

SEJ Journal

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Smog lingers over Houston Media muddle Bush's record as air progress slows

By **BILL DAWSON**

Truth, it is said, is the first casualty of war. And in the political battles of George W. Bush's presidential campaign, accuracy has already suffered multiple wounds.

Houston's notorious air pollution has become one of the initial battlegrounds of the 2000 presidential campaign. Texas Gov. George W. Bush and his supporters have exaggerated his pollution-control accomplishments. Critics, eager to fault him, have misstated his record. And even prestigious news organizations have failed to get the facts right.

It should be no surprise that in the heat of the presidential race, combatants would vie to portray Bush as an environmental hero or corporate toady. But the

reality is more complicated. In fact, despite Bush's original focus on voluntarism for many older industrial plants, his appointees have also pursued mandatory pollution controls for industry. And though it is bad, Houston's ozone pollution in recent years does not show a clear worsening trend. The city's problem is a failure to improve.

"I haven't seen any information indicating it is getting worse," said Rob Barrett, Harris County's pollution control director and an occasional critic of state officials' actions during Bush's term as governor.

Of course, holding your own is not good enough for Houston. The lack of recent progress after years of slow improvement shows the task of eliminat-

ing excessive ozone is huge. The leveling off of ozone reduction there, Barrett said, is "a great, great concern."

Clearing the air on this subject is far from easy. The complex air quality problems of the nation's oil and petrochemical capital offer plenty of opportunities for misunderstanding, oversimplification and outright error. Claims and counterclaims of a

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George W. Bush

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Parks: Green spaces may calm and cool us

By **JIM SCHWAB**

Urban park stories can grab readers' attention by hitting them where they live—and where they and their children play.

After decades in which conservation meant a dedication to things "out there," meaning out of town, the last two decades have produced a new interest in the environment of the cities and suburbs in which most of us live and work. Naturally, much of the environmental movement initially worked to clean up industrial areas and reduce air and water pollution.

But in recent years, the public has focused increasingly on parks and open spaces that provide not only recreation but a bit of nature in the city. "City liv-

ability" has even become a presidential campaign theme, as have concerns about urban sprawl. And some say it could have effects far beyond the aesthetic.

Some researchers have suggested that the quality of the urban environment, including access to trees and open space, affects people's mental health. Among the pioneers in this area are Francis E. Kuo, a psychologist, and William C. Sullivan, who teaches environmental design. In 1993 they founded the Human-Environment Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.

One of their studies tested the socialization of residents of the Robert Taylor Homes public housing project in

(Continued on page 30)

SEJ: Training a generation

A request came recently from a foundation representative who has long supported the Society of Environmental Journalists.

He asked about SEJ's major accomplishments over its decade-long life. What would you say, he asked, has been SEJ's impact. What were the signal achievements that would not have happened without SEJ?

At first, it struck me as a disturbing question. I mean, why has this foundation been supporting us if they didn't know our significance. Then, I had some more mature thoughts about the question.

It never hurts, after all, to consider your place in the world, where you've been, where you are and where you want to go. SEJ, thanks to our supporter's prodding, could profit from such an assessment. Of course, our answers would also be useful to him in his pitch to his board. But I saw great merit in SEJ asking itself this question—for its own benefit.

So SEJ Executive Director Beth Parke put a query out on the SEJ listserv. And members began to respond.

Robert McClure, a writer at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, recalled how lonely he felt when he began to cover the environment more than a dozen years ago, before SEJ. He faced a daunting task of mastering a wide array of topics—economics, biology, chemistry, etc.—with no one to help.

"Occasionally when I meet a reporter new to the beat it occurs to me how lucky he or she is to have SEJ available. For one thing environment reporters are not usually well-understood even in their own newsrooms. The nature of the beat is that we are doing things a little differently than others around us in the building."

"Environment stories generally don't break, they ooze," McClure continued. "You can't successfully cover this beat by reading news releases and making friends with a few key sources. Instead, we must delve deeply into fairly complicated topics and talk to a wide range of people that changes from story to story."

James Eli Shiffer of *The News & Observe* in Raleigh, N.C., added that other reporters in his newsroom are envious that he has an association of cooperative colleagues to help him do his job.

"The listserv, *SEJournal* and the conferences have introduced me to stories, sources and fellow reporters that enrich my work every day," Shiffer said. "Environmental coverage would be much the poorer without the Society of Environmental Journalists."

Brian Lavendel, a freelance journalist, said it's tough to pinpoint SEJ's single achievement. Of most value is the organization itself. The conferences, listservs, publications, workshops and personal relationships he's established through SEJ have made him more professional and effective as a journalist, he added.

Report from the society's president

By
Mike
Mansur



"Indeed, I feel that my professional identity has in large part been defined by our organization," Lavendel said.

Katie Hetrick of the *Press Enterprise* in Bloomsburg, Pa., said SEJ has been especially valuable to a small-town reporter. It's helped her explain corporate pollution, recycling and dozens of other issues.

"Small papers and their not-so-well-paid reporters do not have the resources to read dozens of journals, attend scientific conferences or enjoy any of the other perks that allow a reporter to truly stay current on a complicated topic like the environment.

"But with SEJ's help, I have a good idea what today's environmental issues are, learn ways I can get to information and see how to make my readers understand these issues. Without this group, I know our environmental coverage would suffer greatly and probably be forever limited to breaking stories about the fight over the local landfill."

Taking a cue from Jimmy Stewart's

George Bailey, Jim Schwab, editor of *Zoning News*, said a better question might be "What would journalism be like today if SEJ had never been?"

"No one is systematically raising the flag of environmental journalism, no one is asking what special needs should be addressed for those writing on this subject, no one is particularly trying to educate and inspire the growing number of journalists inclined toward this topic despite its intense technical demands.

"Would America's environmental news coverage be poorer without SEJ? I think so. We should realize we've come a long way, Baby, and who would want to go back? Who else would fill the void?"

I don't know who would have filled that void. Someone might have. But, no doubt, SEJ has more than ably carried the banner of environmental journalism. We've grown in numbers, programs, staff and sophistication. We've trained a generation of reporters in newsrooms across America.

Even the journalist in some newsroom who has never read a single piece of SEJ material has been elevated, in my opinion. For he must compete and profit from the competition and the stories of all those around him.

What's more, if four environment stories are finalists for the Pulitzer Prize—as was the case this year—who could possibly calculate how many of those had their roots in the story of some other reporter before, who inspired or provoked those who came after to go beyond anything they ever thought possible.

If, as George Bailey learned, one man's life touches so many others, how many thousands could it be that an organization like SEJ has touched?

They must be too numerous to count.



I'd like to thank all those who responded. It's tough in the world of daily journalism to take time to think about such weighty questions. But, boy, is it worth it when you do.

I also want to thank Colony Brown, who brought so much to the SEJ board as the associate representative. Colony has ventured off into the dot-com world, outside journalism. Thanks so much, Colony, for all your contributions. ❖



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

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Brown steps down

SEJ board representative for Associate members Colony Brown has stepped down after serving almost two years of her three-year term. Brown left her position as senior project director for the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation to pursue a career change as marketing manager for a D.C. area Internet start-up, cvent.com.

Elected to the SEJ board in 1998 at the annual meeting in Chattanooga, Tenn., Brown worked to solidify SEJ's partnership with RTNDF. As a member of the SEJ membership committee, she reviewed applications and worked to market SEJ membership through the use of e-mail lists and broadcast trade press.

Members attending SEJ's Ninth National Conference in L.A. will remember the "Hollywood, Press and the Environment" plenary session's introductory video, which Brown produced. She also organized RTNDF panels last year and at several other SEJ national conferences.

Brown played an important role in the creation and distribution of *TipSheet*, a biweekly electronic publication of news tips for journalists, produced jointly by SEJ, RTNDF and the National Safety Council's Environmental Health Center.

SEJ's 2000 annual board election will include a vote by Associate members to fill Brown's vacancy for the final year of her term. A call for candidates for the Associate representative will be mailed to the Associate members in June. SEJ's board election will be held at the annual meeting in October. ❖

Foundations respond to proposals

The following foundations recently announced grants in response to SEJ proposals for project funding and general support of SEJ programs 2000—2002:

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park, Calif.: \$200,000 over two years, for general support.

The W. Alton Jones Foundation, Charlottesville, Va.: \$200,000 over two years, for f programs including national and regional conferences, publications, and new-member outreach.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation of Miami, Fla.: \$200,000 over two years, for a series of programs to improve environmental journalism.

C.S. Mott Foundation, Flint, Mich.: \$75,000 over 18 months, for programs to strengthen environmental reporting of the Great Lakes region.

The Turner Foundation, Atlanta, Ga.: \$40,000 over two years, general support.

The George Gund Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio: \$21,120 , one year, for Ohio-based activities. ❖

SEJournal submission deadlines

Summer '00	July 15, 2000
Fall '00	October 15, 2000
Winter '01	January 15, 2001
Spring '01	April 15, 2001

Send submissions to SEJournal editor Rob Taylor, reltaylor@aol.com, 7204 45th Street, Chevy Chase, MD, 20815.

Journalists probe environmental justice issues

By JAMES BRUGGERS

The Chevron Oil refinery in Richmond, Calif., opened its gates to nearly 50 journalists as part of a Society of Environmental Journalists regional workshop on covering environmental justice issues.

“Reporting on Refineries,” held March 11, was also sponsored by the Center for Environmental Journalism at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. Co-sponsoring the event: National Association of Black Journalists, Asian American Journalists Association, Northern California chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and the *Contra Costa Times*.

The event was organized by veteran SEJ volunteers Jane Kay of the *San Francisco Examiner* and UC-Berkeley and Denis Cuff of the *Contra Costa Times*, with instigation early planning help by SEJ board member James Bruggers, now with the *Louisville Courier Journal*.

The tour provided a rare look inside at the maze of pipes, tanks and stacks that make up the refinery. Bay Area oil refineries have been in the news a lot in recent years, often after fires or explosions—some of them deadly. Some send smoke into nearby low-income neighborhoods.

The region’s refineries are often reluctant to let the media inside. Typically, Cuff said, “you have to have a reason and an escort.” The journalists’ visit to the refinery was strictly controlled and photographs were allowed only in one area—of an on site wetlands that serves as a water treatment facility.

“We just couldn’t resist the chance to roam around one of the largest refineries,” said workshop participant Chris Thompson, staff writer at the *East Bay Express*, the main alternative weekly in Alameda and Contra Costa counties just across the bay from San Francisco.

Chevron provided the tour via bus and let people out at one stop: a wetland that doubles as a water treatment facility. In a meeting room, the company’s top environmental officials gave presentations on how they’ve reduced pollution and worked with their residential neighbors on their concerns. They fielded a battery of tough questions from the participants dealing with how gasoline is made, how it is priced at the pump and how the company addresses pollution and worker safety concerns, as well as the future of the controversial gasoline additive MTBE.

In the afternoon, participants met at a community center near the refinery for a series of panel discussions. Speakers included environmental regulators, other refinery and industry representatives, environmentalists and Richmond residents. The officials who attended gave participants an explanation of how refineries are regulated and discussed the difficulties of determining what’s safe and what’s not.

“The word safe means different things to different people,” said Steve Hill, manager of permit evaluations for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Journalists need to be careful about using the word “safe” and understand that people’s different perceptions come into play, as well as politics. Bay Area refineries contribute just 4.5

percent of the region’s air pollution, he said.

Dr. John Balmes, chief of the UC-San Francisco Medical Center’s occupational and environmental medicine division, talked about rising rates of asthma in the United States. But he said the cause is hard to determine.

The workshop also allowed participants to hear from people who live near refineries and work on environmental justice issues.

Among them: Pamela Chiang and Nouth Senenoi, both with the Laotian Organizing Project. The project, working on behalf of 10,000 Laotian immigrants who live in the area, has been fighting for a multi-lingual community warning system for Contra Costa County’s industrial area, home to 350 small- and large-scale industrial sources and 22 Superfund sites.

“We are here as refugees,” Nouth Senenoi said through an interpreter. “Most of us don’t speak English.” If there’s an accident, she said, “We won’t know what to do.”

Speaker Henry Clark of the West County Toxics Coalition in Richmond has been a national leader in the environmental justice movement. He did not shy away from the politically charged words of “environmental racism.” He asked that the conscientiousness of the nation be awakened “to make sure that these facilities are operating safely, to make sure that these communities don’t continue to be the dumping ground for new industries, because they’re already disproportionately impacted.”

Don Gosney, with the Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 342, offered his list of tips for journalists who cover refineries. Among them:

1. Bring fresh batteries for your “crapola meter” because “it’s going to get knee deep.”
2. Everybody has an agenda; get to know the agendas.
3. Find sources beyond refinery sources of spokespeople and workers. Find contract workers to talk to; they can know a lot.
4. Even though you may be on a tight deadline, be careful of whom you quote. “There are a lot of kooks out there,” he said, and many don’t know what’s going on.

Jim Bruggers is environmental reporter for the Louisville Courier Journal.



Reporters Cheryl Colopy and Kathy McNally question Jim Storrs, the refinery’s process safety manager.





Workshop focuses on science, salmon and style

By **NIELS NOKKENTVED**

About 35 journalists and university students heard from top scientists and writers in a two-day regional workshop in Moscow, Idaho, April 20 and 21.

Sponsored by the Society of Environmental Journalists and the University of Idaho, the sessions were led by eight journalists who talked about their craft and 16 scientists, professors and professionals who explored scientific issues. Scientific topics ranged from salmon conservation to biotechnology, water quality and nuclear issues.

Keynote speaker William Dietrich, former *Seattle Times* science writer and Pulitzer Prize winner, discussed science writing in general and the public's need for reliable information from journalists. And several attendees took advantage of the opportunity to get a one-on-one critique of their work from writing coach and author Michael Frome. This was the first time SEJ has arranged for such coaching at a regional event. Since the response has been enthusiastic, the society will consider making coaches available at more events.

Among scientific issues, regionally contentious salmon conservation took the foreground at the Moscow meeting. Scientists explained the bases for their varying positions on salmon recovery planning, which faces a momentous decision whether to breach four federal dams on the lower Snake River in eastern Washington to ease the passage of endangered salmon. The discussion covered conflicting interpretations of data and the mystery of delayed mortality—the disproportionately large failure of ocean-going Snake River salmon to return to spawn in their natal streams.

Some blame that shortfall on the dams. But Dr. Ted Bjornn, University of Idaho research scientist and a member of the

National Marine Fisheries Service Snake River Salmon Recovery Team, warned writers against jumping to conclusions. Apparent correlation in data, he noted, doesn't always mean a cause and effect relationship.

Though most fisheries scientists in the region say the dams have to go to save the fish, American Fisheries Society President Christine Moffitt warned against promoting a single solution that would ignore other contributors to the salmon's demise—like stream deforestation, commercial fishing and mass-production hatchery operation.

Reporters attended from Wyoming, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. Workshop organizer Bill Loftus of the University of Idaho was disappointed that newspapers failed to send more reporters who run into science on other beats. But SEJ Executive Director Beth Parke was pleased that so many students came. "Part of SEJ's mission is to reach out to students," she said. "In a few short years they will be entering the professional world as journalists. This kind of event can inspire some to concentrate on the environment beat. At the very least it can give students a first taste of the complexities of environmental writing."

Niels Nokkentved is environment reporter at the Twin Falls (Idaho) Times-News.

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Pulling back from the borders

Coverage narrows as economic and environmental links expand

By **FRANK EDWARD ALLEN**

Nobody predicted that a major legacy of the North American Free Trade Agreement would be narrower journalism. Economic and environmental links among the United States, Mexico and Canada have expanded rapidly since NAFTA was implemented in 1995, but news correspondents who follow the agreement's effects now worry that the journalistic coverage of NAFTA and its consequences is shrinking and becoming more parochial.

Hilary MacKenzie, North American correspondent for Canada's *Saturday Night Magazine*, says she sees far less coverage of Mexico in Canada since NAFTA. "As the relationships have become closer, the level of attention has been reduced," she says. "We still do the safe coverage, pieces about droughts, natural disasters and crime. Now and then, people are sent down to Mexico for a specific story, but all of us have cut back the staffing of our bureaus."

Diane Lindquist, a business and economics reporter for *The*

San Diego Union-Tribune, says she notices that more American newsrooms are "turning inward" and putting far more "local emphasis" on coverage, often at the expense of stories across the border that have great significance or implications for these same communities. Sergio Sarmiento, a Mexican syndicated columnist and commentator for Television Azteca, also laments the rise of more parochial coverage. "This practice of zip code journalism," he says, "is happening all over Mexico, too."

In early May, these three journalists gathered in Mexico City with about two dozen others who represent news organizations in all three countries for a two-day conference entitled "North America and the News Media." Joined by activists, policy makers, sociologists, historians and two Mexican presidential candidates, the group explored emerging economic, environmental and cultural trends that appear likely to affect the entire continent. The discussion ranged widely, from issues of trade growth and transborder pollution to poverty, immigration and human rights.

(Continued next page)



SEJ President Mike Mansur, environment reporter for *The Kansas City Star*, described some signs of improvement in the prominence and depth of environmental coverage in many U.S. newsrooms. For example, he noted that four finalists for Pulitzer Prizes this past year were environment stories. But he also expressed anxiety about the growing concentration of news-media ownership in the United States, often resulting in “a cheapening of the way we cover these complicated stories.”

Jacques Rivard, correspondent for the CBC in Vancouver and Canadian representative on SEJ’s board of directors, confided his increasing frustration with broadcast editors who have an aversion to environmental stories, especially to news about collaborative progress in resolving problems. “Too often, their attitude is that good news is no news,” he said. “When I frame the subject for them as an economic or public-health story, I have a much better chance of getting it on the air.”

Anthony de Palma covers trade and cross-border economic developments in the Western Hemisphere for *The New York Times*. The scope of his assignment can be overwhelming at

“Objects may be closer than they appear.”

—Anthony de Palma
on the interconnectedness of economic developments in the hemisphere.

times, he said. The interconnectedness of economic developments in the hemisphere often reminds him of the warning printed on his car’s side-view mirror, “Objects may be closer than they appear.” Rather than writing about exotic locales and strange customs, he tries to find a framework for stories that he calls “inter-mestic,” a blend of international concerns with an important domestic issue, such as immigration and jobs.

The conference was organized by the Santa Fe-based North American Institute, a small but feisty nonprofit founded in 1998 by Maurice Strong, Bruce Babbitt and Jesus Silva Herzog. NAMI’s goal is to increase awareness of major challenges that face the governments and societies of North America as the economic integration of Canada, Mexico and the United States continues to accelerate.

NAMI’s president is John D. Wirth, a Stanford University historian and the author of *Smelter Smoke in North America: The Politics of Transborder Pollution*. “Economic integration of North America is happening rapidly,” he says. “But in terms of environmental and social effects, all three countries still lack the institutions to address the new realities.”

