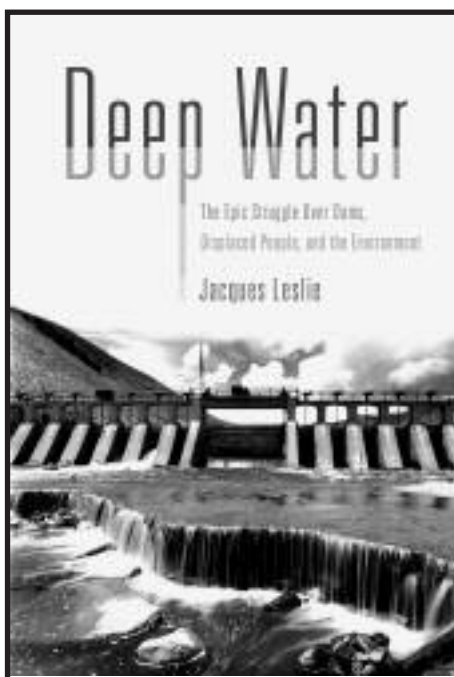
Framework for Decision-Making," which provided the framework for "Deep Water;" the three main characters are all former commission members representing the three divergent opinions on dam construction.

What results is a richly written view of the protagonists' three worlds and the complexity of dam-building. Leslie has a wonderful eye for telling details that illuminate the larger picture. My favorite is his description of 'Muela, a village in the southern Africa country of Lesotho that has weathered the construction of a nearby dam. He writes:

"Rondavels in sparse arced clusters overlooked the reservoir, and in their neatly trimmed thatched roofs exuded sufficiency. But above them ominously loomed the project's operations building, possessing a scale so unlike anything in its human-sized surroundings as to suggest that it had been deposited there by aliens, which, in a sense, it had. Massive and bland, it announced the arrival in 'Muela of modernity, three stories high and twenty-five horizontal windows per story, as linear as a milk carton..."

In the end, Leslie concludes, history will judge our spate of monumental dam-building badly. "They'll be relics of the twentieth century, like Stalinism and gasoline-powered cars," he says, "symbols of the allure of technology and its transience, of the top-down, growth-at-all-costs era of development and international banks, of the delusion that humans are exempt from nature's dominion, of greed and indifference to suffering."

Nancy Bazilchuk is a freelance writer and editor in Norway, where hydroelectric power provides the primary source of electricity and only one major watershed remains dam free.



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### Climate change scientist paints a stark and vivid picture

**THE WINDS OF CHANGE: CLIMATE, WEATHER AND THE DESTRUCTION OF CIVILIZATIONS**

By Eugene Linden

Simon & Schuster, \$26

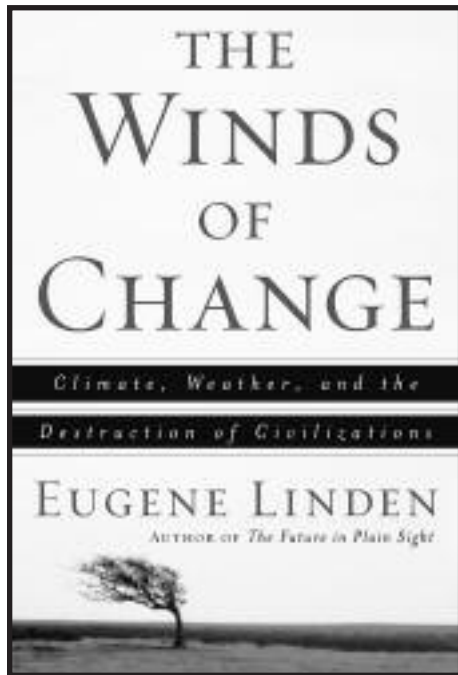
Reviewed by **JIM MOTAVALLI**

Global warming is becoming fashionable. *Time* magazine just devoted a special issue to the topic and *Vanity Fair's* "green issue" gave essay-length space to journalist Mark Hertsgaard. Not to mention the plethora of new books and even documentary films, including Laurie David's Earth Day HBO special "Too Hot

(Continued next page)

Not to Handle” and “An Inconvenient Truth,” featuring climate change talking head Al Gore.