The conference was hosted by *Reforma*, one of Mexico’s most respected daily newspapers. Co-sponsors included the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *San Diego Union-Tribune*.

Frank Edward Allen President, Institutes for Journalism & Natural Resources

National conference update

Wildlife center good habitat for journalists

The Bengel Wildlife Center, located minutes outside Lansing, is where SEJ’s Tenth National Conference will wind down on Sunday, Oct. 22. The 259-acre site with its wetlands, prairies and woodlands will provide excellent habitat for environmental journalists.

The wilderness-like setting promises to be a good one for Sunday’s keynote speaker, Bill McKibben, well-known nature author and contributing editor to *Harpers* magazine. McKibben’s long list of published works includes *Hope, Human and Wild*; *The End of Nature*; most recently, *Maybe One: A Case Study for Smaller Families*, which delves into the environmental stresses of a growing world population. He is currently working on *Long Distance: A Year of Living Strenuously*, due to be released in December, 2000.

Other Sunday events include nature walks and birding (the conference is likely to coincide with the sandhill crane migration), lessons in nature photography, writing workshops, and a session with a Hemingway scholar who will discuss whether “Papa” was an early environmental journalist.

The Bengel Wildlife Center, a facility of the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation, contains two types of managed habitats: wetlands (lakes, ponds, bogs, marshes and forested wetlands) and uplands (prairie, brush, forest and a forested island). A demonstration and teaching facility, the center will endeavor to train landowners and others to restore, improve and



Bengel Wildlife Center is site for Sunday events

protect habitat.

The 8,700-square-foot Laughlin Building was still under construction when SEJ’s conference team visited the site in January. The grand opening of the center is scheduled for June 17-18, and will be well-fitted by the time SEJ arrives in the fall. It will be the permanent home of the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation.

—Chris Rigel



Chicago made a final, desperate effort to keep **Kevin Carmody**. On one of his last days in the Windy City, it was somehow arranged for Lake Michigan to give up a 30-inch, ten-pound rainbow trout to the avid fisherman. Carmody, who claims to have pictures of the mammoth beast, has been warned that the trout are nowhere near that size in Texas.

Still, that is where he has headed to cover growth issues for the *Austin American-Statesman*. Carmody spent the past five years covering the environment for Chicago's *Daily Southtown*. His wife, WGN-TV planning manager Pat Tanaka, and their daughter have been wanting to move south for awhile.

Also covering growth issues in the South, but a little further east, is **Bruce Ritchie**. He is reporting for *The Tallahassee Democrat*. Ritchie comes to the paper after freelancing in Florida for a few months after covering the environment for *The Press-Enterprise* in Riverside California.

After several years as a reporter and seven months as editor, **Terry Fitzpatrick** is no longer "Living on Earth." He's moved from NPR's weekly environmental show to a new Internet site, Verde.com, whose backers include Chris Blackwell (Island Records) and Ted Turner. As senior manager of interactive production, Fitzpatrick says his job is to "cook up" videos, polls, quizzes and other "multimedia widgets" that make environmental news multidimensional—even fun.

Fitzpatrick eventually plans to return to Seattle as Verde's Northwest regional

correspondent.

Dale Willman has been named managing editor of the Great Lakes Radio Consortium (GLRC). Willman will oversee the consortium's four regional bureaus which, each week, provide 29 minutes of environmental news, features and commentary to 140 stations in 10 states. He replaces **David Hammond**, the founder of the GLRC, who has been promoted to director of National Programs for Michigan Radio, the consortium's parent organization.

The environment will be changing

Media on the Move

Compiled by **George Homsy**

quite a bit for **Mike Taugher**. After four and a half years covering the ecology of the wild West for the *Albuquerque Journal*, Taugher heads to the coast. He is putting this feet up on the environment desk of the *Contra Costa Times* in Walnut Creek, Calif., to cover the Bay area and northern parts of the state.

Cracking the books this fall will be **Angela Swafford**, whose work is regularly seen on Discovery.com. She's a member of the newest class of Knight Science Journalism Fellows at MIT in Cambridge. Swafford is excited about studying and broadening her science knowledge, but the Columbia native and Florida resident has indicated some concern about "learning to cope with the bitter cold of winter."

The Metcalf Institute's Second

Annual Workshop for Journalists has announced this year's class of Marine and Environmental Reporting fellows. The new crew will participate in a six-day scientific workshop, run by the University of Rhode Island's graduate school. It gives reporters hands-on experience in the lab and in the field. This year's Metcalf fellows are **Vivian Baah**, reporter, Centre for Environmental Communications, Ghana, West Africa; **David Case**, staff reporter for TomPaine.com; **Brooke Donald**, bureau editor, *The Baltic Times*, Estonia; **Ron Feemster**, freelance writer, New York; **Michael Greenwood**, staff writer, *Hartford Courant*; **Mari Jensen**, freelance writer, Tucson, Ariz.; **Samantha Levine**, environmental reporter, Kiplinger Editors; **Carol McCarthy**, health and science editor, *The Day*, New London, Conn; **John Miller**, freelance writer/producer, Cleveland, Ohio; Umesh Raghuvanshi, correspondent, *The Hindustan Times*, Lucknow, India; **Gary Robbins**, science writer, Orange County Register, Santa Ana, Calif.; **Erik Schwartz**, staff writer, *The Mercury*, Pottstown, Pa.; **Randy Showstack**, writer, *Ecos*, Washington, D.C.; **Michael Smith**, reporter, *The Providence Journal*, Warwick, R.I.

Don't let your move go unnoticed! If you have a new job, new book, new fellowship or new award, let your colleagues know. Email George Homsy at ghomsy@world.std.com or send a fax to (603) 947-9622.

SEJ members: ever consider adopting?

SEJ is launching a Member-Adopt-A-Member Program to solicit donations from members to underwrite the dues for those who request financial assistance and qualify under specific guidelines.

"The board and staff have worked hard to keep SEJ dues low and very competitive with other journalism organizations," said SEJ vice president and membership committee chair James Bruggers. "But we felt that some people, particularly those just starting out in their careers, may find the dues to be enough of a hardship

that they shy away from membership."

Here's how it will work: If you have a journalist in mind that you want to adopt, contact Jutland Medina at the SEJ office (sej@sej.org), and send a check with the name and address of the journalist to SEJ at P.O. Box 27280, Philadelphia Pa. 19118. Ms. Medina will send the "adoptee" an application form.

SEJ is already accepting general contributions from members to underwrite the dues for people who contact the office and ask for help. SEJ board members

have agreed to jump-start the program by contributing \$600 in personal funds, enough for 15 memberships.

To qualify for assistance, applicants must have an annual income of less than \$25,000 a year, and should contact Chris Rigel (crigel@sej.org). SEJ staff will provide the financial assistance on a first-come, first-served basis as funds become available from members, with priority given to first-time applicants.

For more information, contact the SEJ office. ❖



If Ted Stubblefield cut Timber Weller, would John Sawhill help?

What's in a name?

Earl Finn and Duane Phinney got constant ribbing over theirs because they worked at the Washington Department of Fisheries.

But to find a guy who really needed a fin, you have to go to Canada, where Fin Donnelly swam most of the 800-mile Fraser River in 1995 to draw attention to the environmental problems of the river. (He's at it again this year, writes Lelani Arris, editor of *Global Environmental Change Report*.)

SEJournal invited members to submit their favorite examples of meaningful names for people in environmental science, advocacy or newsmaking. Editors take no responsibility for the accuracy or good taste of the responses. Here are a few of them:

Forestry offers much pulp for our mill. Some critics believe that Ted Stubblefield, former forest supervisor of the Gifford Pinchot and Olympic national forests, should have changed his name or profession. The public might be more sympathetic to managers like Timber Weller, a wildlife mitigation specialist for the Florida Division of Forestry. And consider this name for the leader of a Forest Service study about the policy implications of large wildfire management: Michael Rains. (Freelancer Jay Letto and Ludmilla Lelis of the *Orlando Sentinel*)

Do you believe it? The public information officer for the Phoenix-based Western Growers Association is Heather Flower. (Patti Eppler, *New Times*)

New York City offers another two-fer. Its Council on the Environment, involved in maintaining urban gardens and trees, is chaired by a minister named Forrest Church. (Michael Gerrard, editor, Arnold & Porter's *Environmental Law in New York*)

Indiana's Department of Natural Resources has an assistant director named Glen Salmon—we presume he's the landlocked subspecies—and an aquatic biologist Brant Fisher. (George McLaren of *The Indianapolis Star*)

Rick Trout is a former Navy dolphin trainer and shark wrangler, though he sounds like shark food to us. But talk

about being in the right place, consider climatologist Chris Landsea at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

Congressional opponents of a commission to look into the environmental problems of oceans included U.S. Reps. John T. Doolittle (R-Calif) and Tom DeLay (R-Tex.). (freelancer David Helvarg)

Several SEJ members nominated Patricia Feral, president of Friends of Animals, for this list. Others argued she should be disqualified, since she reportedly changed her name.

Your editor recalled several nominal fits and anomalies from the Northwest.

Is it any surprise that Hazel Wolf and Hank Fisher became wildlife advocates, or that Woody Wheeler fit right in at The Nature Conservancy's Seattle office? Reporters calling the Washington

- Donna Hart, vice president, International Wildlife Coalition.
- Michael Fox, vice president, Humane Society of the U.S.
- Camilla Fox, wildlife programs, Animal Protection Institute.

Others less appropriate:

- John Sawhill, president, Nature Conservancy.
- James Fishman, publicist, National Audubon Society.
- Pat Derby, president, Performing Animal Welfare Society. (Opposes horse racing, among other things.)
- Walter Pidgeon Jr., president/CEO, Wildlife Conservation Fund of America. (Pro-hunting lobby, defends pigeon shoots, among other things.)
- Kathy Hunter, formerly operations director, Toronto Humane Society, when it was firmly opposed to hunting.



Grin & Bare It

And this tidbit from Joe Davis, Washington-based writer:

Herd on the Street

I walked down to the World Bank and IMF on my lunch hour, old ambulance-chaser that I am, during recent protests.

As I approached, I saw no demonstrators, a few uniformed cops, police chief Charles H. Ramsey and deputies holding a press conference, and about a dozen satellite trucks plus various cameramen walking around.

Although the sidewalks in front of IMF were cordoned off, a bucket loader and a dump truck were at work in front of the building. Finally the truck pulled away and a police car sprinted in front of it, siren wailing, to escort it away. Then I saw clearly what was had been loaded into the dump truck: horse manure dumped by protesters.

Overheard from cynical reporters standing nearby: "Well, Chief Ramsey say he's not going to take no s--t from anyone... but just look across the street."

What's happening on your beat? Send humorous stories and GABI ideas to editor Rob Taylor, reltaylor@aol.com or fax to (301) 656-8324.

Department of Fish and Wildlife often get PR guy Tim Waters. Okay, but what was the Ancient Forest Campaign doing hiring a guy with the industrial-strength name of Argon Steel?

Puget Sound enviros worried about the U.S. Coast Guard's toughness in policing shipping safety when the agency named an Adm. Softye to oversee its Seattle office. He's gone now, but the National Marine Fisheries Service's Seattle office, which keeps calling for more study before deciding whether to breach the four Lower Snake River dams to protect salmon, is headed by Will Stelle. To cynics, that sounds a lot like Will Stall.

Animal People editor Merritt Clifton won our prize for nominating the longest list of potentially eponymous environmental group officials. First, his best-named list:

- John Flicker, president, National Audubon Society.
- Jennifer Herring, vice president, Wildlife Conservation Society.
- Robert F.X. Hart, former president, American Humane Association.

Tracking campaign cash

A senator's coolness to global warming is rewarded

By CURTIS MOORE

In 1996, Chuck Hagel—Republican candidate for the United States Senate from Nebraska—was the kind of opponent who was every politician's worst nightmare: rich.

Running against a popular Democratic governor, Ben Nelson, Hagel was initially given little chance by political odds-makers. But he ran a good campaign, overtook Nelson, and when things started getting close, Hagel played his trump card: he lent himself \$1 million.

Hagel won handily, finishing with 56 percent of the vote but a \$1 million hole in his bank account.

This is the sort of problem that those familiar with the ways of Washington know how to solve. And, although he had not previously held elective office, Hagel was no stranger to the nation's capital. He had been chief aide to Republican Rep. John Y. McCollister of Nebraska, a lobbyist for Firestone, and the number-two official at the Veterans' Administration in the Reagan Administration. Only after this apprenticeship in Washington did Hagel found Vanguard Cellular Systems and make his fortune, return to Nebraska and lay the foundation for a U.S. Senate race.

Within days of his election, Hagel's coffers began to swell with donations from special interest groups. Much of the money came from Washington, D.C., and its suburbs, including a hefty chunk from industries opposed to action to address global warming. What was surprising was that he didn't appear to have raised the subject in his campaign. There's no record in the news library of the *Omaha World Herald* of candidate Hagel uttering the words "global warming" or "Kyoto Protocol", nor do a few campaign observers recall any mention of global warming, directly or indirectly. (Efforts to ask the senator's office about this were in vain. Hagel's staff failed to respond to multiple inquiries made over several days.)

Yet within months of entering the Senate, Hagel became one of the most unflinching allies of the oil, coal, utility and other industries fighting actions to control global warming. He held hearings, made floor statements and speeches, and cosponsored the Byrd-Hagel Resolution, which is probably the single most significant legislative action taken with respect to global warming by the U.S. Senate. Passed by the Senate on June 12, 1997, by a vote of 96-0, it requires Third World nations to meet "new specific scheduled commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions" as a prerequisite to U.S. participation, and rejects as unacceptable any agreement that "would result in serious harm to the economy of the United States."

During the two years following his election Hagel raised roughly \$133,000 from political action committees opposed to curbing greenhouse gas emissions to stem global warming—more than five times as much as he had raised from these same groups before the election. His post-election contributors included not only BP Amoco, Chevron, Marathon, Mobil, Occidental, Shell, Tenneco, and Texaco oil companies, but electric utilities in West Virginia, Ohio, the Dakotas, Michigan, Missouri, California, Pennsylvania, Minnesota,

Georgia, Alabama and Florida, as well as the Big Three car makers of General Motors, Ford and Daimler Chrysler, and several coal companies.

These and other contributions enabled Hagel's campaign to pay off most of its debt to him. Of the \$1,099,783 that his campaign collected in 1997-98, it paid \$787,000 to him. On average, in other words, for every \$1,000 donated by a coal, oil, utility, auto or other interest, roughly \$750 was deposited in his personal bank account. This is perfectly legal, of course. But it is also, at least in most places, news. Although his six-year term doesn't expire until 2003, he added another \$366,194 in 1999-2000 to his political war chest, which repaid him another \$205,000.

In a year when campaign finance reform has become one of the leading political issues, such tales are catching more of the public eye. Reviewing such records need not be left to political reporters alone. This article offers some techniques for tracking "hard money" donations (not so-called "soft money," the unlimited donations made to political parties.)

Check the record. Determine whether a candidate takes positions that logically would attract heavy contributions from vested interests. This may be the easiest step, especially for those with access to Lexis/Nexis. Reporters without such resources can visit Project VoteSmart, <http://www.vote-smart.org/>, a non-profit institution based in Montana with a branch office in Boston. It bills itself as "a national library of factual information on over 13,000 elected offices and candidates for public office." The non-partisan project is funded by individual contributions as well as the Pew, Carnegie and other foundations.

VoteSmart's Reporter's Resource Center will conduct searches for inquiries at federal, state and county levels. I spoke with Director Monica Chrzaszcz (phone: 406-859-8690, fax: 406-859-8681), and within 90 minutes my fax machine spat out 13 pages. Most was downloaded from Lexis/Nexis, and included a CNN interview, testimony from two hearings and a floor statement. Information on official congressional actions can be found at the Library of Congress' web site, Thomas (<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas2.html>), which has links to web sites of both the U.S. Senate (<http://www.senate.gov/>) and the House of Representatives (<http://www.house.gov/>).

Follow the money. Politics.com seems to have a link to every conceivable site that is politically related (see <http://www.politicaljunkie.com/index.htm>). A more user-friendly site (<http://www.tray.com/>) is operated by Netivasion.com. It describes itself as "A place to discover who gave what to which federal candidates when..."

Essentially, Netivasion connects readers to Federal Election Commission data that have been manipulated to make them much easier to understand (the FEC's direct link is <http://imgsrv.sdrdc.com/fecimg/query.html>). Tray is easy to navigate: click on "US House/Senate Campaign Money Info: All Candidates," then the election cycle of interest, and type in the first three letters of a candidate's last name. Within 25 seconds a page pops up with a photo, summaries of receipts and expendi-

tures, and tabs for downloading more detailed information.

Aggregate contributions from individuals are roughly as important as those from PACs, so they cannot be ignored. Indeed, finding a \$1,000 contribution from an association president or a senior partner in a law firm that represent a major industry is a dead giveaway that special interest money is being funneled to a candidate. Netivasion provides a list of all individual contributors.

Further down on the site, look for a state-by-state breakout of itemized contributions. Click on the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland, and most of the inside-the-beltway money will appear. Think Big Oil is important? Click on Texas and Oklahoma.

For information on Political Action Committees (PACs), click on "Contributions from/to PACs and other Committees," and a list of PAC contributions totaled by Standard Industrial Code (SIC) appears.

Look beyond the obvious. For global warming, for example, the coal, oil, electric utility and auto industries obviously have stakes in the debate. But look for others. Coal, for example, is the number one source of income for U.S. railroads. Moreover, many railroads are coal owners dating from the days when the government gave them land as an inducement to open the West. The largest single operating expense for many chemical companies is the cost of coal and oil, which are feedstocks for their products. Similarly, steel mills and cement kilns not only consume immense amounts of energy, but also use coal and lime, both of which emit carbon dioxide, as feedstocks.

Look for circumventions. Federal law limits hard money contributions from individuals to \$1,000 per campaign (primary, runoff and general elections each constitute a single campaign, so there is a potential maximum of \$3,000). PACs are capped at \$5,000. For those who want to give more it's easy to circumvent the rule. Wives can give, and so can children and parents. A company's lawyer, the firm's partners and their wives and children can give. For example, lobbyist Clayton Yeutter gave Hagel \$2,000 in the 1996 campaign cycle, while "homemaker" Christy Bach Yeutter pitched in another \$1,000.

Aside from this, there are numerous other ways of skirting the rules. For example, Netivasion reveals that Hagel received \$5,000 from Burlington-Northern (BN) (headquartered in Nebraska, BN also donated \$5,000 to Hagel's Democratic opponent, a common practice). But is that all? Possibly not, for on April 19, 1996, BN gave \$2,500 to Keep Our Majority Political Action Committee (KOMPAC), which in turn donated \$30,000 on July 2 to the Republican National Committee, which funneled roughly \$60,000 to the Nebraska Republican Committee over a period of months, including a payment of \$15,312 on July 17. Then on July 20, the Nebraska RC gave \$1,000 to Hagel. Was some of BN's April 19 contribution earmarked for Hagel? No way to tell, but such things happen, so the connection might be worth reporting.

Look for clusters. "Bundles," or gifts collected by a single lobbyist from colleagues, then delivered to the office-holder, are signs that a candidate has been adopted by an industry. So are fundraisers. To find these, look for donations clustered on or close to the same date.

To do this, scroll to the bottom of Netivasion's page to,

"Breakout of recipients by date." This produces a list of contributions grouped in batches. On April 2, 1998, Hagel collected \$15,300 from 19 individuals, almost all from Texas and associated with the oil industry.

The three exceptions were Bill O'Keefe, Stephen Wood of Reston, Va. and Washington lawyer Kent Hance, whose activities, it seems, fit well in the oil patch. O'Keefe is executive vice president of the Washington-based American Petroleum Institute, oil industry's trade association. He is also chairman of the Global Climate Coalition, a business confederation founded in 1989 to lobby against actions to curb global warming. Wood works for Diefenderfer and Wunder, a Washington lobbying firm whose clients include several oil and rail companies. Hance, a lawyer and member of Congress from 1979-85, "is active in the acquisition of international oil and gas drilling rights on behalf of U.S. and international clients," according to his official biography.

In 1999-2000, Hagel hit the jackpot in California, especially with Edison Mission Energy and its related companies. EME is the world's third or fourth largest independent producers of electricity, with plants in 20 or more nations, virtually all of them coal-fired, with no pollution controls—exactly the type of power plants likely to be shut down by a global warming agreement that called for reductions in emissions. From July 23 to Aug. 10, 1999 Hagel received 15 individual contributions from Edison executives totaling \$14,500. This was in addition to \$10,000 from the firm's political action committee that had been spread over several months.

Avoid red herrings. There is so much money from so many different sources that it is dizzying. Trying to pin down the connection between a student in Texas and a given candidate can be not only maddening, but a waste of time, because there might be none.

Examine expenditures. Because all of the Web sites focus on contributions, not expenditures, this can be tough. But a trip to the Federal Election Commission to check campaign fund outlays can be worth it, because there is virtually no constraint on how money can be spent. Candidates buy cars (and repairs for them), clothing, dinners, and vacations. They give money to the Boy Scouts and the Miss America Pageant, local colleges and universities, state, local and national committees, to other candidates, or in Hagel's case, to retire his own loan.

Add it up. Whether a candidate received money because industry liked his views, or adopted those views for the sake of raising cash is impossible to say. Indeed, trying to find a brown paper bag stuffed with money trading hands in exchange for a vote may miss the point.

Money is applied to fields of Washington in much the same way that fertilizer and pesticides are worked in the soils by a farmer, stunting the growth of plants that are unwanted while bolstering the health of those that are. In Hagel's case, as he took the offensive on global warming, he received a hefty boost.

Curtis Moore was Republican counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works from 1978-89, and started his professional career in Congress in 1970 working for then-Rep. William V. Roth, Jr., now chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance.

Mine's toxic trail is uncovered

By MARK MATHEWS

Tucked away near the Idaho border, 70 miles from Canada, Libby is a small Montana town of 2,600 hard-working and independent people. With logging way down, residents have scrambled to make a living any way they could. And like many people in small Western towns, they've kept their troubles to themselves. Until recently, few people outside Libby knew that a startling number of residents have died of lung diseases, or that today, many suffer from lung cancer.

But last November a mini-firestorm of media coverage blew the cover off Libby's respiratory plague. The storm brought unprecedented federal and state attention to the little town's plight, sent investigators searching across the country for related outbreaks, and left embattled W.R. Grace & Co. defending itself against a whole new class of civil actions.

The case demonstrates how environmental reporting can focus public attention and prod agencies to action on a problem, even when they have long quietly acknowledged it. Admirers of the coverage say it brought needed help to the victims. Critics say it needlessly inflated fears.

For two decades, Libby residents have known that their sickness is caused by asbestos dust from a nearby vermiculite mine owned by Grace. Not only miners and truck drivers contracted the diseases; their wives, who shook the fine particles out of their work clothing, also sickened, as did their children. Even people with no known link to the mine got asbestos-related diseases. Gayla Benefield, whose parents, Perley and Margaret Vatland, both died of asbestos-related diseases, speculates: "This could go on to the fourth generation within families. My grandchildren watched my mother die and they were terrified. They asked me if they would die of that, too."

History of a Quiet Epidemic

For years, while individuals doggedly fought private legal battles with Grace, the mine's owner, the story went virtually unreported. The first case of asbestosis, a thickening and scarring of lung tissue, was diagnosed in a Libby worker in 1959, while the mine's original owner, Zonolite Co., still controlled the facility. Chest X-rays taken by Zonolite showed that 48 out of 130 workers had abnormal lungs. But company officials didn't inform the workers, union officials say. Grace took over the mine in 1963, and in 1969 company officials received a warning from Grace's insurance company about workers' chest x-rays: "When an X-ray picture shows a change for the worse, that person must be told and must be gotten out of the environment... Failure to do so is not humane and is in direct violation of federal law."

But according to Don Judge, executive secretary of the Montana State AFL-CIO in Helena, "It wasn't until 1979 that the workers and the union were told the dust contained particles of tremolite," a hazardous form of asbestos. Grace disputes the claim, saying that respirators were introduced to the business in 1959 and the union filed a worker asbestosis claim as early as 1967. But it doesn't dispute that its workers were harmed. As the years passed, miners and their family members got sick.

One Spokane-based doctor reported more than 200 cases of asbestosis. By the turn of the century, former workers had swamped Montana's Lincoln District Court with cases filed against Grace, which had closed the mine in 1990 and shipped its last load of ore from Libby in 1993.

Where Were the Media?

The media didn't pay much heed. Every few years an article about a lawsuit surfaced in the back pages of the *Missoulian*, the state's largest daily, says Michael Jamison who has covered the Flathead Valley for the paper since 1996.

"But to get the thread of the story, you had to be able to look at all of them," he says. "I had wondered about them, but I didn't understand the scope. I assumed others before me had already written that story."

Roger Morris, editor of Libby's paper, *Western News*, says he covered the first asbestos lawsuit filed by an employee against Grace, and another trial that involved a resident who didn't work for the company.

"But there's no way we could cover it all," he says. "We're an eight- to 12-page paper that comes out twice a week. People want us to cover the high schools, sports, churches and the bridge club. They don't want to read court reports."

For a brief moment during the 1998-99 Montana legislative session, the Libby tragedy stared some local journalists in the face. A slew of Libby families drove to Helena to protest a bill sponsored by the Montana Chamber of Commerce that they claimed was an attempt to help Grace avoid litigation by steering victims away from the courts and

towards workers compensation. Later that day, a union representative recounted the families' emotional testimony to journalists working in the state house press room. But there were other hearings on major bills, and the story got lost in the shuffle.

"Tracking down stories during the legislative session can be like trying to chase down a snowflake in a snowstorm," says University of Montana journalism professor Dennis Swibold. The proposed bill quickly died in committee, with no local coverage.

Ironically, what finally shone a spotlight on Libby was W.R. Grace's assertion last summer that its mine cleanup at Libby was finished. Kootenai Development Co., which bought the mine site from Grace, was asking for return of the last unspent portion of Grace's reclamation bond. Town residents saw a notice for public hearings on releasing the bond, and were outraged.

The case demonstrates how environmental reporting can focus public attention and prod agencies to action on a problem.

The story spreads...

The tragedy of Libby, Mont. may not have stopped there.

In Minneapolis, lawyers and family members believe asbestos from Libby contributed to the deaths of two dozen workers from local vermiculite handling and processing plants.

In fact, the Libby mine shipped its tainted product to hundreds of sites across North America. These locations and even consumer products are now subjects of a broad federal search for continuing asbestos hazards.

Minneapolis Star Tribune Washington correspondent Greg Gordon discovered the Minnesota-Libby connection about the same time as congressman Bruce Vento (D-Minn.) disclosed that he suffered from asbestos-related lung cancer from another source.

Gordon cobbled together stories about asbestos disease victims who blamed their illnesses on two Minneapolis plants that handled vermiculite. A lawyer for purported victims had already filed several suits against W.R. Grace, which operated one of the plants and supplied the other.

Other reporters followed the Libby asbestos trail to sites in Spokane, Boston and Denver.

Though the Libby mine was closed in 1990, the EPA said it was screening 265 to 313 sites in 42 states that may have accepted vermiculite shipments from Libby—once the source of more than half of the U.S. production of vermiculite—to determine if any sites still carry asbestos contamination that poses a current or future hazard to workers or the public.

EPA officials said any risks were likely to be greatly reduced since the early 1990s. As the survey began, EPA officials said they suspected that only 15 or 20 still operate as handlers or processors of construction or gardening products, and perhaps only a half dozen may prove worth a detailed site inspection. What they were looking for, one official speculated, was piles of vermiculite that nobody had bothered to clean up.

And the track doesn't end there. Vermiculite has been used as a soil conditioner, home insulation and packaging material. The EPA and Consumer Product Safety Commission also launched a joint investigation of these consumer products for asbestos contamination.

If the EPA finds asbestos above trace levels in some products, it will assess the risk to consumers, said John Melone, director of EPA's national program chemicals division. The agency could require labeling, propose reduction in asbestos content or even ban a product, Melone said. But banning a product would be hard to defend, he conceded, in light of a 1991 court ruling that overturned EPA's 1989 ban on asbestos in most consumer products.

One report suggested the risk was not merely hypothetical. Though shipments from Libby ceased in 1993, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* found a bag of Zonolite Chemical Packaging Vermiculite—originally from Libby—on a shelf in a Chubby and Tubby hardware store in the Seattle area. According to the paper, EPA testing found asbestos fibers at levels up to 80 times higher than allowable under federal workplace safety rules.

"Some of the people who had filed lawsuits were concerned that if the bond were released Grace could say that the site didn't present a public health problem," said Bonnie Gestring with the Montana Environmental Information Center in Helena. Some locals protested, and a trio of Swibold's University of Montana graduate students became interested.

Swibold, after being tipped off by a fellow university staff member about Libby's asbestos problem, says he checked news archives and, "I was shocked when we didn't find any clips at all." He sicced journalism students Ben Shors, Shannon Dinny and Ericka Schenck Smith on Libby. The youths immediately recognized the importance of the story. But by the time they finished some preliminary research and visited Libby, they found the tracks of Andrew Schneider, an investigative reporter for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, who had heard of the Libby illnesses from Gestring and an out-of-state doctor.

The students were "behind (Schneider) by three to four days everywhere we went," Shors says. But neither the *Post-Intelligencer* nor the students broke the story. It first surfaced in the little *Daily Interlake* in Kalispell, a two-hour drive east of Libby, whose reporters got wind of the situation late but moved fast. As they scrambled to piece together a story that had gone largely unnoticed for years, they found that locals weren't very cooperative.

"I asked them where they had been," says Benefield. "I refused to interview with them. But I did send them down to the courthouse to look at the records." The *Interlake* story broke on the second weekend of November. The *Post-Intelligencer* followed with massive coverage by mid-week. Stories by the journalism students ran in the *Missoulian* on three consecutive days the following weekend.

The most shocking element of the coverage was Schneider's body count. After interviewing several doctors and more than 100 Libby residents, Schneider wrote that at least 192 people had died from complications of asbestosis brought on by the material mined and milled in Libby.

Later, he said a storm of calls, e-mails and letters since led him to believe that the death figure may be much higher. Schneider also reported that doctors and Libby residents say 375 more people have been diagnosed with fatal illnesses linked to Libby's asbestos.

His story told how six of seven members of the Bundrock family were struck by asbestos-related disease.

"Arthur Bundrock suffered for 21 years. His pain was not just from the disease, but from the knowledge that the white, talc-like dust he carried home from the mine every day had attacked the lungs of all of his family but one. 'I've got it,' said (Bundrock's wife) Helen, 'and so do Donna, Robin, Mary and Bill. Only my youngest, Cindy, hasn't been diagnosed with it, and we're all praying for her.'"

Libby residents worried aloud that residual tremolite contamination around their town might still be making people sick. Schneider got a laboratory to sample dirt from five areas along a road, and four of the samples turned up hazardous asbestos fibers.

In the coverage, government agencies fared little better than Grace. Schneider, a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner, noted

that EPA had declined a regional officer's recommendation that it clean up tailings along the road and had not investigated asbestos-related illness because it had not been "invited."

Reaction

After the media caught fire, things started cooking in Libby. The EPA opened an office in town, launched an investigation, and authorized a hazardous-waste team to comb homes and former industrial sites for asbestos contamination. Though most homes showed no hazard, the team found four houses and two former storage areas tainted with hazardous types of asbestos fibers, both next to homes and businesses.

The Consumer Products Safety Commission announced a nationwide investigation of asbestos in consumer products. Davitt McAteer, the boss of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration, launched new sampling at existing mines and agonized over how his agency failed to prevent painful asbestos-related deaths from Libby's tremolite. Schneider quoted him as saying, "We could have done more. We should have done more, and we didn't."

The EPA and federal medical experts announced a \$4 million program to screen local residents and former workers for signs of lung disease. Grace, which reopened its Libby office, pledged \$250,000 per year to a local hospital for asbestos-related treatments. It also offered to fund an independent medical treatment for former workers and Libby residents diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease.

Meanwhile, lawyers filed several class-action suits against the company in state and federal court on behalf of Libby residents and consumers nationwide. And camera crews and journalists from network television and national publications descended on Libby. In Helena and Washington, D.C., the asbestos story became a hot potato. Republican Gov. Marc Racicot denied all knowledge of the problem, though he is from Libby and documents dating back to 1956 show state awareness of the problem. For example, in August 1992, a Montana Department of State Lands draft environmental assessment for reclaiming the mine site stated that "former employees have contracted asbestos-related diseases," and "exposure to airborne tremolite resulting from access-road dust has been identified as a public-health concern."

Montana Republican Sen. Conrad Burns withdrew his support from the U.S. Senate's Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act of 1999, a bill he had claimed would weed out frivolous lawsuits, standardize settlement awards and reduce the number of asbestos cases. Burns's Democratic opponent in coming elections, Brian Schweitzer, pointed out that the bill would deny non-workers and family members any recourse to compensation. He also accused Burns of kowtowing to the industry's Coalition for Asbestos Resolution, which gave the senator \$29,500 in campaign contributions.

The total of Libby-related personal injury lawsuits against Grace has reached 193, of which 60 have been settled and eight dismissed, according to Grace spokesman William Corcoran. Grace lost all four that went to a verdict, he said, for damages ranging from \$75,000 to \$656,000.

In court, Grace said it made many efforts to protect its workers, including spending \$14 million on dust-control mea-

asures in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In part, Grace attorneys blamed health problems on workers who smoked and were careless with asbestos. Asked about Schneider's counts of deaths and illnesses, Corcoran said Grace has verified only 30 to 40 deaths linked to the Libby mine.

"We've asked him to verify (the numbers) and he has refused," Corcoran said.

The company spokesman denied that it kept Libby workers in the dark about the asbestos hazard. He said that Grace has been forwarding workers' chest x-rays to their physicians since 1964, as required by state law.

"We know that people were harmed working in our mine and we regret that," Corcoran said. Unfortunately, he added, the money that Grace spent on worker protection "wasn't enough. We know a lot more about asbestos now than in the '60s and '70s; we wish we knew then what we know today."

In Libby, some residents complained that the media coverage was overblown, and some worried that it would hurt real estate values and tourism.

"Everybody's writing sensational crap," said Roger Morris, editor of *Western News*. "I may be shooting myself in the foot professionally, but that's what I think."

The community is split, said Wendy Thomi, EPA's community involvement coordinator at Libby. "Many people are extremely thankful that they're getting this attention and money. Others think way too much is being made of it, and wish it would go away."

Mark Matthews is a freelance writer based in Missoula.

CD-ROM available

The renowned biologist Edward O. Wilson has turned from the classroom to home computers to teach the value of biodiversity. He has teamed up with a former student to produce a new CD-ROM about conservation biology and how to protect the earth's vast array of living things.

"Point-and-click" technology is a new arena for the Harvard University professor, who taught evolutionary biology for 35 years and is now University Professor Emeritus.

"Conserving Earth's Biodiversity with E.O. Wilson" features 10 interactive exercises to teach students about such topics as biogeography, habitat fragmentation and population growth studies. It offers video clips of Wilson talking about his experiences and findings, along with 15 detailed maps showing deforestation patterns, plant diversity and ecosystem distribution. It also incorporates 1,000 photographs.

The program is targeted for high-school and college students, but is written with differing levels of sophistication to reach a broader audience. Network links are updated regularly to keep information timely, which can aid journalists writing about topics as varied as population growth and the invasive plant called purple loosestrife.

The CD-ROM with a user's guide and instructor's manual sells for \$39.95. Review copies are available by contacting the Island Press publicity department at press@islandpress.org or by phone at (202) 232-7933.

The beryllium story: How one tip led to exposé

By SAM ROE

The caller's voice was low and hoarse, and he couldn't finish a sentence without stopping to catch his breath.

He said he had a chronic, potentially fatal lung disease and that he had to be tethered to an oxygen tank 24 hours a day. He said he had contracted the illness at a local factory, from a material called beryllium.

I had never heard of beryllium, or of its hazards, but the caller assured me that many people were suffering just like he was.

At first, I thought I was looking at an in-depth health story. But the story was much more. I soon learned that beryllium was critical to the production of nuclear bombs and other weapons. And over time, I learned that the illnesses and deaths associated with the metal were not strictly accidental.

I worked on the story full-time for 22 months, reviewing tens of thousands of industry, scientific, and recently declassified government documents, an effort that required numerous Freedom of Information Act requests and trips to Colorado, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and Washington. In the end, we published a six-day series, documenting a 50-year pattern of collusion by the U.S. government and the American beryllium industry that caused the injuries and deaths of dozens of U.S. workers.

Among the findings: Over the last five decades, government and industry officials knowingly allowed thousands of workers to be exposed to levels of toxic beryllium dust far exceeding federal safety limits.

I learned much from reporting this series. For example, the U.S. Energy Department has been declassifying thousands of documents, many related to America's Cold War build-up and its effects on public and occupational health. These records are available at several federal records repositories.

Instead of putting a FOIA request in writing and waiting weeks for a response, you may want to call an Energy Department FOIA officer and find out what is available on your topic. The department keeps indexes of the records available. Instead of waiting months to have the government send you documents, you can go to the repositories and copy the records yourself.

For the beryllium series, I spent several days at the government repository in Oak Ridge, Tenn. While I was there, two large boxes of beryllium documents were made public for the first time. I didn't waste time reviewing the records then and there: I copied all of the records, boxed them up, and shipped them home.

Previously secret records are being released every day. You may want to identify Manhattan Project sites or Cold War companies in your area and request documents about those facilities.