You would think that all this attention would better inform the American people. But consider these statistics: Even though a



record 57 percent of Americans now believe that climate change is under way, only 36 percent say they worry about it “a great deal,” according to the most recent Gallup Poll. Another poll, this one by ABC/Time/Stanford University, reveals that 64 percent think there’s “a lot of disagreement” among climate scientists on the reality of global warming, despite the scientists’ near total consensus.

Veteran environmental journalist Eugene Linden says he has watched in frustration as the public view has diverged sharply from the scientific consensus. The media obviously deserve part of the blame,

being too quick to seek balance from the tiny band of naysayers, and for giving ample space to such non-scientific material as Michael Crichton’s novel “State of Fear.”

When I interviewed him, Linden summed up our state of affairs bluntly: “Lots of people think that climate change is still open to debate. In the last couple of years, the press did an abysmal job of conveying scientific alarm. It’s doing a better job now. As an analogy ... when somebody does a story on the dangers of smoking they don’t feel obligated to find scientists who work for Philip Morris to say that the dangers are minimal. There is the same level of consensus in the scientific community that climate change is a threat as you have on smoking being a danger to your health. Yet it’s been only very recently that the issue has been on the public agenda.”

All of this leads us to Linden’s elegant book, “Winds of Change,” which is mostly about the climatic record and its relationship to human societies. Parallels to Jared Diamond’s “Collapse” are unavoidable, particularly because Linden devotes chapters to the westward expansion and subsequent retreat of the Vikings and the mysterious disappearance of the Mayan culture. Unlike Diamond, who weighed factors such as the tendency of societies to exceed their “carrying capacity,” Linden focuses on the climate and weather factors.

Linden’s chapter on the Vikings is fascinating because it offers new insights into a long-ago tragedy: The probable starvation of many Viking settlers in Greenland when temperatures turned sharply colder between 1343 and 1345. The book contains a riveting description of scientists’ analysis of material found in the

*(Continued next page)*



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remains of a sod-and-wood house. After the inhabitants ate their dairy cows on ancient evenings 600 years ago, they went after the dogs and, finally, resorted to a starvation diet of ptarmigan and hare.

Linden is firmly in control of his material and the writing is fast-paced, especially when he's tagging along on a scientific expedition to the Arctic or voyaging through the North Atlantic in search of changes to the Gulf Stream.

However, readers' appetite for material like this should probably not be taken for granted. Sentences like this one don't help: "Apart from marine, lake, glacial, and dendrochronological records, there is also the climate record reconstructed from analysis of stalagmites and other forms of speleothems in regional caves."

The book is roughly chronological, moving through ancient times to the ravages of El Niño, which produced tragic droughts in the 1870s British Raj and in Suharto's Indonesia in the 1990s. It closes with some well-informed predictions about our climatic future. But the best thing about Linden's book is that it carefully builds a scientific case that weather and climate have played a far more important role in history than we've previously acknowledged, and that even bigger effects are coming.

"The Winds of Change" is well timed. Hurricane Katrina was a wake-up call for many in linking climate-warmed ocean water to increased storm intensity. Two years ago, while touring with *E/The Environmental Magazine's* book "Feeling the Heat: Dispatches from the Frontlines of Climate Change" (Routledge), I found it hard to interest audiences in global warming. Linden told me he's glad his book was delayed from its original publication date. "Had I been on time, it would have sunk without a trace," he said. Instead, it is appearing in airport book stores and achieving, when last I checked, a 4,000 rank on Amazon. It's not "The Da Vinci Code," but it's a start.