Other tips:

- Know the laws. Know exactly what a corporation is allowed to do and what the government is supposed to do. Is a corporation over-exposing workers? Is the government enforcing the rules? In my series, I found that the beryllium industry was not adhering to the rules, and regulators were not enforcing them.

- Read the scientific papers. Scientists often conduct studies at private companies and then detail their findings in publicly available journals. Some of these findings are the very things

that the companies would like to conceal, such as safety violations. I found many beryllium studies that detailed the amount of toxic dust in certain plants. The papers were not specifically about exposure levels; nevertheless, information contained in the papers helped me document examples of overexposure.

- Find the leading plaintiffs' attorneys. Get as many documents as you can from them. Request copies of exhibits. Get depositions on disk.

- Follow the buck. Politicians may say they are against pollution, but are they granting tax breaks to the big polluters? Are they receiving campaign contributions from these firms?

- Know exactly what government and industry officials say publicly about an environmental problem. How does this square with what the documents show? Do officials say one thing publicly and something different in depositions, when they are under oath?

The beryllium industry has repeatedly made misleading statements to workers. One beryllium company's warning letter told workers that it had the "most modern" equipment, "designed to control the beryllium content in the air you breathe within limits considered completely safe by competent medical authorities." But nowhere did the letter say that the company has never consistently kept dust counts below those safety limits.

- Study whether industry is trying to influence the science behind an environmental problem. The beryllium industry created, organized, and funded its own board of scientists. And the industry leader published its own medical textbook, with many chapters written by the company's executives, doctors, and lawyers.

- Find victims. If no one has been harmed, or the risk is sketchy, you may want to rethink the story. Experts estimate that 1,200 Americans have contracted beryllium disease. I identified victims primarily through court and industry records and victims' support groups.

- Be aggressive on follow-up stories. Some regulators feel caught between the media's plea for openness and industry's plea for privacy, so they may not volunteer information regarding action they are taking.

The Blade's beryllium series prompted major safety reforms, numerous lawsuits, and two congressional investigations. It was also instrumental in pushing the federal government to a historic admission that acknowledged that it had harmed Cold War weapons workers. The Clinton Administration asked Congress to compensate these victims—a request that has resulted in three bills now before Congress.

The Blade series and follow-up articles can be found at <http://www.toledoblade.com/deadlyalliance/>.

A final note: The caller with the low, hoarse voice who tipped off *The Blade* was a man by the name of Butch Lemke. He died of beryllium disease shortly after our series ran. While there may be many obstacles to reporting these stories, it is important to remember that the stakes are high.

Sam Roe is an investigative reporter for The Blade of Toledo, Ohio.



1999 environmental reporting awards

Government exposures win reporting prizes

By **ROB TAYLOR**

Exposing the government's willingness to endanger workers for the sake of nuclear weapons scored big in journalism awards for 1999.

Sam Roe of the *Blade*, Toledo, Ohio, won an armful of 1999 journalism awards for his "Deadly Alliance" series, about what he called a partnership between industry and the government that knowingly exposed workers to toxic levels of beryllium. Kevin Carmody of Chicago's *Daily Southtown* won a George Polk Award, among others, for disclosing the government's resistance to acknowledging responsibility for beryllium-contamination illnesses and deaths of the makers of the first United States atomic bomb.

Both reporters added to the unflattering portraits painted by previous multi-prize-winners Eileen Welsome, Karen Dorn Steele and others of a federal government that secretly exposed unwitting people to health hazards for nuclear research and weapons production.

And they weren't alone. *The Washington Post's* Joby Warrick was a 1999 finalist in the Scripps Howard Foundation's Edward Meeman award competition for his series of articles about the government's exposure of workers to highly toxic plutonium at its Paducah, Ky., gaseous diffusion plant. Warrick found contamination spread through work areas, locker rooms and even cafeterias at the plant. Two reporters at *The Oregonian*, Portland, Ore., also were finalists with an exposé of politics and pesticide regulation. But in the end, the award went to Roe.

Aside from winning the Meeman, Roe took home the Edgar A. Poe Award for coverage of news of national or regional significance and the Inland Press Association's Community Service Award. He got a second place in the National Headliner Awards for investigative reporting, and was a finalist in competition for the Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting, awarded by Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

In a year when environmental reporting failed to win a Pulitzer Prize, Roe narrowly missed winning a Pulitzer for investigative reporting; he was a finalist.

Also reaching the Pulitzer finals were the *Raleigh News & Observer's* staff coverage of Hurricane Floyd's destruction, abetted by North Carolina's factory-farm animal wastes, and two environmental reporting entries from *The Oregonian*. The Portland paper's blanket coverage of an oil spill was a finalist in the breaking news category, and its coverage of pesticides made it to the finals for explanatory reporting.

Roe's exhaustive series stemmed from a 22-month investigation of workplace safety problems associated with the production of beryllium, a strong, light metal that was considered critical to production of nuclear bombs, as well as missiles and other military weapons.

Relying on tens of thousands of court, industry and recently declassified government documents, Roe described what he called "a decades-long pattern of the government putting beryllium production and costs ahead of worker safety."

Roe focused on an estimated 1,200 U.S. workers that have contracted beryllium disease, an incurable, often fatal lung illness, and hundreds have died from it. He showed that government officials knew that workers in beryllium plants were being exposed to hazardous levels of toxic beryllium dust, in some cases 100 times higher than the federally recognized safety limit. But when the Labor Department moved to impose tighter workplace safety standards, the Defense Department and the Energy Department helped to block the rules; both feared better safety for workers might endanger the U.S. supply of a metal of military importance.

Dr. Peter Infante, director of standards review for the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, agreed that the government has done a poor job protecting beryllium workers. "These are all deaths and disease that could have been prevented," Dr. Infante told the *Blade*. "That's the sad thing about it."

IRE judges called Roe's project "an exhaustive piece that forced into the open embarrassing information that government and industry wanted hidden, using tragic tales of people who spent years of their lives gasping for breath."

Carmody, a former president of SEJ, focused on the plight of people who helped develop the first atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project lab at the University of Chicago. Ten of those workers were diagnosed with chronic beryllium disease, but for 45 years the government intentionally kept hundreds of other workers in the dark about the potentially deadly health consequences of their exposures.

Many federal workers have claimed for years that their illnesses—leukemia, lung cancer, Hodgkin's lymphoma and various other cancers as well as beryllium disease, asbestosis and other ailments—were the result of exposures to radiation and chemicals during years of work at the bomb factories from the 1950s through the 1970s. But until recently, the government fought lawsuits demanding compensation and argued that there was no proof the illnesses were caused by their work.

Last January, a presidentially appointed panel concluded that there was "credible evidence" that the illnesses were related to work exposure. The Clinton Administration followed up by proposing legislation to compensate an estimated 3,000 nuclear defense workers for illnesses related to workplace exposures, at a cost of more than \$520 million.

"We're going to try to correct this injustice," said Energy Secretary Bill Richardson.

Environmental Reporting Awards list

Pulitzer Prize Finalists

- Investigative Reporting: Sam Roe, Toledo Blade, for his "Deadly Alliance" expose on beryllium poisoning of defense workers. (Winner was the Associated Press for its exposé on a Korean War massacre of civilians by U.S. troops).

- Breaking News: Staff, The Oregonian, for comprehensive coverage of the environmental disaster created when a cargo ship carrying heavy fuels ran aground and broke apart, and how fumbling by official agencies made it worse; and Staff, the Raleigh (N.C.) News & Observer, for comprehensive coverage of the destruction and environmental damage caused by Hurricane Floyd. (Winner was The Denver Post for coverage of the Columbine High School massacre.)

• Explanatory reporting: Brent Walth and Alex Pulaski, *The Oregonian*, for their series on how politics influences pesticide regulation. (Winner was the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune for its examination of the costs of alcohol abuse.)

George Polk Awards

• Local Reporting, Kevin Carmody, *The Daily Southtown*, for “Deadly Silence” exposé on the cover-up of beryllium poisoning of Manhattan Project workers.

Scripps Howard National Journalism Awards

Edward J. Meeman Award for Environment Reporting

• Newspapers over 100,000 circulation, winner: Sam Roe, *Toledo Blade* (see above). Finalists: Joby Warrick, *The Washington Post*, Paducah plant workers exposed to plutonium risks; Brent Walth and Alex Pulaski, *The Oregonian* (see above).

• Newspapers under 100,000 circulation, winner: Mike Dunne, *Baton Rouge (La.) Advocate*, for a series of stories that illustrated the flaws in the government’s attempts to save Louisiana’s wetlands. Judges said: “In the finest tradition of journalism, (Dunne) prompted environmental official;s to make some changes in the way they were going about protecting the state’s precious coastline. The is an excellent example of how shining a light on a problem can bring about positive change.”—Finalists: Kevin Carmody, *Daily Southtown* (see above) and Jeff Alexander, *The Muskegon (Mich..) Chronicle*.

Electronic Media

• Small Market Radio, winner: High Plains New Service, for its reports on the Sioux Indian community’s reaction to an industrial-sized hog farm that proposed setting up operations on the reservation. Judges said: “This well-reported investigative piece makes a remote part of South Dakota come alive. A balanced

and human report on an often marginalized sub-culture.”

Investigative Reporters & Editors, IRE Awards

• Newspapers 100,000-250,000, Medal Winner: Sam Roe, *Toledo Blade* (see above).—Newspapers 100,000-250,000, finalist: Andrew Schneider, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, for “Uncivil Action: A Town Left to Die,” the story of a Libby, Mont., vermiculite mine that was linked to widespread asbestos disease.

• Books, Certificate Winner: Alan Green of the Center for Public Integrity, for his book “Animal Underworld: Inside America’s Black Market for Rare and Exotic Species,” which went beyond the illegal trade to document how zoos and animal rights groups often pretend to be opposed to their own practices.

The Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting

• Winner, Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, *Time* magazine, for their special investigative series on “corporate welfare,” including the damage to public lands and the environment that is fostered by special tax breaks and giveaways.—Finalists included: Sam Roe, *Toledo Blade* (see above).

National Headliners Awards

• Investigative Reporting, second place: Sam Roe, *Toledo Blade* (see above).

• Beat Reporting, second place: Kevin Carmody, *Daily Southtown*, (see above).

Editor’s Note: SEJournal reports the results of national and regional journalism awards given by journalism groups and universities, but not awards given by private interest groups or state press associations. More awards, including broadcast prizes, will be reported in subsequent issues.

Steaming hooley or news peg?

Earth Day 30 preempted by Elian

Hard news pushed Earth Day out of the limelight again this year, prompting environmental reporters and editors to debate whether that was a tragedy or no great loss. The federal seizure of Elian Gonzalez from his Miami relatives’ home dominated news over the 30th ED weekend. Five years earlier, the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building had eclipsed the 25th Earth Day.

On both anniversaries, avalanches of hard news coverage pushed environmental issues into back corners of newspapers and into small pockets of air time on television and radio. Jim Motavalli, editor of *E Magazine*, posted a complaint about this twist of fate on the SEJ listserv April 24. Within minutes, the listserv exploded with a crossfire on the subject.

The exchange exposed ambivalence among, and deep divisions between, environmental journalists regarding coverage of Earth Day. Some dismissed the celebrations as contrived events dominated by celebrities, publicity stunts and corporate greenwashing; others treasured it as a news peg for in-depth stories and a teaching opportunity; and several journalists saw a mixture of the two.

“For the most part, the hype around Earth Day is indeed a steaming pile of hooley,” concluded Peter Dykstra, a senior news editor for CNN, “but in terms of its ‘increasing the visibility of environmental reporting’ (okay, maybe not always the quality....) it is indeed our steaming pile of hooley.” Dykstra said that while Earth Day is a contrived event, it offers an opportunity to do in-depth stories that are usually ignored by editors and the public.

The self-appointed “curmudgeon” of the debate was Paul Rogers, environmental reporter for *The San Jose Mercury*

News, who denigrated Earth Day as “largely a non-story,” full of contrived events and greenwashing. Rogers also rejected arguments that Earth Day provided a platform for environmental reporters to produce educational features aimed at kids. He said they get that at school from “Captain Planet.” “Our job is to objectively cover news, not manufacture it,” Rogers grumbled electronically. SEJ obtained permission from the participants to list excerpts from the debate:

Jim Motavalli, Mon. 7:01 A.M.:

The Oklahoma bombing blew the 25th anniversary of Earth Day off the nation’s front pages. It’s unfortunate that, this year, the 30th Earth Day and the whole clean energy focus was lost in all the nonsense about Elian, Elian, Elian (not to mention the non-issue of Leo DiCaprio’s Clinton interview). Earth Day got very little national coverage as far as I could tell (*The Times* buried it, for instance), and the ABC special lost in the ratings to reruns. Does anyone have a more positive spin on this?

Peter Dykstra, Mon. 7:04 A.M.:

Like 1995, we saw a whole lot of our work get pre-empted. But we did get a nice piece on the air about how to turn Lazaro’s front door into an attractive mulch.

Carolyn Chase (*San Diego Earth Times*), Mon. 9:42 A.M.:

I did see some coverage of the national event—on the entertainment segment on CNN—noting that Leonardo DiCaprio’s 20-minute interview with Clinton was cut to 2-minutes on the ABC Earth Day special. Nothing about the environment of course. That’s part of what happens when you go for

the mega-celebrity approach.

Jim Schwab (*American Planning Assoc.*), Mon. 8:32 A.M.:

Trying to maintain momentum over this event by holding it the same weekend as Easter and Passover loses a lot of people amidst other holiday priorities. Maybe this never occurred to the organizers, but then that says something, too.

Peter Dykstra, Mon. 10:33 A.M.:

My favorite one from 1990 is that the City of Greensboro, N.C., moved all its Earth Day observances back one week so as to not conflict with the Greater Greensboro Open, one of the lesser events on the PGA Men's Tour. Janet Reno should have been as sensitive.

Michael A. Rivlin (*Amicus Journal*), Mon. 12:00 P.M.:

The Frontline/NOVA pre-Earth Day piece on global warming that did run was one of the few popular yet rigorous treatments of this topic that avoided the he-said-she-said approach that makes so much coverage of this subject absolutely mystifying and ultimately frustrating for readers and viewers.

As for Elian, the 3 months of all-Elian was over the top, but coverage of the actual raid was warranted. (Without it, the media would have been accused of a cover-up.)

Paul Rogers, Tue. 12:06 A.M.:

Pshaw.

Does it matter much that the breaking Elian news pre-empted a bunch of "coverage" about festivals, movie star speeches and rhetoric from political leaders of both parties? In my view, Earth Day is largely a non-story. I know SEJers have this debate every year. Why don't we cover Arbor Day? Same reason. There are plenty of environmental news stories without running contrived stuff. Maybe I'm a curmudgeon, but am I the only one who finds the whole Earth Day season—from the greenwashing to the blizzards of worthless press releases—quite tiresome? Just because enviros order us to cover something doesn't mean it is news. Viva Elian!

Carolyn Chase, Tue. 7:46 A.M.:

Surely you admit that "news" is not the prevailing standard for coverage these days—if it ever was ... the Elian situation is a classic latin soap opera—not much news there—just rampant opportunism and emotionalism and exploitation—like the traffic accident most cannot turn away from. People peacefully attempting to educate themselves and their community is seldom to never considered news. I wonder whether it should be. (I'm a volunteer Board member of the group that organizes the main festival here.)

With the incessant focus on drama as news, the millions of actions taken and more needed every day to deal with environmental challenges, will never "rate" as that kind of spectacle. You should cover Arbor Day. There are a million "serious" angles—but probably not one that can compete with the blood and drama quotient required to "make the news" standards of bread and circuses.

It is disheartening to hear an SEJer applauding editorial decisions to cut even "soft" coverage in favor of exploiting a 6 year old.

Jim Motavalli, Tue. 9:56 A.M.:

Paul Rogers should keep in mind that Earth Day is the *only* time most major media even consider covering an environmental story. If I'm wrong, name the full-scale global warming specials that *weren't* tied to that "non-event." It's fine to be a curmudgeon about contrived events, as long as you consider every day to be Earth Day.

Mike Taugher (*Albuquerque Journal*), Tue. 10:56 A.M.:

Why should any journalist get excited about a holiday—an anniversary story? And consider that the event was chaired this year by a teen idol engaging in an embarrassingly blatant PR response to an entertainment blurb controversy last year.

Heather Dewar (*The Baltimore Sun*), Tue. 11:33 A.M.:

I wholeheartedly agree with Paul. Earth Day's sole virtue is that editors consider some kind of Earth Day story to be mandatory, just like a Veterans Day story. So if you're lucky and skillful, you can use it as an opportunity for remedial education (which I think is a big part of our job). On the other hand, editors usually prefer to cover a tree-planting or stream clean-up—the equivalent of that obligatory 1A Veterans Day photo of a flag on a grave. Yo prefiero Elian.

Mike Dunne (*Baton Rouge Advocate*), Tue. 12:16 P.M.:

I, too, have to come down on the side of those who see little real value in Earth Day. Earth Day here in Baton Rouge is billed as the biggest in the South. The Earth Day festival exists in great part because many of the community's biggest polluting industries sponsor it and use it as part of their effort to show how "green" they really are. My newspaper is also a sponsor, I might add.

I cannot tell you how thankful I was that I was out of town and did not have to cover it this year.

Tom Meersman (*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*), Tue. 3:18 P.M.:

I'm glad that Earth Day has become a commonplace spring event in many communities. For that reason, I always write a pre-Earth Day story that lists cleanups and tree plantings for those who want to participate. No harm in that. I don't cover the events themselves, but neither do I look down my nose at people who engage in those activities or sponsor them.

I noticed very little corporate greenwashing this year, but I did see an increase in the number of Earth Day story pitches coming from politicians and from state agencies.

As Heather noted, Earth Day provides a good excuse to write a non-news story that will get better play than usual...such as consumer choices and decisions that can really make an environmental difference.

If a few stories didn't make the weekend news because of Elian, so what? That's the biz. If the stories are strong enough, they'll have their day.

Jim Motavalli, Tue. 2:33 P.M.:

I beg to differ. Wasn't East Timor a strong story? Isn't overpopulation a strong story? Aside from CNN, the major media have almost totally ignored that last one, and many more. Aren't African civil wars and havoc-causing Bangladesh floods strong stories? That's why we have Project Censored.

Ken Ward (*Charleston Gazette*), Tue. 2:42 P.M.:

At the risk of sounding like a fence-walker, I think that both sides of this “what gets covered” discussion have some valid points.

As for Earth Day, I went out of town and hiked in the Monongahela National Forest. It was rainy and cold, but it did me (and in the end, probably my readers) more good than if I spent the day doing a feature about a tree-planting ceremony.

Maybe we should create a national Earth Day holiday for environmental reporters...

Carolyn Chase, Tue. 3:14 P.M.:

Seems like that’s how y’all already treat it. So party on. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers around the world is just not something most of you—or your editors—think is worthy. But have a few of them killed in protests—wow! that will make Earth Day “worthy”—don’t ya think?

Coincidentally, I was driving by the major post office around here today and they have a sign out front for “public messages”—it said, “Make Mother’s Day a Priority”

ho hum,

twisted and bitter, but then I don’t work on Earth Day for the media, thank god.

Ken Ward, Tue. 6:20 P.M.

I don’t recall anyone saying that if a couple protesters are killed on Earth Day, that would make me want to cover it more. I guess I missed something.

Earth Day is exactly how it has been described—it’s an event that interest groups (though perhaps “public” interest groups) cooked up to try to get people to pay attention to their issues. I don’t think it’s our job to fall into doing that on Earth Day just because “thousands of volunteers” around the world took part.

Just because “we” or “our editors” don’t cover a staged event that environmental groups or industry or whoever hold, that doesn’t mean we don’t cover the issues involved. It seems like to me that much of the complaints about lack of E-Day coverage have more to do with that than anything else.

Marla Cone (*Los Angeles Times*), Tue. 3:58 P.M.

I think our readers would rather hear about the health risks of the water they drink or the air they breathe than read about people at a fair or a tree-planting. I recommended to my editor that we cover Earth Day like any other national event or holiday: A short, inside story wrapping up the events. My editor wanted to do nothing, reflecting what many of you are saying. And I agree that it is a non-news event. But my feeling is that if so many people are involved in a worldwide event, whether it’s Easter or Earth Day, we should have some type of story reporting it, instead of totally ignoring it. Of course, it’s a waste of an experienced enviro writer’s talents to do it. Leave it to an intern or weekend reporter if you can.

Peter Dykstra, Wed 7:48 A.M.:

Consider this: As Lyndon Johnson once said of Ferdinand Marcos, “sure he’s an S.O.B., but he’s our S.O.B.!”

For the most part, the hype around Earth Day is indeed a steaming pile of hoey, but in terms of its “increasing the visibility of environmental reporting” (okay, maybe not always the

quality....) it is indeed our steaming pile of hoey.

It’s no secret that every facet of environmental interest—from the general public’s awareness level, to non-profit groups’ membership coffers, to our bosses’ interest in reporting on our beat—is traditionally driven by fear and tragedy. For all its contrivedness, Earth Day represents the one opportunity in which we, in our work, can set our calendars for stories that take a thoughtful look back, or ahead, at where we truly stand with environmental politics, environmental economics, environmental organizations, environmental contrarians, and, lest we forget, the environment. Despite the hype, it beats the ambulance chasing we’re expected to do on many other environment stories—including some we shouldn’t chase as much as we do. I actually prefer to use Earth Day as an opportunity to measure what we’ve won or lost in the natural environment; how the political players have fared; and who was right and who was wrong.

At least every five years, we get the opportunity to take center stage, and to do so with material that is at least above the norm for thoughtfulness. And if Earth Day is the lame excuse to get my bosses to run this stuff, it’s our lame excuse.

Gary Braasch (Freelance photographer), Wed 1:47 P.M.

The political beat has seemingly continuous ability to get big coverage from the endlessly repeated stump speeches, state and national political party machinations, and “he said-she saids from political steaming fax piles. How does this happen? Can anyone argue against my opinion that day after day most of this political campaign stuff is deeply boring, repetitive, not urgent and does not advance our democratic need to know more about the candidates. Very similar arguments are used against environmental stories.

Amy Gahran (Freelance), Wed. 8:48 A.M.:

Earth Day was intended, at least in part, as an opportunity for *kids* to gain a greater environmental awareness. So yes, many of the events are rather contrived and not necessarily newsy in the way journalists prefer—but perhaps the contrived approach might make more sense if you view Earth Day as an educational tool for children rather than just a news story/event.

Paul Rogers, Wed. 6:45 P.M.:

Color me skeptical.

Is it our job to educate kids about issues from the environmental movement’s perspective? Seems to me they get plenty of that at school and from Captain Planet. Our job is to objectively cover news, not manufacture it.

What if we do stories (as I did) for Earth Day saying most barometers of environmental health are improving in the United States? Or that there isn’t a landfill shortage? Or that the air is cleaner, not dirtier? Or that the water is cleaner, not dirtier? Or that there are fewer toxics released by factories?

If environmental journalism is to be taken as seriously as other types of reporting by our editors and by the public, and if we as a group of writers are not going to be stereotyped as biased tree-huggers masquerading as real reporters, then we should strive to apply the same tough standards of newsworthiness on eco-stories as on police, politics or court stories. Environmental groups already have enough public relations people... ❖

Riding the range on a Pentium II

By PAUL ROGERS

Most of the writing we do in Silicon Valley involves computer chips. But last year, *The San Jose Mercury News* took on cow chips. Using databases to analyze federal billing records, the newspaper tried to measure the true costs and beneficiaries of grazing on federal lands from the Great Plains to the Pacific.

Our conclusion, after nine months of painstaking and sometimes frustrating investigation, was that Federal taxpayers spend more than \$100 million every year in grazing subsidies to keep cattle and sheep roaming public lands.

The public bears this cost largely because grazing fees are the same as in the mid-1970s, \$1.35 per cow per month. On private lands around the west, by comparison, grazing fees can reach up to \$15 per month.

Grazing also imposes steep ecological costs on public lands. Cattle grind down native grasses, trample streams and in some cases, drive birds and fish to the endangered list.

But perhaps more noteworthy for many taxpayers, our Microsoft Access databases were able to generate precise tables proving that the biggest beneficiaries of below-market grazing fees are not the mom and pop cowboys depicted in Hollywood movies, as many defenders of the status quo in Congress have alleged for years. They are a small number of corporations, millionaires and hobbyists. Simply put, the public pays Anheuser Busch, Idaho billionaire J.R. Simplot, computer heiress Mary Hewlett and other "Rolex Ranchers" to damage its lands.

To compile our findings, we used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain more than 26,000 billing records from the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. In a practice that dates back to the 19th century, the two agencies allow livestock grazing on 254 million acres of land in 17 western states, an area equal in size to California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

The BLM keeps nationwide records of the people who hold federal grazing permits. That database is relatively easy to obtain. We simply asked Leon Pack, a very helpful career number-cruncher in Denver who controls the BLM billing system, to send us electronic copies of the records, showing name, address, location and number of animals each for BLM permittee.

Would that our friends in the U.S. Forest Service were so

organized.

Difficult as it is to believe, the U.S. Forest Service has no way of running national queries to find out who rents its lands for livestock grazing. Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck told us that such a database is at least two years away. That means that no one can type in a name—say Ted Turner—and find out how many animals that person has, where they are, and what that person pays in fees. All Forest Service grazing records are kept separately in the agency's nine regional offices.

This fact has frustrated environmental groups, reporters and taxpayer advocacy organizations for years. Trying to crack the bureaucracy, we FOIA'd all six regional Forest Service offices in the West where most cattle grazing on public land occurs.

My first FOIA went out in November, 1997. We did not receive all the records in a usable format until 13 months later. At first, Forest Service leaders refused to give us the records, claiming that to let the public see the names and addresses of

ranchers renting federal lands would violate the Privacy Act. We were preparing to file a lawsuit when we learned that the Idaho attorney general already had done so

Eventually, Idaho won, and the records slowly were released. To our chagrin, we found that each region had a different record keeping system. Each had different fields in its databases. Some were clean and easily searchable. Others were full of errors and required hand checking. In the end, former *Mercury News* database editor Jennifer LaFleur, now with the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, combined all six Forest Service files into one database. We spent weeks going line-by-line and combining permit holders by address. Billionaire J.R. Simplot, for example, has at least nine different names on his BLM and Forest Service grazing permits. Most trace back to the same post office box in Idaho, however, so we were able to combine them and get a true picture of his use of public land.

We ran queries ranking permit holders by the number of livestock they had on public lands. Our findings: The top 10 percent of grazing permit holders on BLM lands control 65 percent of all livestock on BLM lands. Similarly, the bottom 50 percent of permit holders on national forests hold only 3 percent of the livestock.

We e-mailed our rankings back to each region of the Forest Service before publication and had them verify for accuracy. The story, "Cash Cows: The Giveaway of the West," was published Nov. 7, 1999, in the *Mercury News*. We learned that databases could be a great tool for tracking other public land uses, such as mining or logging, though some federal resource agencies have been slow to compile usable databases.

Oh, and we learned one other thing. It's really hard to photograph cows.



Simply put,
the public pays
Anheuser Busch,
Idaho billionaire
J.R. Simplot,
computer heiress
Mary Hewlett
and other
"Rolex Ranchers"
to damage
its lands.

Paul Rogers is the resources and environment writer at The San Jose Mercury News. The project can be viewed on its web site at: www.sjmercury.com/nation/giveaway.

EPA Blackout advances industry agenda

By JOSEPH A. DAVIS

At the end of a week of hackers-in-headlines, the chemical industry and others regulated by EPA pulled off one of the boldest “denial of service attacks”—not simply by bringing down a Web site they disliked, but by bringing down public trust in electronic right-to-know. The losers will be journalists and the public.

Riding a wave of public and media concern about hackers, House Commerce Committee Chairman Tom Bliley, R-Va., on Feb. 17 forced EPA’s Web site and e-mail offline for more than two weeks. There is no doubt that EPA had some major security problems, but I believe Bliley’s attack was part of an industry-driven campaign against the public’s right-to-know, rather than an innocent effort to strengthen EPA’s Web site.

Bliley has long been a supporter of industry lobbying efforts to keep information about the health risks of chemical pollution out of the public eye—lobbying that began well before Congress passed the first “right-to-know” law in 1986.

The most recent chapter—the battle over Web site security—goes back at least to September 1997 when an investigation by EPA’s inspector general found EPA vulnerable to hacker attacks. Bliley and the chemical industry publicized this report. Two years later, after an October 1999 report from Congress’ General Accounting Office found vulnerabilities in the networks of 22 federal agencies, including EPA, Bliley asked GAO to investigate EPA further.

But only last February, when computer security became a hot-button issue, did Bliley and the chemical industry launch a full-scale attack. On Feb. 7, when headlines screamed of hackers bringing down big Web sites like Yahoo! and eBay, the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA) published a press release detailing the EPA security flaws that GAO had found. On Feb. 15, Bliley wrote to EPA Administrator Carol Browner complaining that EPA had not carried out enough of the security fixes recommended by GAO. He called on her to “immediately shut down the Internet connection to your Agency data systems”—an action that had not been recommended by GAO.

Bliley abruptly canceled a hearing planned for Feb. 17 and instead held a press conference a day earlier to blast EPA’s computer security and call publicly for a site shutdown. On Feb. 17, EPA complied.

It wasn’t the first time Bliley and industry have used headline-grabbing, alarmist messages to limit EPA’s use of the Internet. After the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa, they warned that on-line posting of worst-case chemical accident scenarios—mandated by Congress—could invite terrorist attacks on manufacturing plants. Congress passed a law last year that required the EPA to take them off-line.

Lobbyists’ Drive

Why was EPA’s site singled out? GAO had also hacked into NASA’s command-and-control systems and Defense Department systems containing military secrets. But the Web sites of these and the other at-risk agencies remained on-line. And if security was the only concern, this matter could—and should—have been handled quietly.

Bliley has received huge campaign contributions from the chemical industry—among the top half-dozen in the House during the 1990s, according to federal campaign finance data compiled by US-PIRG. Nearly all of his recommendations to restrict access to EPA data had first been advanced by the chemical industry.

In the past year, much of the industry’s agenda on information access has been advanced by a lobbying consortium called the Coalition for Effective Environmental Information (CEEI), whose members include CMA, the American Forest and Paper Association, the American Petroleum Institute, BASF, Bristol-Myers Squibb, and other EPA-regulated companies and industries. CEEI firms have complained that competitors might glean “confidential business information” (CBI) from EPA’s Web site.

Meanwhile, CEEI has been trying to expand the legal definition of CBI to include more of what they don’t want made public: not “trade secrets” in the traditional or legal sense (e.g., Coke’s secret formula), but rather data now required to be public, such as reports on industrial plants’ waste and emissions.

CEEI has complained that EPA’s on-line EnviroFacts database, a key tool for reporters, poses a competitive risk precisely because it offered greater access, integration, and currency of data. CEEI also has argued that information about companies’ pollution citations should be moved off-line if they settle out of court.

Following the industry’s lead, Bliley complained to Browner that the EPA system’s vulnerability to penetration via the Internet could compromise “law enforcement-sensitive data, proprietary and confidential business information, Privacy Act data, and financial and accounting systems,” and “even the chemical accident worst-case scenario database...”

Why Reporters Should Care

Reporters may have already lost access to on-line data because of CEEI’s larger campaign. For instance, after industry objections EPA abandoned its plans to rank the environmental performance of car plants, refineries, and other facilities under its Sector Facilities Indexing Project. Also, the public will not get the national overview of health risks from chemical accidents, fires and explosions that on-line postings of worst-case accident scenarios would have provided.

Expect more of the same after Bliley’s denial-of-service attack. By damaging EPA’s credibility, this incident provides the perfect justification for suppressing information. Industry argues that if EPA can’t protect confidential business information, then EPA shouldn’t get that information in the first place. Similarly, if EPA computers are insecure, then they can say EPA’s electronic right-to-know effort should be scaled back. They are already busy doing so.

Joe Davis covered the House Commerce Committee in the 1980s when the original “right to know” law was passed and continues to write about electronic reporting resources for various publications.

Viewpoints

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

Viewpoints response

Web site insecurity due to neglect

By U.S. REP. TOM BLILEY

Last year, I championed a successful bipartisan effort, with the Administration's initially grudging but eventually full support, to pass a law that prevented EPA from posting on the Internet, in a national, searchable electronic database, site-specific death and injury estimates for potential accidents at tens of thousands of chemical facilities nationwide—information that the FBI and other law enforcement and national security officials believed would aid terrorists in carrying out acts of violence against our fellow Americans.

This law—which requires that EPA make this information available to the public in more secure ways—crystallized the modern reality that, in today's interconnected world, the manner in which government discloses information to the public must be balanced against society's need for adequate security. It also raises legitimate concerns about the extent to which the vast stores of non-public, confidential information maintained by EPA—including the “worst-case scenario” database—may be vulnerable to unauthorized access, theft, tampering or misuse.

In April 1999, I first wrote to EPA requesting information relating to its computer security practices, based on a 1997 report from EPA's inspector general that raised serious concerns in this area. Despite EPA's promises to correct the vulnerabilities identified by the inspector general, EPA had made little or no progress implementing improvements in this area. Although EPA responded to me in May 1999 by stating that it had indeed enhanced its computer security, I was skeptical given EPA's poor track record.

Accordingly, in August, 1999, I asked GAO to conduct a review of cyber-security at EPA. GAO's findings were more alarming than even I had expected. Having conducted over 100 audits of computer security at various Federal agencies, GAO experts informed my staff that EPA's problems were, in scope and magnitude, as bad—or worse—than they had ever seen. GAO found “serious and pervasive problems that essentially render EPA's agencywide information security program ineffective.” EPA's security program planning and management was “largely a paper exercise that has done little to” protect its data systems, and GAO's tests of EPA computer-based controls concluded that “the computer operating systems and the agencywide computer network that support most of EPA's mission-related and financial operations are riddled with security weaknesses.” Despite EPA claims to me that it had already implemented an enhanced firewall strategy by May, 1999, GAO's auditors—using commonly available hacker tools—were able to easily penetrate EPA's defenses from the Internet.

Even more alarming was GAO's finding that EPA's neglect of these security vulnerabilities had resulted in dozens of known security breaches over the past several years, including “repeated systematic probes from a variety of domestic and foreign sources,” compromised passwords, deleted files, and the use of EPA's systems to infiltrate the data systems of other governmental and non-governmental entities and, in at least one case, to launch a “denial of service” attack on a private Internet service provider. These vulnerabilities and known breaches ren-

dered EPA's systems wide open to the world and thus impossible to “clean” without a major overhaul.

Perhaps the most damaging of GAO's findings was that these security breaches could easily have been prevented by EPA management over the past seven years. EPA knew about many of these security problems for years, but failed to heed the warnings and recommendations of its own senior security personnel and inspector general. In 1993, EPA security consultants called for improvements to the security of the agency's mainframe computers. In 1996, outside security consultants called on EPA to correct what they concluded were catastrophic security vulnerabilities. In 1997, EPA's inspector general warned EPA to implement enhanced perimeter defenses, and identified known security breaches and damage to EPA systems. But EPA leaders repeatedly chose to disregard security recommendations that might have caused their systems to be disrupted while security enhancements were implemented.

Perhaps this points to a fundamental conflict between EPA's decentralized organizational approach and effective computer security management. Or perhaps this was caused by nothing more than failed leadership attention to guaranteeing that EPA's security policies were being carried out. But one thing is for sure: it should come as no surprise to anyone that, after years of failing to implement security improvements, the agency was left with no choice but to bring down its computer systems and undergo a massive overhaul to purge its corrupted systems and erect adequate security barriers.

That is why, after careful consideration of GAO's written findings, I decided to postpone the planned public hearing on EPA's cyber-security problems and called upon the agency to temporarily shut down its systems and fix these problems. This was the most prudent course of action to take, given that it appeared EPA would continue its own irresponsible conduct unless I raised sufficient public pressure on the agency to act otherwise. And contrary to some assertions I did not publicly release any specific information from GAO's review until after EPA con-

(Continued on page 26)

In today's interconnected world, the manner in which government discloses information to the public must be balanced against society's need for adequate security.

South inspires hard-nosed exposition and poetry

RIVER OF LAKES:

A JOURNEY ON FLORIDA'S ST. JOHNS RIVER

By Bill Belleville

University of Georgia Press, 220 pp., 2000.

BLUE RIDGE 2020: AN OWNER'S MANUAL

By Steve Nash

University of North Carolina Press, 211 pp., 1999.

Books by Members

You couldn't find a better contrast of environmental writing styles than in the pages of these two books. Although they have much in common—both describe the history and current state of a Southeastern regional ecosystem—their approaches represent two ends of a stylistic spectrum.

On the literary narrative side you find *River of Lakes*—a broadly drawn, first-person essay by Bill Belleville that takes us from the St. Johns' headwaters to the ocean, often moving as poetically as the marshy river it describes.

On the hard-nosed, expository side of the style spectrum you find *Blue Ridge 2020*—a sharply focused set of journalistic explorations of major issues confronting the region by Steve Nash. Although full of personal glimpses of scientists at work, the book does not linger on scenes of mountain beauty, but rather gets straight to the heart of the problems.

Nash is an associate professor of journalism at the University of Richmond. He has a long history as a science writer and contributor to *BioScience*, *The Scientist*, *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *E Magazine* and the *SEJournal*.

As Nash explains it, the Blue Ridge ecosystem is significant as the largest concentration of public lands east of the Mississippi and also because it contains some of the greatest biological diversity in North America.