*Jim Motavalli is editor of E/The Environmental Magazine and co-author of "Green Living: The E Magazine Handbook for Living Lightly on the Earth" (Plume). He is helping organize the "Ride and Drive" at this year's SEJ conference in Burlington, Vt.*



### **Teddy's luckless, little-known trip makes a riveting tale**

#### **THE RIVER OF DOUBT: THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S DARKEST JOURNEY**

**By Candice Millard**  
**Doubleday, \$26**

#### **Reviewed by MARK NEUZIL**

In 1913, after getting whipped by Woodrow Wilson in the preceding presidential election, Theodore Roosevelt went to South America to lick his wounds in what for him was the only way for a real man to respond: an arduous, grueling, exhausting (and attention-getting) biological exploration of a dangerous, unknown country. The risky, ill-planned and luckless trip nearly killed Roosevelt, his son Kermit and everyone else in the party. Three men did die – one murdered, one drowned and one left to his own devices among hostile natives in the Amazonian jungle.

First-time author Candice Millard takes the reader along for the ride on this epic adventure, which nearly all other Roosevelt

biographers gloss over or ignore. At times the book reads like a potboiler; sometimes the events and narration seem so incredulous that one is left wondering "could their circumstances have been that dire?" and "how come I didn't know about this before?"

Yet, despite some small reservations about the author exaggerating the dangers of the journey, this remains a fascinating account of the ex-president, his son, Brazil's most famous explorer, Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, American George Cherrie, one of the most noted naturalists of his time, and several hard-working Brazilian comrades, three of whom don't return.

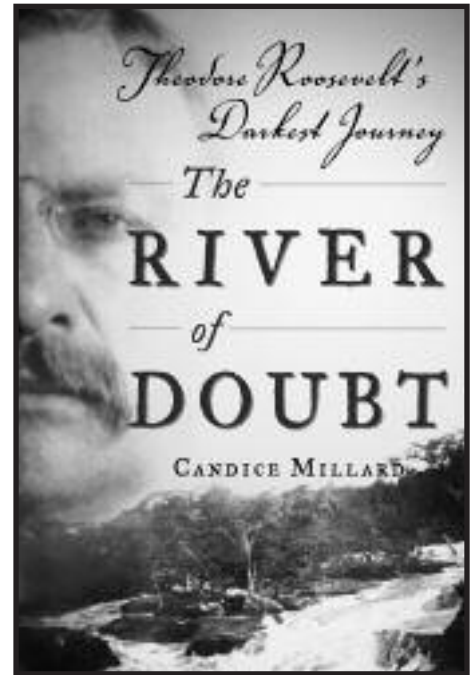
The idea for the trip came from the Rev. John Augustine Zahm, a "funny little Catholic priest" who was vain, self-important and spectacularly unqualified. Zahm did the planning; he hired a sporting goods store clerk named Anthony Fiala to be in charge of provisions and equipment. Fiala's resume included a disastrous 1903 expedition to the North Pole in which his ship was crushed in the ice and he and his men spent two frigid years awaiting rescue, "arguably making him the last person on earth to be entrusted with the planning or provisioning of a scientific expedition" to the Amazon, Millard writes.

Because of their poor planning, neither Zahm nor Fiala ended up making the most difficult part of the journey, down the previously unexplored, nearly thousand-mile-long River of Doubt, an Amazon tributary that featured white-water rapids, hostile natives, disease-carrying insects and plants and few sources of food. No one had a map, nor was a local guide employed.

Roosevelt became very ill with fever and spent part of the trip under a makeshift canopy riding in a canoe hacked out of a jungle tree, shielded from the sun and rain. The ex-president was in such bad shape by the time the expedition reached its rescuers that he had to be loaded by stretcher on the steamer home. Less than 5 years later he was dead, and his children considered the Amazon trip as a contributing factor.

Perhaps the saddest epitaph belonged to Kermit, a strapping 24-year-old whose grit and physical prowess helped keep his father alive. In many ways serving his father was the pinnacle of Kermit's life, which devolved into a spiral of alcoholism and self-loathing that ended in his tragic suicide.