Stretching 550 miles from northern Georgia to southern Pennsylvania, this region is also famous for its scenery and the Shenandoah and Smokey Mountains national parks, the Blue Ridge Parkway, seven national forests and large sections of the Appalachian Trail.

In describing the region and its environmental problems, *Blue Ridge 2020* relies on published studies and interviews with biologists, foresters, botanists and other scientists actively engaged in assessing the environmental health of the Blue Ridge. Nash prefers to take the reader into the heart of the issues rather than skirting along political fracture zones, and he omits interviews with environmentalists and industry spokespersons without apology.

The region's biggest problems involve acid rain, exotic species, disappearing wildlife habitat and uncontrolled growth. Nitrates from airborne NOx compounds, for example, approach the human health toxicity standard for drinking water in some remote streams in the Smoky Mountains where water should be at

its purest.

The book carefully dissects a major ongoing controversy over acid rain and the decline of red spruce on Mount Mitchell. Scientists now say they understand better the mechanisms by which acid rain causes damage, but they still disagree over its impact.

In addition to an assessment of problems, Nash includes sidebars entitled "solutions." For example, in a discussion about rural sprawl, he describes approaches and guidelines from other regions. One shortcoming of the book may be that some of the "solutions" don't actually describe alternatives but are simply details of damage reports. But even this criticism goes less to the merits of the book than to its brevity in a topic area that might lend itself to encyclopedic treatment.

Nash also describes some of the history of environmental conflict in the region. For instance, he describes the turn-of-the-century suit by the state of Georgia over the Copper Basin area of Tennessee, in which Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said:

"It is a fair and reasonable demand on the part of [Georgia] that the air over its territory should not be polluted on a great scale by sulphurous acid gas, that the forests on its mountains should not be further destroyed or threatened by the acts of persons beyond its control."

The Blue Ridge has green in its future, "but it may well have been robbed of much of its beauty, its uniqueness, the splendor of its native plants and animals and their myriad linkages," Nash warns. Many scientists are knowledgeable but feel powerless, like "bystanders at a train wreck." Yet one strength of the book is that Nash describes how public opinion strongly supports environmental protection; he details what steps are being made to build protection into public policy.

Overall, *Blue Ridge 2020* is an outstanding piece of even-handed environmental journalism that is grounded in scientific fact and guided by straightforward concerns about the public interest in the Blue Ridge region.

If *Blue Ridge 2020* is intended to guide public policy, *River of Lakes* is intended to help readers connect with nature, especially those rare and wonderful surviving corners of wilderness in Florida. Belleville describes finding an ancient mound of shellfish, probably from a pre-Columbian camp, and thinking about the beliefs of these Native Americans.

People had three souls, they believed. "One is in the pupil of the eye, a second is the shadow the body casts, and the third is in the image reflected in clear water. Upon death, two of the souls leave the body while the one in the eye remains... When I come to such places looking for peace, alone on the densely wooded, shelly hills, I am... nearly consumed by the promise Florida's wilderness still offers."

If biological diversity is strength, stylistic diversity must be one of the more interesting metaphors to be found among the community of environmental writers.

—Bill Kovarik

The Rocky Flats story

Avatar of secrecy, mismanagement, risk and misplaced hope

MAKING A REAL KILLING: ROCKY FLATS AND THE NUCLEAR WEST

By Len Ackland

University of New Mexico Press, 308 pp., 1999.

Books by Members

I live in the southeastern corner of Boulder, Colo.—just about eight miles from the infamous Rocky Flats plant. There, for decades, the Department of Energy manufactured plutonium “triggers” for nuclear bombs. Driving down Highway 93, I’ve seen the sign at the plant’s entrance evolve over the last five years from the slightly hopeful “Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site” to the more terminal “Rocky Flats Closure Project.” It’s part of my life.

Consequently, I have an especially pressing interest in understanding Rocky Flats. This plant is a large and looming figure in Colorado’s long, colorful history, but it’s also a microcosm of issues affecting our nation and our world. It has become an avatar of secrecy, mismanagement, risk and misplaced hope. However, Rocky Flats is also a dreadfully—even painfully—convoluted and technical topic. Much has been written about this plant, but precious little is readable.

Fortunately, Len Ackland’s new book, *Making a Real Killing*, is a refreshing change for people who really want to

understand why nearly every facet of America’s nuclear bomb business became such a terrible mess. Ackland breaks the history of Rocky Flats down into carefully selected, well-crafted chunks that also manage to fit together to form an engaging story.

The story Ackland tells is as much about people and communities as it is about the plant. He begins by delving deep into the past of the land where the infamous plant now stands, following the evolution of the ranching Church family that homesteaded the land in the 1860s and that still owns much of the surrounding property.

He also explores the feisty, larger-than-life political grandstanding that led to the unfortunate siting of a potential radiation and chemical hazard upwind from, and up the water table from, one of the West’s major population centers. He describes how the plant worked, and what happened when things went wrong, through the eyes of the people who worked there. He talks to the neighbors of Rocky Flats. And he explores the DOE and government-contractor “culture,” often blamed as a root cause of problems at this and other weapons plants.

This is also a well-supported and thoroughly documented book, complete with footnotes—a valuable resource for journalists and researchers. Several photographs and illustrations help to bring Rocky Flats to life.

So get ready to settle in to this book if you start reading—it’s more engrossing than you might expect.

—Amy Gahrn

Utah woes

Environmental plagues claimed but not proven

CANARIES ON THE RIM:

LIVING DOWNWIND IN THE WEST

By Chip Ward

Verso, 238 pp., 1999

For years, Chip Ward has led a pretty interesting life in what is typically considered one of the most desolate places in the country: Utah. The thing about Utah is that it gets much more interesting if you take the time to slow down and really experience the details, as well as the vistas.

In the mid-70s Ward and his wife, Linda, lived a fairly isolated life amid the stunning slickrock and fragile, surprising ecosystem of Capitol Reef National Park, in the southern part of the state. Later, they brought their new family north to the small town of Grantsville on the edge of the vast Great Basin Desert.

There, gradually, the Ward family came face-to-face with some of this country’s worst environmental nightmares: The dioxin-spewing, leak-prone Tooele nerve gas incinerator. The chlorine-drenched, secretive Magcorp magnesium refinery. The arsenic- and heavy metal-laden Kennecott copper smelter. And Dugway Proving Ground—home to open-air testing of chemical and biological warfare agents, and also to the annual “detonation season” when expired ordnance would be exploded several times a day, rattling windows and worse in nearby Grantsville.

In *Canaries on the Rim*, Ward explains how he and his family became aware of these problems, what they learned about the region’s environmental history, and how they organized parts of the local community to gather more information and ask more questions—loudly and in public.

This lively, first-person book rambles from topic to topic, but Ward is a good storyteller who points out intriguing coincidences and contrasts—especially that deserts are neither as barren or isolated as commonly believed, which makes hiding environmental monsters out there even more dangerous. He delves into the region’s truly bizarre history, complete with mysterious sheep kills and abandoned plans for an underground railroad for MX missiles.

However, this book is more a collection of observations than a coherent narrative. While it’s well worth reading, it is highly opinionated. Normally I wouldn’t have a problem with that, but unfortunately Ward fails to substantiate many of his most striking or controversial contentions to the extent that many journalists would like.

So in a sense, read this book at your own risk. If you’re serious about researching or covering these issues, look to *Canaries on the Rim* as a guide, not a definitive reference. It’s one person’s account—a very engaging and worthwhile one to be sure, but also one that needs to back up what it says.

—Amy Gahrn

Calendar

JUNE

21-24: **6th Interdisciplinary Conference on the Environment:** Montreal. Contact: Kevin Hickey, IEA/Hickey-Kantarelis, Assumption College, 500 Salisbury St., Worcester, MA 01656. (508) 767-7296. Fax: (508) 767-7382. E-mail: khickey@assumption.edu. URL: <http://champion.iupui.edu/~mreiter/iea.htm>.

22-25: **Endocrine Disruptors in the Marine Environment: Impacts on Marine Wildlife and Human Health:** Bar Harbor, Maine. Sponsored by the Marine Environmental Research Institute and University of Connecticut, this symposium will assess impacts of hormone-like pollutants, the use of wildlife as sentinels for human risks, and new methods for findings and measuring these contaminants. Contact: Sandy Witcomb, The Jackson Laboratory, 600 Main St., Bar Harbor, Maine. 04609-1500. (207) 288-6419. Fax: (207) 288-6080. E-mail: slw@jax.org. URL: <http://www.jax.org/courses/documents/meriworkshop.html>.

25-28: **Managing Marine Recreational Fisheries in the 21st Century:** San Diego. Sponsored jointly by the National Marine Fisheries Service and National Sea Grant College Program, this is being billed as the first major, national forum to focus on issues shaping the marine recreational fisheries. Contact: Dallas Miner. (301) 427-2015. E-mail: Dallas.Miner@noaa.gov

JULY

8-13: **The Coastal Society's 17th International Conference:** Portland, Ore. This biennial symposium will feature sessions on revitalizing urban coasts and waterfronts, protecting and restoring coastal ecosystems, and reducing vulnerabilities to coastal hazards. Contact: Laurie Jodice, (541) 737-1340. URL: <http://www.oce.orst.edu/mrm/tcs17/confhome.html>.

9-12: **The American Society of Agricultural Engineers annual international meeting:** Milwaukee. Sessions for this conference will focus on such new technologies to limit environmental contamination. A particular focus of the entire meeting will be "precision farming"—the use of computers and high-tech equipment to tailor the use of agricultural chemicals or other resources to the specific needs of the soil and/or crops as they change across a field. Contact: Brenda West, American Society of Agricultural Engineers, 2950 Niles Rd., St. Joseph, MI 49085-9659. (616) 428-6327. Fax: (616) 429-3852. E-mail: west@asae.org. URL: <http://www.asae.org/>.

July 16-20: **North American Prairie Conference:** Mason City, Iowa. Symposia presented during the meeting will address topics such as roadside-vegetation management and seed-source issues, along with sessions on prairie culture, heritage and ecology. Contact: Carol Schutte, North Iowa Area Community College, 500 College Dr., Mason City, IA 50401. (515) 422-4319. Fax: (515) 422-4115. E-mail: schutcar@niacc.cc.ia.us. URL: <http://www.niacc.cc.ia.us/~napc/index.html>.

17-19: **The Extreme of the Extremes: International Symposium on Extraordinary Floods:** Reykjavik, Iceland. The theme of the scientific meeting is to focus on the role of factors such as mountains, extreme climate zones, and the interaction of snow and ice in fostering unpredictably large floods. Attention will also be given to whether extreme flooding is increasing in frequency. Talks are also scheduled on environmental consequences of such flooding. Attendees also have the opportunity to take field trips to area geysers, volcanic "plugs" and glaciers. The meeting's official language will be English. Contact: Helga P. Finnsdottir, Extremes2000 Conference Secretariat, Hydrological Service, National Energy Authority, Grensasvegi 9, IS-108 Reykjavik, ICELAND. E-mail: extremes2000@os.is. URL: <http://www.os.is/vatnam/extremes2000/invitation.html>.

24-26: **Air Pollution 2000:** Cambridge, UK. This eighth International Conference on Air Pollution will bring together scientists working in industry, research organizations, government and academia who are working on monitoring, simulation and management of air pollution problems. Emphasis will be on the development of experimental and computational techniques which can be used as a tool for the solution and understanding of practical air pollution problems, from which it is possible to evaluate proposed emission control techniques and strategies. Case studies will be presented and discussed in detail. Papers may also be accepted on a more theoretical nature, which are mathematically and computationally based. Contact: Sally Walsh, Wessex Institute of Technology, Ashurst Lodge, Ashurst, Southampton, SO40 7AA, UK. (+ 44 (0) 2380 293223. Fax: (+44 (0) 2380 292853. E-mail: slwalsh@wessex.ac.uk. URL: <http://www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences/2000/air2000/>.

26-28: **Urban Transport and the Environment for the 21st Century:** Cambridge, UK. The meeting will provide an opportunity for the exchange of information between researchers, technologists, planners and those involved with transport policy. Contact: Sally Walsh, Wessex Institute of Technology, Ashurst Lodge, Ashurst, Southampton, SO40 7AA, UK. (44)-238-029-3223. Fax: (44)-238-029-2853. E-mail: slwalsh@wessex.ac.uk. URL: <http://www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences/2000/ut2000/>.

AUGUST

6-10: **Year 2000 Ecological Society of America annual meeting:** Snowbird, Utah. Sessions for this meeting are expected to cover topics from plant ecology and climate change, to biodegradation, role of pollinators, and restoration of perturbed ecosystems. Contact: Alison Gillespie, Ecological Society of America, 1707 H St., NW, Washington, DC 20006. (202) 833-8773. Fax: (202) 833-8775. E-mail: alison@esa.org

Calendar

7-10: **National Beach Preservation Conference:** Kaanapali, Maui, Hawaii Topics to be covered by this conference range from erosion and nonpoint pollution to harbor dredging and restoration projects. Contact: Robert A. Mullane, Hawaii Sea Grant Extension, Maui Community College, 310 Kaahumanu Ave., Kahului, Hawaii 96732. (808) 984-3254. Fax: (808) 242-8733. E-mail: rmullane@soest.hawaii.edu. URL: <http://www.soest.hawaii.edu/SEAGRANT/NBPC2000.html>.

8-11: **HydroVision 2000:** Charlotte, N.C. This conference offers session on a range of hydro-energy topics, including the value of old dams, innovative technologies, flood control, small-head hydro vs large, river restoration, and the protection of Snake River salmon. Contact: HydroVision 2000, 410 Archibald St., Kansas City, Mo. 64111-3046. (816) 931-1311, ext. 105. Fax: 816-931-2015. URL: <http://www.hcpub.com>.

12-18: **Dioxin 2000 Conference:** Davis, Calif. URL: <http://www.cevs.ucdavis.edu/Cofred/Public/Aca/ConfHome.cfm?confid>.

13-16: **Fifth International Conference on Greenhouse Gas Control Technologies:** Cairns, Australia. Featuring advances in greenhouse-gas control technologies, including those to capture, store or recycle such pollutants, and presentations on the potential for other energy sources to substitute and the tradeoff in impacts that should result. Contact: Colin Paulson, GHGT-5 Secretariat, CSIRO Energy Technology, P.O. Box 136, North Pyde, NSW 1670, Australia. (61)2-949-08790. Fax: (61)2-949-08819. E-mail: c.paulson@det.csiro.au.

14-19: **Living on the Edge: Birds 2000:** St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. This meeting is jointly sponsored by the American and British Ornithologists' Unions and the Society of Canadian Ornithologists. Sessions will include data from long-term population studies, sessions on effects of fragmented ecosystems, sea-foraging populations and conflicts between humans and their avian neighbors. Contact: Bill Montevecchi, E-mail: mont@morgan.ucs.mun.ca. URL: <http://www.mun.ca/birds2000/default.html>.

20-25: **Efficiency & Sustainability: A summer study on energy efficiency in buildings:** Pacific Grove, Calif. Sponsored by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE), featuring sessions on the role of consumer behavior, information and electronic technologies, regulations, and environmental policy in fostering the expansion of energy conservation within the building trades and new structures. Contact: Rebecca Lunetta, ACEEE 2000 Summer Study Office, P.O. Box 7588, Newark, Del. 19714-7588. (302) 292-3966. Fax: (302) 292-3965. E-mail: rlunetta@erols.com. URL: <http://www.aceee.org>.

27-31: **International Conference on Riparian Ecology and Management in Multi-Land Use Watersheds:** Portland, Ore. Riparian zones, the terrestrial areas adjacent to moving waters, exert a strong influence on the inhabitants of those waters. This conference, sponsored by the American Water Resources Association, will focus on research that affects the conservation, management or restoration of riparian areas. Contact: Jim Wigington, EPA, 200 S.W. 35th St., Corvallis, Ore. 97333. (541) 754-4341. Fax: (541) 754-4716. E-mail: pjw@mail.cor.epa.gov. URL: <http://www.awra.org/meetings/Portland/Portland.html>.

29-31: **An Agricultural Perspective on Emerging Policies and Technologies for Managing and Sequestering Carbon:** Des Moines, Iowa This conference will feature presentations on sequestering carbon and reducing greenhouse-gas emissions through various agricultural practices, such as reduced tillage, the production of biomass-energy crops, and the conversion of grasslands into more carbon-dense ecosystems. Contact: Jim Cooper, Chariton Valley Resource Conservation and Development, (515) 437-4376. E-mail: jcooper@cvracd.org.

29-Sept. 2: **EuroOCEAN 2000:** Hamburg, Germany. Sponsored by the European Commission. Topics to be covered include research drilling on the continental margin, fisheries research, marine transport in the Arctic, marine biotechnology, harmful algae, marine pollutants, and the availability of marine data. Contact: Alan Edwards, Marine Ecosystems, Infrastructure, European Commission, Research DG/D.I.3, SDME 7/65, Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium. Fax: (32)2-296-3024. E-mail: alan.edwards@cec.eu.int. URL: <http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dg12/envsc/eurocean.html>.

SEPTEMBER

10-12: **Predicting Field Performance in Crop Protection:** London. The symposium will look at why pesticides don't work as well in the field as they did in the lab. Contact: Sonia, Conference Secretariat, SCI, 14/15 Belgrave Sq., London SW1X 8PX, UK. (44) 20-7235-3681 Fax: (44) 20-7823-1698 E-mail: soniaw@chemind.demon.co.uk. URL: <http://sci.mond.org>.

17-22: **International Conference on Coastal Zone Management:** Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. Focusing on four themes: aboriginal practices, community-based actions, coastal environmental health, and oceans governance. Contact: James A. Smith, Coastal Zone Canada 2000 Secretariat, c/o NB Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, New Brunswick, E3B 5H1 Canada. (506) 462-5961. Fax: (506) 453-5210. E-mail: czc2000@gov.nb.ca. URL: <http://www.gov.nb.ca/dfa/czc-zcc2000/htm>.

23-26: **Children's Health and the Environment:** Colorado Springs. The annual International Neurotoxicology conference will feature sessions on methylmercury, lead, PCBs, endocrine disrupters, and pesticides. Topics will focus not only on exposure, but finding biomarkers, evaluating risks from new epidemiology, and looking for synergism between toxic exposures. Contact: Joan Cranmer, Department of Pediatrics, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, 1120 Marshal St., Room 304, Little Rock, Ark.

Calendar

72202. (501) 320-2986. Fax: (501) 320-4978. E-mail: cranmerjoanm@exchange.uams.edu. URL: <http://www.neurotoxicology.com>.

25-Oct. 10: **Cellular Mechanism of Beneficial and Harmful Effects of Electromagnetic Fields:** Yerevan, Armenia. Sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), this meeting will focus on the cellular targets for EMF radiation, metabolic pathways that are affected, effects on different target organ systems, and potential for therapeutic applications. Contact: LSIHES Administrative Office, Hasratian St. 7, Yerevan, 375014, Armenia. (3742) 281772. Fax: (3742) 288427. E-mail: biophys@ipia.sci.am. URL: <http://www.sci.am/~biophys/biomed/seminars.htm>.

OCTOBER

5: **Flood Warning and Management: Seeking the questions for the new millennium:** London, England. This session will probe what's known about flood risks to the environment, techniques to reduce the costs of protection, flood forecasting technology, and case histories. Contact: Erica Hammond, Terence Dalton Ltd., 47 Water St. Lavenham, Suffolk UK 10 9RN. (44) 1787-248097. Fax: (44) 1787-24826. E-mail: erica@lavenhamgroup.co.uk.

12-15: **Writing the Past, Claiming the Future: Women and Gender in Science, Medicine and Technology:** St. Louis. Contact: Charlotte Borst, Local Arrangements Committee, Department of History, St. Louis University, 3800 Lindell Blvd., St. Louis, Mo. 63156

16-19: **Contaminated Soils, Sediments & Water: Analysis, Site Assessment, Fate, Environmental and Human Risk Assessment, Remediation and Regulation:** Amherst, Mass. The 16th annual meeting on this topic, this year's conference will cover bioremediation, hazard assessments, hydrocarbon identification, and case studies. A special focus will be given to topics including arsenic, heavy metals, jet fuel, MTBE, chlorinated hydrocarbons, contamination at military sites, and natural attenuation of contaminants over time. Contact: Denise Leonard, Environmental Health and Sciences, N344 Morrill, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass. 01003. (413) 545-1239. Fax: (413) 545-4692. E-mail: dleonard@schoolph.umass.edu. URL: <http://www.aehs.com>. ❖

Please visit SEJ's interactive calendar at

<http://www.sej.org>

where you are invited to post information about events that would be of interest to environmental reporters.
SEJ's Web calendar is edited by Janet Raloff, Science News, jar@scisvc.org.

Web site insecurity...(from page 20)

curred with my judgment and shut down its systems. I did so in order to minimize any potential for additional hacker attacks on EPA's systems due to publicity about specific problems.

Since the shutdown, the agency has finally begun to make real progress in its security efforts. The agency is now working on enhancing its perimeter defenses, enforcing government wide and Agency security policies that have been on the books for years, and enabling improved hardware, software and other procedures to detect intruders who attempt to breach EPA's systems. Today, less than three months after the Internet shutdown, security at the agency's public access Web site has been strengthened, the site is 99% restored and operational, and—most significantly—the integrity of this public data has been enhanced, while non-public data is better protected from unauthorized access or use.

It is time for all federal agencies to recognize that it is not acceptable to have hackers conducting chat rooms on government computers (as GAO found with EPA), nor is it acceptable for government computers to be used to infiltrate or attack private institutions or other government agencies. But for my

efforts over the past year, I am certain that EPA would not have implemented many of the security improvements it has since February, and still would not be taking all of the necessary steps to safeguard its confidential and sensitive data.

To those who would see fictional, anti-right-to-know conspiracies in the one-week shutdown of EPA's public Internet connection, let me suggest that you look instead to EPA's failed leadership and years of neglect in assessing blame. My efforts are aimed at protecting the integrity and usefulness of EPA's public data, while ensuring that non-public, confidential data remains private and secure from unauthorized use or access. For those who may still be unconvinced about my efforts, the full GAO report detailing EPA's security vulnerabilities is slated to be published in a few weeks. I would encourage you to actually sit down and read it.

Mr. Bliley, the Republican chairman of the House Commerce Committee, has represented Virginia's 7th congressional district since 1980.

Society of Environmental Journalists

10th National Conference

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SeaWiFS Project, NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center, and ORBIMAGE

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Geneva Overholser, syndicated columnist (invited)
David Suzuki, scientist and Canadian broadcast celebrity

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Michigan Motorcar Tour
Dow Chemical Plant in Midland, Mich.
Bird Watching and Wildlife Refuge Management
Michigan State University's National Food Safety and Toxicology Center

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or contact the SEJ office at (215) 836-9970 or sej@sej.org

Houston smog... (from page 1)

presidential race increase those hazards, making it even more important for journalists to proceed with caution.

For starters, consider one seemingly straightforward question: How has the official federal designation of Houston's air quality under the Clean Air Act changed since Bush took the governor's chair in 1995?

Reading an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* last Nov. 12, anyone could conclude that the city's official status has worsened in response to deteriorating conditions:

"On paper, Bush's environmental record does not look especially strong," the *Monitor* wrote. "After measuring higher than usual levels of ozone, nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide in Houston, federal authorities declared the city's air-pollution problem 'severe' and bumped up Dallas's designation from 'moderate' to 'serious.'"

In fact, though the Dallas-Fort Worth region's "bump-up" did happen last year, reflecting a worsening trend there recently for ground-level ozone, Houston's "severe" designation for ozone dates from five years before Bush became governor in 1995. There has been no change in the last 10 years in this "severe" rating, which set a 2007 deadline for Houston to comply with the national health standard for ozone. And during the past decade, Houston has never been classified as a violator of any other health standards established under the act, including those for nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide.

It's easy to see how anyone might have gotten the idea recently that Houston's ozone problem has been getting worse. Houston topped Los Angeles last year—the first time any metropolitan area has ever done so—as the place where ozone levels exceeded the federal standard for the most days at one or more

monitors: 52 days in the Houston area, versus 42 in LA. Thanks to Jay Leno, Saturday Night Live and Politically Incorrect, even people who don't follow environmental news closely are now aware of that Houston is the nation's new smog champ. (Fig. 1)

Environmentalists and other critics have been quick to heap blame on Bush. Even conservative *New York Times* columnist William Safire, praising Arizona Sen. John McCain as he vied with Bush in the GOP primaries, wrote on March 6 that "environmentalists know that while pollution in Bush's Houston and Dallas has worsened, McCain's clean-air record is sound."

In contrast, Bush claimed last spring that air across the Lone Star State "is cleaner since I became governor."

But for Houston, at least, many leading air quality analysts say it's not clear whether the ozone problem is getting better or worse.

The most common yardstick—the number of days in each year with at least one ozone reading exceeding the standard—has zigzagged since 1990 without a clear up or down trend, according to state records. This contrasts poorly with LA, where increasingly aggressive pollution controls have steadily shrunk ozone formation since the late-1980s.

One measure shows some worsening. The largest number of days in which ozone readings exceeded the standard at any one sampling site over three years has inched upwards since 1993, reversing progress in prior years. That's important, since it is the test the EPA will apply to judge Houston's compliance with air standards. By 2007, the city is due to reduce the number to 3 from the recent total of around 40. (fig. 3)

Yet still other state statistics suggest some recent improvement. Since about 1992, the number of days with at least one

Courtesy of THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE

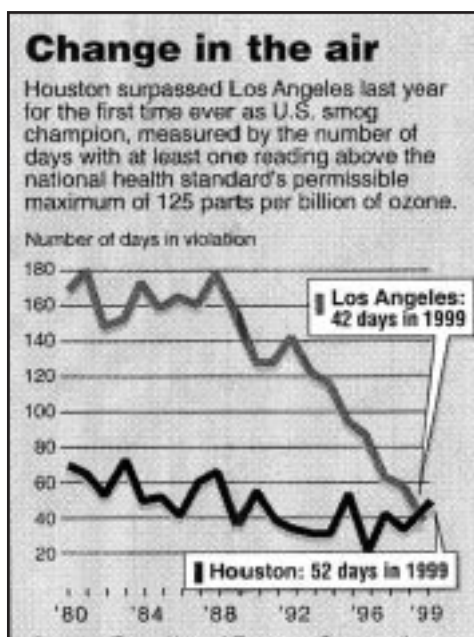


FIGURE 1. Source: Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, South Coast (Calif.) Air Quality Management District

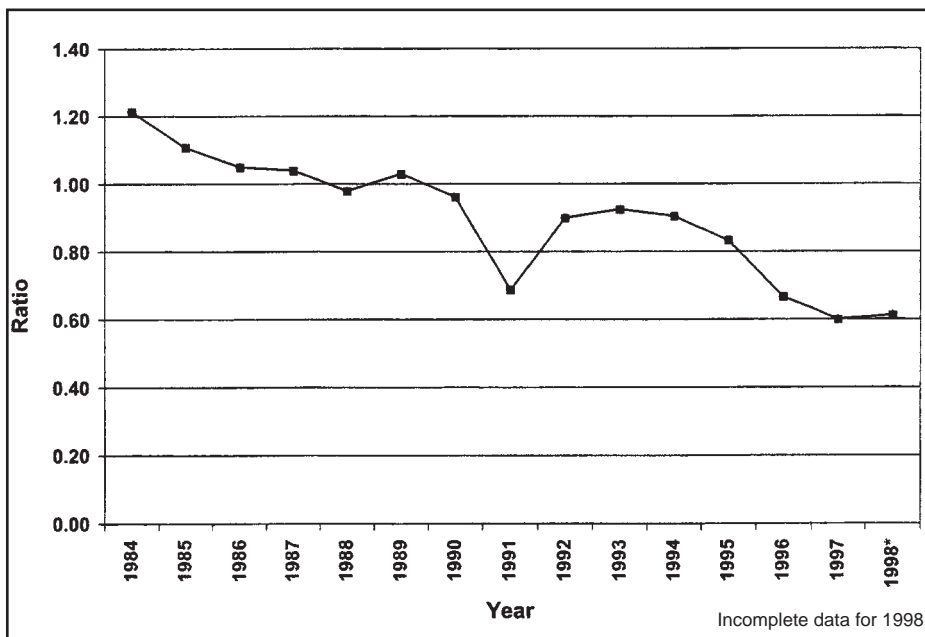


FIGURE 2. The ratio of ozone exceedance days to ozone conducive days at 11 monitoring sites in the Houston-Galveston area. Source: Regional Air Quality Planning Committee, Houston-Galveston Area Council

ozone violation in Houston appears to have declined relative to the number of hot, muggy days when weather was ripe for ozone formation. Some analysts believe weather alone may have boosted the number of violations. (Fig. 2)

One expert committee that found no clear ozone trend there in recent years advises the Houston-Galveston Area Council, which represents local governments across an eight-county region. The Council's Air Quality Reference Guide was written by two environmentalists who have long been outspoken advocates for cleaner air, together with two industry representatives and three local government officials. They concluded that since 1990, "there has been an apparent flattening of (previous) progress" toward attaining the ozone standard.

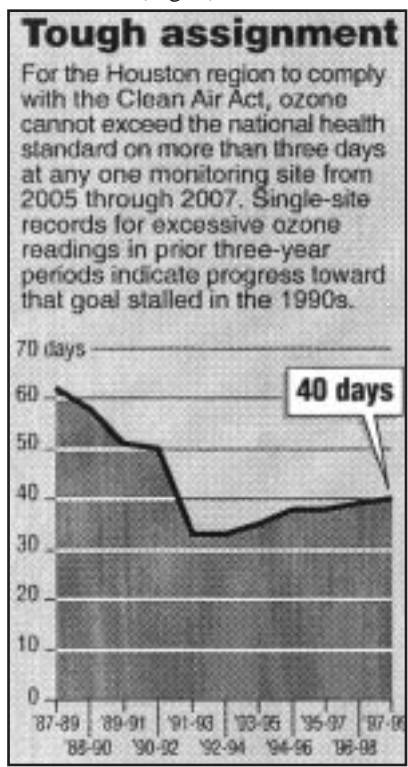
Independent analyst Matt Fraser, a faculty member at Rice University in Houston, recently agreed, "I don't think there's any evidence that it's getting worse."

As for the governor's policies, Bush is best known for championing "voluntary" pollution reductions, for which he has received both praise and criticism. In fact, however, his administration's position never was confined to that. His appointees have also pushed toward tougher mandatory air pollution controls, and he has accepted a Democrat-proposed stick of mandatory emission reductions to go with his carrot of voluntarism.

Bush's appointees at the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC), the state's version of the EPA, have been devoting much of their attention recently to picking the measures for federally-mandated State Implementation Plans intended to make ozone levels start coming down in Houston and Dallas, as well as Beaumont and El Paso, which also violate the ozone standard.

The measures under study involve actions to reduce both industrial and automotive emissions of pollutants that form ozone. Most American cities' ozone problems can primarily be blamed on pollutants from cars and trucks. But a mixture of ozone-reducing strategies is especially necessary in Houston, which not only has millions of vehicles, but also a huge industrial complex that produces much of the gasoline and petrochemicals used by the rest of the country.

In 1971, Texas lawmakers exempted existing industrial plants, then either operating or under construction, from needing state emission permits, which generally require stricter levels of pollution control.



Courtesy of THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE

FIGURE 3. Source: Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission

Twenty-five years later, TNRCC officials calculated that these "grandfathered" plants still accounted for much of the state's industrial air pollution (later put at about a third), and began private discussions with industrial officials about the possibility of a legislative mandate to eliminate the permit exemption. Some industry representatives balked at that action, and the talks broke down.

In 1997, Bush proposed that the state's older, "grandfathered" industrial plants reduce their air pollution voluntarily. A bill passed by the Legislature that year and signed by Bush ordered the TNRCC to draft a proposed program for issuing voluntary permits. The agency did so, and some companies started to volunteer to take reductions.

But some lawmakers continued to press for mandatory controls on the plants. In 1999, the battle resulted in a compromise. Late in the legislative session, Bush announced that he would accept a Democratic legislator's amendment to a utility deregulation bill, requiring grandfathered electric power plants to reduce their emissions. The governor signed both that bill and a separate measure to set up the voluntary permit program he had been championing, though it now applied only to industries other than utilities.

Bush's position is not simple or one-dimensional, and journalists haven't always gotten the details right. Last Oct. 15, for instance, *The Washington Post* reported that under the Texas Clean Air Act's permit exemption for older, grandfathered plants, these facilities are "allowed to pollute at will." Actually that's not correct. Despite the permit exemptions, other state pollution-control rules apply to grandfathered plants.

But perhaps the biggest liberties arose in, and in response to, pro-Bush ads on air pollution during the Bush-McCain primary race. The ads were funded by an initially mysterious group called Republicans for Clean Air, which was later revealed to be bankrolled by Sam Wyly, a wealthy Dallas investor and Bush supporter.

The ads exaggerated Bush's role in enacting the utility deregulation bill's requirement for emission reductions at grandfathered utility plants. They claimed Bush "led" the effort to "clamp down on old coal-burning electric power plants." Bush actually agreed to the measure late in the session, after two years of publicly supporting only a voluntary plan for utilities' and other industries' grandfathered plants.

Some critics of the ads, meanwhile, erroneously denied Bush any credit at all for the mandatory emission reductions ordered by the utility bill. In an analysis of the ads' accuracy, *The New York Times* on March 3 reported that the utility law's section on air pollution "was, in fact, a voluntary program"—confusing it with the separate, voluntary-permit bill.

The influential League of Conservation Voters made the same mistake in a press release on the Wyly ads: "It was only after great delay and criticism that Bush worked with industry to create a bill calling for voluntary pollution reductions from coal-burning power plants. Under the Bush plan, these plants are still not required to comply with air quality standards, instead any emissions reductions are purely voluntary."

Bush's own presidential campaign, in contrast, appears to have forgotten about the voluntary program that was his original preference. It chose to omit the program from its Web site

posting of “important facts” about his environmental record in April. In a section on air quality, the campaign cited only the utility bill, claiming that it will reduce emissions by 250,000 tons per year. It left out any reference to the much smaller, 10,000-ton reduction claimed for the voluntary program on the separate Web site maintained by the governor’s office.

Meanwhile, Bush’s TNRCC has been moving to ratchet down industrial pollution controls generally. The various State Implementation Plans being developed at the TNRCC to reduce ozone include an array of additional provisions for reducing nitrogen oxides, the primary smog-reduction target in Texas following three decades of programs that focused on reducing other ozone-forming gases known as volatile organic compounds. TNRCC officials have said that Houston’s plan, due to be submitted to the EPA for its approval in December, will include a mandatory 90 percent reduction in nitrogen oxides at all plants in the metropolitan area—those that have permits as well as those that enjoy grandfathered, permit-free status.

Bush himself may have overstated the historical significance of the 90 percent reduction in nitrogen oxides that the Houston ozone plan is expected to include when the TNRCC adopts it. Last fall, in a statement released by his office, Bush said this 90 percent mandate would be “unprecedented in the nation.”

That’s debatable. In 1991, utility plants, the leading pol-

luters around Los Angeles, were ordered “to reduce smog-forming nitrogen oxides by *more than* 90 percent,” that area’s South Coast Air Quality Management District said at the time (emphasis added). But that didn’t apply to other industrial plants.

The Democratic National Committee, for its part, incorrectly credited the EPA for the 90 percent nitrogen oxide cuts that Texas officials’ ozone plan is expected to include for Houston-area industries.

“In 1999,” the DNC said on its own Web site in March, “pollution in Texas became so critical that federal regulators mandated emissions must be cut in Houston by 90 percent or the state would lose billions in highway funds.”

In fact, though the Dallas area does face the possibility of losing transportation funds because the EPA started its official “sanctions clock” running for that area last year, the EPA hasn’t activated that “clock” for Houston and never ordered the 90 percent emissions cut for industrial plants in the metropolitan area. State officials came up with that number, in consultation with EPA, before the federal agency stated publicly what was needed.

Bill Dawson covers environmental issues for the Houston Chronicle.

Open space has many uses...(from page 1)

Chicago. Much of this concrete jungle of 28 high-rise apartment buildings was untouched by greenery, a situation captured in the PBS documentary, “The Forest Where We Live.” The film noted that, in a survey of residents, Kuo and Sullivan found a lower frequency of violence among those living in planted areas than in nonplanted areas.

“I have become convinced that trees are really an important part of a supportive, humane environment,” Kuo concluded. “Without vegetation, people are very different beings.”

What do these findings portend for other cities with park-deprived inner-city neighborhoods and an absence of greenery? Might a greener city reduce tension and violence?

Urban green space also provides valuable services that might be costly to match with human engineering. These include:

- **Flood mitigation.** The preservation of open space in floodplains, as riverfront greenways, helps to reduce flood damage by allowing the soil to absorb flood waters at the same time that it

maintains prime wildlife habitat. Often, these pose more reasonable alternatives to expensive structural flood-control projects. Trees also prevent soil erosion through their root systems, thus reducing the silting and clogging of waterways.

In the aftermath of the 1993 Midwest floods, the city of Arnold, Mo., used federal disaster relief funds to accelerate the acquisition of hundreds of floodplain buildings along the Mississippi and Meramec rivers. The clearing of this “greenway” subsequently reduced its potential future flood losses to a minute fraction of the \$4 million loss it experienced in 1993.

- **Drainage.** One of the most innovative ideas in urban environmental design is taking root in Seattle’s Belltown neighborhood, which is creating a stream down the middle of eight blocks of Vine Street from Denny Way to Elliott Bay as a natural filter for stormwater. In essence, this is a working park, with portions of the street closed to cars and Seattle’s copious rainwater flowing down terraces to the sea past the neighborhood’s beloved p-patch an urban garden of wildflowers and vegetables.