*Mark Neuzil is chair of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has written several books.*



# Leaking gas tanks and chemical pollution are common focus

By MIKE DUNNE

Ever wonder what lies beneath your feet – what’s down there in the ground on which we walk?

*The Toledo Blade’s* Tom Henry has an editor, Jim Wilhelm, who asked that question and the result was an interesting look at what the government is doing – or not doing – to clean up gasoline spills from leaky underground tanks.

On Sunday, April 23, Henry’s story started out with these words: “Twenty-two years after taking the most aggressive action in history to prevent underground storage tanks from further polluting America’s drinking water, the federal government is sitting on \$2.5 billion in gas-tax money earmarked for a backlog of cleanups.

“The leaks are of critical concern for two reasons:

“Petroleum products have benzene, toluene, and other substances known to cause cancer or other health problems, including brain, heart, and lung damage. Young children are especially vulnerable.

“About half the nation’s drinking

water supply comes from groundwater. Some cities, such as Dayton and Springfield in Ohio, draw most of their drinking water from groundwater. A pin-hole leak that emits even a gallon of gasoline has the potential to contaminate up to 1 million gallons of groundwater.”

He went on to tell his readers about the thousands of petroleum leaks that have not been cleaned up in his state and elsewhere. Nationwide, there is a backlog of nearly 120,000 leaking tanks.

Henry’s leaking gasoline tank story was just one of hundreds of environmental stories that were printed and broadcast in the past three months. Stories ran the gamut from land-loss flooding problems in Alaska to health problems caused by popcorn-flavoring to the usual pollution problems.

Henry said the underground storage tank story began “with my city editor, who’s apparently fascinated by what lies beneath our feet. In the spring of 2002, he had me spend several weeks putting together our own series about the risk of

underground pipeline explosions we face as a country as the nation’s infrastructure deteriorates.” That effort won several awards and was a finalist for the John Oakes Award.

City Editor Wilhelm “was just curious how many tanks are still out there, where the leaky ones are and so forth. Then – surprise! – during my research I stumbled across a nifty little thing on the SEJ website called *TipSheet*. The general theme of my story started to take shape after reconnecting with a June 8, 2005, *TipSheet* item. I wasn’t so much intrigued by the controversy over the MTBE additive (mentioned prominently in the *TipSheet* item).”

What caught his attention was the 2005 Sierra Club report about the number of backlogged cleanups. “I also found recent GAO reports and, of course, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports and Congressional Research Service reports.”

Henry adds a tip of his hat to a post on

*(Continued next page)*

*SEJ's*

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the SEJ listserv by **Dave Poulson**, about work that his graduate students at Michigan State University's Knight Center for Environmental Journalism had done on this general topic.

"The story evolved from a generic 'How many underground storage tanks are there? Where are they? How many leak?' type of story into a more refined theme about how the federal government has allowed bureaucracy to slow down the pace of cleanups for a major source of pollution identified more than 20 years ago." A regional EPA official told Henry that leaking tank cleanup was one of the few areas where money was available, but apparently off limits for spending.

"The same story can be done from any state simply by finding out who the underground storage tank guru is, both at your regional EPA office and in your state agency. For the regional EPA office, that's easy. At the state level, you'll likely find out that it's a toss-up between the state environmental regulator or the state fire marshal's office or a natural resource agency or some other agency, Henry said.

He also suggests finding "somebody to give you a primer on how the system works, how contractors do their jobs, how applications for cleanup plans are filed, etc., i.e., get walked through the bureaucracy and get to understand their world." For starters, go to [www.epa.gov/swerust1/states](http://www.epa.gov/swerust1/states). That's a general clearinghouse of information called State, Local, and Tribal Underground Storage Tank Programs, with links to background information. Eventually, you'll want to end up at [www.epa.gov/swerust1/states/statcon1.htm](http://www.epa.gov/swerust1/states/statcon1.htm), which is a directory of links to state officials and state data.

The data was current as of Sept. 30, 2005, and is apparently updated every six months. "Be forewarned the numbers are cumulative since 1988," Henry added. "Find out how much money your state gets from the national Leaking Underground Storage Tank Fund, which was created in 1986. Chances are it'll be in the vicinity of \$1.4 million annually," he said.

There are at least a half dozen Government Accountability Office reports on the subject. Five can be found at [www.epa.gov/OUST/ustsystem/gaorepts.htm](http://www.epa.gov/OUST/ustsystem/gaorepts.htm). One of the more recent ones came out in November, GAO report 06-45 ([www.gao.gov/new.items/d0645.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0645.pdf), with

**Douglas Fischer** of the *Oakland Tribune* reported on March 8 that researchers see ethnic differences in the health impacts of a suspected carcinogen used to make nonstick and stain- and water-resistant products. Whites are contaminated with three times the amount of perfluoro-



Courtesy of THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

**Tom Henry of the Toledo Blade** looked at funding for cleaning up and replacing leaking gasoline tanks.

summary [www.gao.gov/docdb/lite/details.php?rptno=GAO-06-45](http://www.gao.gov/docdb/lite/details.php?rptno=GAO-06-45))

EPA also put out a decent backgrounder in a March 2004 report that was released at a national underground storage tank conference. "It soft-pedaled the issue of backlogs and played up the progress angle." See [www.epa.gov/swerust1/pubs/20annrpt.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/swerust1/pubs/20annrpt.pdf) for full report.

Chemical pollution continued to be a focus on the beat.

On April 25, **Dennis Bueckert** of Canadian Press had a story about a new study that "persuasively linked" the most commonly used weed killer on Canadian lawns and gardens – known only as 2,4-D – to cancer, neurological impairment and reproductive problems. The report in the journal *Pediatrics and Child Health* contradicts a recent re-assessment of 2,4-D by the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency, which found it does not cause cancer. The issue has been controversial for years, Bueckert said.

chemicals or PFCs than Hispanics. Levels in blacks are half those in whites, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Levels for men in all three racial groups are slightly higher than women, according to the research, slated for publication in the April 1 edition of *Environmental Science and Technology*. CDC researchers cannot explain the differences, though genetic and lifestyle factors are primary culprits, Fischer reported.

**Andrew Schneider** of the *Baltimore Sun* wrote about how federal occupational health scientists and others investigated the illnesses endured by workers exposed to butter flavoring at popcorn plants in six states. The package of stories ran April 23.

**Kevin McGran** of the *Toronto Star* wrote March 6 that the number of Canadian freight-train accidents and toxic spills is climbing and that "only a tiny fraction of the accidents are ever investi-

*(Continued next page)*



**Beat...** (from page 29)

gated. There were 11,147 accidents between 1996 and the end of 2005 and almost all involved freight trains. Last year, there were 1,246 accidents – the most since 1996 – and 215 of them involved toxic and dangerous materials.”

On May 10, *San Diego Union-Tribune* staff writer **Mike Lee** was one of several reporters to use the recent release of the annual Toxics Release Inventory. “Bucking state and national trends, San Diego County has increased its reported amount of toxic chemicals emitted by smokestacks, hauled to landfills and released into the environment in other ways. Between 2000 and 2004, the amount of federally tracked toxins discharged in California and the United States dropped by about one-third. In contrast, the countywide total swelled by 60 percent,” Lee wrote about the newspaper’s analysis.

**Kristin Collins** of the *Raleigh News & Observer* wrote on March 12 about field workers who gave birth to deformed babies were illegally exposed to pesticides more than 20 times each while they picked tomatoes in eastern North Carolina. All worked for Ag-Mart, a Florida-based tomato grower, and they were illegally exposed to a host of chemicals as often as three times a week, according to Department of Agriculture documents. Three of the 15 chemicals are linked to birth defects in lab animals. Ag-Mart said none of its workers were illegally exposed to pesticides and that the Agriculture Department misinterpreted its records.

On March 18, Collins wrote that violators of North Carolina’s pesticide laws who have sprayed homes, cars and waterways with toxic chemicals have endangered human health, killed animals and fish, and left containers coated with poisonous residue beside busy roads. Her review of state pesticide enforcement records showed violators rarely paid more than a few hundred dollars for their illegal acts.

On March 12, **Nell Boyce** on the “Morning Edition” of National Public Radio reported on a new website that

questions some products using nanotechnology, including some cosmetics. It is the Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The center has just put up a new website with a searchable list of 212 commercially available nano-products. Thirty-one of those products are cosmetics. ([www.nanotechproject.org/](http://www.nanotechproject.org/))

**Marc Reisch** of *Chemical and Engineering News* wrote that terms such as “organic” and “natural” often get top billing on cosmetic labels, but some synthetic polymers are often the real stars behind skin creams, hair sprays, sunscreens, and a host of other cosmetics. The story ran May 8.

Before there was a Richmond, Calif., there was Standard Oil, a 600-acre refinery built atop former marshland in 1901, reported **Kristi Cole** and producer **Ben Trefny** of KALW News of the San Francisco United School District on March 12. Standard was one of three industries that put Richmond on the map (the city was incorporated in 1905). But over the years, many Richmond residents seem to think that the giant refinery, the largest on the Pacific Coast, has hurt the town. The 30-minute radio documentary examined the history of the relationship between the company and the community. ([www.kalwnews.org/ram\\_files/news2006\\_03\\_12.ram](http://www.kalwnews.org/ram_files/news2006_03_12.ram))

**Michael Janofsky** of *The New York Times* was one of several reporters to cover a federal appeals court decision overturning a clean-air regulation issued by the Bush administration. On March 17, he wrote that the Bush plan would allow many power plants, refineries and factories to avoid installing costly new pollution controls to help offset any increased emissions caused by repairs and replacements of equipment. “The ruling by a three-judge panel was the court’s second decision in less than a year in a pair of closely related cases involving the administration’s interpretations of a complex section of the Clean Air Act,” Janofsky wrote.

**Roberto Santiago** of *The Miami*

*Herald* wrote about mercury in fish caught in area waterways. “The state health department says that people – especially pregnant women and children – should avoid eating predator fish such as bowfin, gar, and largemouth bass 14 inches or longer – especially in areas highlighted on its website,” he wrote on April 30.

On the other end of the sunshine state on the same day, **Nathan Crabbe** of the *Gainesville Sun* wrote about another fish problem – the misunderstood and endangered sturgeon and a controversial restoration plan. University of Florida researcher Frank Chapman said, “The sturgeon is in trouble and we better do something about it because the fish aren’t going to do it themselves.”

**Emily Heffter** of the *Seattle Times* wrote May 2 that city’s schools shut off drinking fountains in 100 public schools after tests found traces of arsenic in the water. “School-district officials don’t think children were exposed to the water with arsenic – at least not enough to affect their health,” she wrote. The district has already begun a \$13 million project to replace pipes and fixtures amid concerns over high levels of lead and iron in some faucets.

On the other side of the country, another drinking water controversy played out. **Howard Weiss-Tisman** of the *Brattleboro Reformer* wrote May 11 about the battle over fluoride in drinking water in Bellow Falls, Vt. “Two public health experts with more than 60 years of experience between them assessed a 500-page report by the National Research Council and reached different conclusions,” he wrote. “Now it is up to the voters of Bellows Falls to figure it out.”

**David Goldstein** of Knight Ridder Newspapers wrote Feb. 7 about a newly discovered Food and Drug Administration report that indicated the agency had data at least three years ago that some soft drinks had unsafe levels of cancer-causing benzene.

“The Environmental Working Group, a private, nonprofit scientific research

(Continued next page)

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**Did you know...**

**you can find freedom of information act tips at SEJ.org**

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organization, found the data recently in a June 2003 FDA report chronicling the level of contaminants and nutrients in food and beverages," he wrote. "Known as the Total Diet Study, the report shows that between 1995 and 2001, nearly 80 percent of the diet cola that the FDA sampled had benzene levels higher than the limit allowable in drinking water. Among 24 diet cola samples, 19 had levels that were on average four times higher."

On March 27, **Randy Lee Loftis** of *The Dallas Morning News* wrote about drinking water system violations in Texas. Most "occur in small to medium-sized systems, which make up about 90 percent of state's drinking water systems but serve fewer than 10 percent of the 22 million Texans who get public water. Only 6 percent violated health standards in 2004. The 280 violators served 872,721 people, just 4 percent of all Texans. In 2005, however, the percentage of Texans who drank water from violator systems jumped to 13 percent. State regulators say they expect the percentage to go up again this year – not because the water is worse, but because the rules are getting tighter, and it takes some systems awhile to get into compliance," Loftis wrote.

**Timothy B. Wheeler** of the *Baltimore Sun* wrote May 11 that Exxon Mobil Corp. is facing more lawsuits over the 25,000-gallon gasoline leak at a service station this year that fouled ground water in the Jacksonville area of Baltimore County. The lawsuits accuse ExxonMobil of negligence for allowing the gas to leak from an underground fuel line at a service station. The suits also accused the company and the station operator, Storto Enterprises Inc., of knowingly failing to report the leak for 37 days and of exaggerating the success of cleanup efforts, Wheeler wrote.

Six residential and commercial wells have been contaminated enough by gasoline or its components to exceed state drinking-water guidelines, but officials say 62 residential wells show traces of methyl tertiary butyl ether, or MTBE, a gasoline additive, the story said.

After last fall's Hurricane Katrina demolished most of New Orleans, the condition of flood protection levees continues to capture some journalistic attention. On April 17, **Edward Epstein** of the *San*

*Francisco Chronicle* wrote about concerns for the 1,100 miles of levees along the Sacramento-San Joaquin River delta complex. "Government officials admit they have their fingers crossed that the system of flood barriers that has been starved for maintenance funding will survive the next few months and beyond without a disaster," he wrote. He quoted one area congressman, Republican Richard Pombo, as saying: "... under current conditions, it is not a question of if there will be a serious failure, but when."

**Marina Strauss** of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* wrote on April 23 about retailers painting themselves "green" to polish corporate images and boost profits. "They are adding more environmentally friendly products to store shelves and launching internal eco-sensitive programs, all in a bid to cut costs and respond to consumers' heightened awareness of the benefits of a clean environment." These new campaigns are not aimed at tree-huggers but the "conventional consumer."

*Washington Monthly's* **Christina Larson** wrote in the May edition about the controversy over an effort to sell off public lands for mining and other commercial lands. After environmental groups noticed a last-minute amendment to a budget reconciliation bill, Larson wrote that they "called allies in the Senate, where the measure could still be defeated. It didn't take much prodding before western Democrats were united against the provision. But to stop the land sales, Republican senators would also need to speak out. That was a harder sell."

**Robert McClure** of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote about the Washington Legislature doing the opposite of the rest of the country – trying to build new dams rather than dismantling them.

The legislature wanted to spend \$200 million on dams. "To slake Eastern Washington's thirst, water would be siphoned off the West's largest river, the Columbia, and stored behind dams in massive lakes – although no one is sure yet whether such water would even be available," McClure wrote March 8.

South Dakota has arguably the best potential for wind power in the nation, but lags behind neighbors with lesser resources, wrote **Ben Shouse** of the *Sioux*

*Falls Argus Leader*. One reason is the state's remoteness, but the inner workings of the electrical grid also pose challenges that are often more political and cultural than physical, he wrote in articles that ran March 26-28. ([www.argusleader.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060326/NEWS/603260345/1001](http://www.argusleader.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060326/NEWS/603260345/1001))

**Jane Kay** of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote on March 8 that federal regulators were considering a West Coast ban on fishing for some of the ocean's tiniest creatures, the shrimp-like krill that support a vast food web of fish, seabirds and whales. Such a ban would be a first. "[W]arming ocean waters and a drop in krill numbers last spring set off a domino effect of sea life deaths," causing the 19-member Pacific Fishery Management Council that advises the U.S. Department of Commerce on fishing regulations to recommend a limit on fishing of krill in federal waters, 200 miles from shore.

**Judy Fahys** of the *Salt Lake Tribune* wrote about the diverse coalition of Utahans – politicians, four-wheelers, green activists, business and even the top leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – telling the U.S. Bureau of Land Management that they oppose plans to transport nuclear reactor waste to the Skull Valley desert. A consortium of nuclear-power utility companies called PFS wants to build and operate a long-term storage facility for reactor waste on part of the Skull Valley Goshutes Reservation in Tooele County.

**Alex deMarban** of the *Anchorage Daily News* wrote about two Eskimo communities – among a dozen or more coastal villages in Alaska – losing ground to the Bering and Chukchi seas because warmer autumns are breeding more storms and melting shore ice that once stopped waves. "In recent years state and federal officials have considered relocating some of the villages but cost estimates in the hundreds of millions of dollars have slowed the discussion. This may be the first time escape roads and bridges, offering a cheaper short-term fix, will be built," he wrote on May 8.

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*Mike Dunne, assistant editor of the SEJournal, writes for The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La.*

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## Platte... (from page 4)

and only to California in irrigated acres, according to Ann Bleed, acting director, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

The new cooperative agreement is a step towards balancing use of the limited water resources. Under it, the states, along with the Department of Interior, were to develop a basin-wide management plan to restore wildlife habitat for endangered and threatened species – the whooping crane, piping plover, least tern and the pallid sturgeon – while meeting human water needs. After 15 years of haggling and more delays than can be counted, the Integrated Management Plan for the Platte River came out this spring.

“The river in itself is in a stage of jeopardy. We are at a critical point,” said Steve Anschutz, Nebraska field supervisor, US Fish and Wildlife Service. Other animals not yet listed are also declining, such as the plains top minnow and the Platte River caddis fly.

The 13-year program, if approved, will provide 80,000 acre feet of water to increase spring flows, protect and restore 10,000 acres of land for habitat and mandate research and monitoring using adaptive management. Current water users would retain their rights, dams and other facilities’ licenses would be renewed and new monitoring would begin.

But the plan is drawing criticism. Conference speakers representing government agencies, environmental groups, a law firm, farming interests and power districts voiced a range of concerns

and pointed out numerous problems with the plan. Most worrisome are funding, program delays and changes, regulatory uncertainty, questionable wildlife benefits, lack of trust among participants, fair sharing of resources and increased federal oversight.



Courtesy of WENDY HESSLER

**Ornithologists call the Platte River Valley and avian Serengeti, offering one of the most spectacular concentrations of migratory birds anywhere in the world.**

air as their silhouetted bodies blackened the sky overhead.

The management plan is still a long way from getting off the ground, though. The Department of Interior just approved the completed final draft document in May. The required environmental impact statement, the record of decision and the US Fish and Wildlife's biological opinion are expected soon. After all of the federal approval, the three governors must approve the plan, and Nebraska is in an election year. Then, Congress can appropriate the money. Start date may be as late as fall 2007.

After leaving the blind and grabbing dinner and a few hours sleep, we returned to Rowe Sanctuary to watch the birds lift off for their daily corn feed. We walked back to the blind in the predawn dark and seven degree temperatures. Not far away, thousands of the red-headed, gray-feathered critters stood in the shallow water and on the sandbars protected by the flowing river. Later, shortly after daybreak, the birds took off. The raucous, deafening chatter filled the

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*Wendy Hessler is a freelance writer based in Omaha, Neb.*

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