- **Water quality protection.** The Austin, Texas, area uses the strategic preservation of open space to protect the Barton Springs that provide drinking water for a major metropolitan area. More general research on water quality protection is available from the American Planning Association, which has produced several reports detailing planning techniques for protecting surface and groundwater supplies.

- **Cooling and cleaning urban air.** In the 1990s, the U.S. Forest Service engaged a team of researchers led by Gregory McPherson, now in Davis, Calif., to quantify the benefits of the urban forest through its Chicago Urban Forest Climate Project. The researchers studied the microclimate of Lincoln Park along the city’s northern lakefront. That study and others have helped

Urban Park Sources:

- City Parks Forum: Mary Eysenbach, Project Manager, American Planning Association, Chicago, (312) 786-6395, <http://www.planning.org/cpf/>
- The Conservation Fund, Arlington, Va.: (703) 525-6300, <http://www.conservationfund.org>.
- Trust for Public Land, San Francisco: (415) 495-4014, www.tpl.org.
- Urban Land Institute, Washington, D.C.: (202) 624-7000, <http://www.uli.org>.

Photo courtesy of the AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION



Woodruff Park at noon in downtown Atlanta

document the extent to which various kinds of trees absorb carbon dioxide and convert it to oxygen, filter air pollutants like sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, and buffer harsh weather conditions by cooling cities in the summer and reducing wind speeds compared to treeless areas. The same techniques for planting wind breaks that the Soil Conservation Service taught farmers in the 1930s work in urban areas as well, helping to reduce building heat loss during the winter in the bargain.

All planted open spaces in the city produce these benefits. Parks, however, are the one major type of land use directly under municipal control, which allows many of these environmental remedies to be implemented as a matter of public policy.

Acquiring and landscaping open space, however, requires money. Reporters can ask how their city and county finance parks and open space programs. Is funding for parks a high or low priority? Some cities, like Chicago and Minneapolis, have dedicated tax sources to remove their park districts from the annual budget struggles and let them plan effectively for the long term. This independent funding has enabled their parks to become the envy of other cities whose parks departments must compete annually for a share of the municipal budget.

In recent years, voters have shown a remarkable propensity for approving bond issues and tax levies to support new parks and open space acquisition. In some places, this has happened because parks and open space have attracted support from a broad coalition of urban interests. These include advocates of “smart growth,” traditional parks and recreation activists, and environmentalists.

Business interests often view green spaces in the city as vital amenities for attracting both tourism and a high-quality work force. These urban quality-of-life assets are reflected in property values, which almost always rise in the proximity of attractive public open spaces. In fact, park development is often a highly creative enterprise that can help solve a number of other urban problems.

In Pittsburgh, for example, Mayor Tom Murphy has staked much of his city’s redevelopment—and his own political future—on the conversion of former industrial sites into parks and new housing. Last November, he participated in APA’s City Parks Forum with a presentation of the city’s plan to link Frick Park with the Monongahela River. The linkage centers on the addition of Nine Mile Run, a creek that connects the park and the river in the shadow of 200-foot-high slag heaps that date to 1923 and are a byproduct of the city’s steel production.

Scientists there are experimenting with plants that can actually sink roots into these sterile slopes and recolonize them with greenery, even as developers plan new housing atop the man-made hills. The result is a dramatic example of a city reclaiming a badly despoiled urban environment by harnessing the combined interests of environmentalists, sports enthusiasts and hikers, as well as developers who might otherwise find the site utterly forbidding.

Jim Schwab is a senior research associate for the American Planning Association and the co-editor of APA’s Zoning News. He is a member of the City Parks Forum project team.

A state-by-state round-up of environmental news stories

To submit stories, contact your state's correspondent or Beat editor Chris Rigel at rigel@voicenet.com or (215) 836-9970.

Alabama—Des Keller, *Progressive Farmer*, (205) 877-6406

Alaska—Elizabeth Manning, *Anchorage Daily News*, (907) 257-4323, fax: (907) 258-2157

Arizona—Patti Epler, *Phoenix New Times*, (602) 229-8451

Arkansas—Robert McAfee, Thinking Like A Mountain Institute, (501) 638-7151

California:

Northern California—Mark Grossi, *Fresno Bee*, (209) 441-6316

San Francisco Bay Area—Jane Kay, *San Francisco Examiner*, (415) 777-8704

Southern California—Marni McEntee, *Los Angeles Daily News*, (805) 641-0542

Colorado—Todd Hartman, *Colorado Springs Gazette*, (719) 636-0285

Connecticut—Peter Lord, *Providence Journal*, (401) 277-8036

Delaware—Tim Wheeler, *The (Baltimore) Sun*, (301) 332-6564

District of Columbia—Cheryl Hogue, *Chemical & Engineering News*, (202) 872-4551

Florida—Deborah Hoag, (904) 721-3497

Georgia

North—Debbie Gilbert, *The (Gainesville) Times*, (770) 532-1234 ext. 254

South—Christopher Schwarzen, *The Macon Telegraph*, (912) 744-4213

Hawaii—Pat Tummons, *Environment Hawaii*, (808) 934-0115

Idaho—Rocky Barker, *Idaho Statesman*, (208) 377-6484

Illinois—Jonathon Ahl, *WCBU 89.9*, (309) 677-2761

Indiana—See Ohio

Iowa—Perry Beeman, *Des Moines Register*, (515) 284-8538

Kansas—Mike Mansur, *Kansas City Star*, (816) 234-4433

Kentucky—Jim Bruggers, *Louisville Courier Journal*

Louisiana—Mike Dunne, *Baton Rouge Advocate*, (504) 383-0301

Maine—vacant

Maryland—See Delaware

Massachusetts—David Liscio, *Daily Evening*

Item, (781) 593-7700

Michigan—Jeremy Pearce, *Detroit News*, (313) 223-4825

Minnesota—Tom Meersman, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, (612) 673-4414

Mississippi—Patrick Peterson, WXXV-TV Fox 25, (228) 832-2525

Missouri—Bill Allen, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, (314) 340-8127

Montana—Todd Wilkinson, freelance, (406) 587-4876

Nebraska—Julie Anderson, *Omaha World-Herald*, (402) 444-1000 ext. 1223

New Hampshire—vacant

New Jersey—Bruno Tedeschi, *The Record*, (609) 292-5159

New Mexico—See Arizona

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

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

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

North Dakota—See Minnesota

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

Oklahoma—vacant

Oregon—Orna Izakson, (541) 726-1578

Pennsylvania

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

East—Chris Rigel, SEJ, (215) 836-9970

Puerto Rico/Caribbean Islands—Vacant

Rhode Island—See Connecticut

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

South Dakota—See Minnesota

Tennessee—See North Georgia

Texas :

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

Central and West Texas—Robert Bryce, *The Austin Chronicle*, (512) 454-5766

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wisconsin—Chuck Quirnbach, *Wisconsin Public Radio*, (414) 271-8686 or (608) 263-7985

Wyoming—See Washington

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

ARIZONA

► **Illegal trail-blazing:** Off-road enthusiasts just can't stay off closed state and federal lands in Arizona and New Mexico, according to an April 16 story in the *Arizona Republic* by environmental reporter Judd Slivka. Slivka follows a Tonto National Forest ranger into the desert in search of four-wheel-drive tracks and other roads that have been carved into the desert illegally. The story discusses the agency's problems cracking down on folks who blaze their own paths instead of staying on approved roads. Contact Slivka at (602) 444-8097 or judd.slivka@arizonarepublic.com.

► **Environmentalist group wars:** Increasing bad blood between The Nature Conservancy and some environmental organizations in Arizona is detailed in an in-depth report in the April 20 issue of *Phoenix New Times* by staff writer Michael Kiefer. Some groups like Forest Guardians and the Center for Biological Diversity are unhappy with what they see as the Conservancy's willingness to side with and sometimes protect ranchers. Contact Kiefer online at michael.kiefer@newtimes.com or at (602) 229-8434, or download at <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/issues/2000-04-20/feature2.html>.

► **Drought** and its toll on the desert in southwestern Arizona was examined by environmental reporter Maureen O'Connell in the March 8 issue of the *Arizona Daily Star*. O'Connell reports that it will take more than a few inches of rainfall to eliminate the possibility of a harsher-than-usual wildfire season and

other problems caused by an unusually dry spell. Contact O'Connell at (520) 573-4195 or occonnell@azstarnet.com.

► **Species protection:** An active colony of cave myotis velfer bats may hinder visits to the state of Arizona's new crown jewel in the park system, Kartchner Caverns. A March 16 story by staff writer Ignacio Ibarra in the *Arizona Daily Star* says the state may lose \$1 million in ticket sales to protect roosting bats. Contact Ibarra at (520) 573-4220.

► **Land preservation:** Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt would like to preserve hundreds of thousands of acres from development in Arizona before the Clinton administration ends this year. To that end, the secretary—and former Arizona governor—has been quietly trying to pull off some land swaps that would trade federal acreage for state land. The proposal was first reported in a cover story in the March 2 issue of *Phoenix New Times* by staff writer Michael Kiefer. Since then, stories in the *Arizona Republic* by growth reporter Kathleen Ingley (March 6) and Jeff Barker of the paper's Washington bureau (April 26) have discussed opposition by current Arizona governor Jane Hull and other lands that might be in the deal. Contact Kiefer at (602) 229-8434 or michael.kiefer@newtimes.com. Ingley is at kathleen.ingley@arizonarepublic.com. This story can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/issues/2000-03-02/feature.html>

CALIFORNIA

► **Water quality:** State water quality officials and Pacific Gas and Electric Co. are set for a big showdown over the utility's Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, on the coast near San Luis Obispo. State biologists and environmentalists claim that the two and a half billion gallons of warmed sea water the plant dumps into the ocean each day is damaging the marine ecosystem in several significant ways. PG&E officials deny the charges, saying the effects are temporary and were predicted even before the plant was built. The Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board will decide whether to issue a cease and desist order

at a special meeting June 2 in San Luis Obispo. David Sneed, environment reporter for *The Tribune* newspaper in San Luis Obispo, went scuba diving at the plant's discharge cove. His two-part report on the controversy appeared in the Jan. 16 edition of *The Tribune*. Visit <http://www.thetribunenews.com/> for the story. Contact Sneed at (805) 781-7930.

► **Giant Sequoias:** President Clinton started a wildfire of controversy in the southern Sierra Nevada in February when he asked forest officials to study a 355,000-acre national monument to protect the giant sequoias. More than half of the native groves of big trees, which grow to 300 feet tall and more than 3,000 years old, are bunched in the 1.2 million-acre Sequoia National Forest. They already have some protection granted by President Bush. Loggers, ranchers, hunters, four-wheel drive enthusiasts, cabin owners and permit holders for Christian camps are fighting the monument designation, fearing their activities will be excluded. Clinton, who in April announced he would convert the acreage to monument status, does not need congressional approval. He invoked the Antiquities Act of 1906, which has allowed many presidents to unilaterally designate national monuments. This story ran in *The Fresno Bee* on March 13. Contact Mark Grossi at (559) 441-6316 or mgrossi@fresnobee.com.

GEORGIA

► **TRI data faulty:** On February 20, *The Times* of Gainesville published a series of stories on Georgia's latest Toxic Release Inventory. Instead of taking the standard approach—listing and ranking the "worst polluters"—reporter Debbie Gilbert checked with each company, got the original emissions data, compared it with the totals published by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division—and found that more than one-third of the numbers were wrong. Computer glitches, transposed digits, misplaced reports, and other errors were common. This rendered the TRI data essentially meaningless because the numbers couldn't be trusted unless checked independently. And Georgia is probably not unique in this respect; reporters in other states should

examine their TRI reports with a critical eye. Debbie Gilbert's number is (770) 532-1234, ext. 254.

► **Fish kill:** Georgia's Environmental Protection Division is negotiating with a Twiggs County kaolin manufacturer following possibly the region's largest fish kill in February. Imerys, formerly Dry Branch Kaolin, is responsible for more than 11,000 counted dead fish in Big Sandy Creek which flows to the Oconee River. The fish died following an alum release which caused the pH of the creek to quickly drop, suffocating the fish. The state believes the count is actually only one-fourth of the total fish killed. Negotiations are to begin by the end of April and could take 30 to 60 days. The story appeared in the *Macon Telegraph* on April 6. Other stories on the fish kill appeared in February. Contact Christopher Schwarzen at cschwarzen@macontel.com or (912) 744-4213, or find the story at <http://www.MaconTelegraph.com/local/fishkill0224.htm>.

ILLINOIS

► **Genetically modified crops:** The *Chicago Tribune's* Peter Kendall on Jan. 24 offered readers a thorough analysis of the economic dilemma Midwest farmers faced about whether or not to stick with genetically engineered seeds, given the pressure by European consumers to bar U.S. commodities unless they are segregated from genetically modified versions. The Page-one piece is available from the *Chicago Tribune* archives at <http://www.chicagotribune.com>.

► **Genetically modified crops:** *Chicago Sun-Times* medical writer Jim Ritter continued his long-running coverage of genetically engineered crops on Feb. 28 with a page one article detailing the growing list of U.S. and multinational food companies that are phasing out use of genetically engineered ingredients. For more information, contact Ritter at (312) 321-3000. The *Sun-Times* web site archives most articles for only seven days, but articles are available on Lexis/Nexis.

► **Exotic species:** *The Daily*

Southtown on Jan. 28 introduced readers to biologists' fears that Lake Michigan's web of life might be unraveling, possibly due to multiple assaults by foreign species like the round goby and several species of water flea. The page-one graphic and article, by then-environment writer Kevin Carmody, detailed the multiple mysteries, including the mass disappearances or illnesses affecting keystone species, that biologists are at a loss to explain. For more information, contact Carmody, now in Austin, at (512) 912-2569. The *Southtown* web site archives most articles for only 30 days.

► **Tampering with EPA lab results:** *Chicago Sun-Times* veteran investigative reporter Charles Nicodemus on Feb. 13 broke the news that the U.S. EPA had closed its contractor-operated laboratory in Chicago based on evidence of intentional tampering and falsification of results. Although the EPA had taken action months earlier, and was about to reopen the Region 5 lab that serves the five states, Nicodemus was the first Chicago reporter to sniff out the story. Then, as he has done countless times before, he unleashed a flurry of follow-up pieces throughout the next week that kept the rest of the Chicago media scrambling to keep up. For more information, contact Nicodemus at (312) 321-3000. The *Sun-Times* web site archives most articles for only seven days, but articles are available on Lexis/Nexis.

► **Sludge:** The *Sun-Times*' execution wasn't quite so well received when the paper's business editor commissioned a freelancer to write an exposé on the Chicago metropolitan sewage district's practice of disposing of sewage sludge on certain agricultural lands. Although the issue of sludge safety appears real in certain circumstances, based on congressional hearings, the freelancer, Tom Randall, turned out to be an executive at the Chicago-based Heartland Institute and editor of the anti-regulation think tank's newsletter, *Environment News* (which recently merged with *Climate News*). Randall's publication has attacked the EPA for its allegedly conspiratorial efforts to cover up the hazards of sludge. The *Sun-Times* article finally appeared in the news section with a page-one introduction

on Jan. 18, under a dual byline with *Sun-Times* police reporter, Frank Main. But the newspaper identified Randall only as a "Chicago-based business writer specializing in environmental reporting." (For a similar case at the *Sun-Times*, see the *Winter 2000 SEJournal*.)

IOWA

► **Over-fertilization:** Iowa's corn yield champion used three times more nitrogen fertilizer than the average Iowa corn field gets, raising questions about possible nitrate pollution, *The Des Moines Register* reported March 20. Call Perry Beeman, (515) 284-8538.

► **MTBE:** A state study ordered by lawmakers found that 29 percent of 2,569 shallow-well samples near leaking-tank sites and elsewhere had levels of MTBE that federal environmental officials consider a health concern, *The Des Moines Register* reported. Nearly 60 percent of the soil samples near the tanks were high enough to be measured consistently. Call Perry Beeman, (515) 284-8538.

KENTUCKY

► **Camping ban:** In just one generation, campers and vandals are destroying up to 10,000 years of human history held within the shelters of the Red River Gorge Geological Area, a 42-square-mile section of the Cumberland Plateau. To stop the damage, *The Courier-Journal* reported on March 29, the U.S. Forest Service this spring will likely impose its first ban on cliffline camping within the gorge, effectively prohibiting camping in the rock shelters. And it has begun charging fees—starting at \$3 per car for one night—for those who camp in approved backcountry areas. Most of the revenue will go toward protecting the gorge's fragile resources. For more information, contact Jim Bruggers at 502-582-4645 <http://www.courier-journal.com/local-news/2000/0003/29/000329red.html>

LOUISIANA

► **Possible Superfund site:** The U.S. EPA's Region 6 Superfund program is conducting tests along 33 miles of the

Calcasieu River and its tributaries in Southwest Louisiana to determine if sediments are hazardous and the Calcasieu Estuary should be named a Superfund site. Area businesses see such a designation as a black eye for the Lake Charles and Calcasieu Parish economy. The contamination is a legacy of decades of pollution from the area's refining and petrochemical industry. This story ran in *The Baton Rouge Advocate* on Feb. 14. Contact Mike Dunne, (225) 388-0301 or mdunne@theadvocate.com.

► **Port parasite:** A Pacific Basin microscopic parasite carried by rats and snails has invaded south Louisiana and has been found in Baton Rouge. Louisiana State University researchers think that if surveys were done in other port areas such as California and Florida, the parasite might also be found. Researchers suspect the parasitic worm arrived in New Orleans in the mid-1980s and spread. It has killed zoo animals in New Orleans and Lafayette, infected horses and, in one case, wound up in a boy. The parasite is not likely to kill humans, the researchers say. Its larvae attack the spinal cord and central nervous system. The story ran on Mar. 22 in *The Baton Rouge Advocate*. For more information contact Mike Dunne at (225) 388-0301 or mdunne@theadvocate.com.

MAINE

► **Ethanol from wood:** What if a cleaner burning gasoline could be made from sawdust, wood chips and other byproducts of Maine's forests? Dieter Bradbury of the *Portland Press Herald* reported on March 12 that a Massachusetts company has a patent on a new process for turning wood and other organic materials into ethanol, a gasoline additive. BCI of Dedham, Mass wants to build a \$60 million dollar plant in Maine to recycle wood waste into a renewable fuel. Until recently corn and other grains were the only materials that could be used to make ethanol. Several midwest states require the sale of ethanol as a clean-air measure. But Maine officials are approaching the company's plans with caution, especially since BCI wants law changes requiring customers to use their gasoline as a way to create a market

for their product. Dieter Bradbury can be contacted at dbradbury@pressherald.com or (207) 791-6326.

► **ESA—Atlantic Salmon:** Maine's top fisheries biologist is resigning after 33 years to protest what he says is the state's failure to heed his views and adequately fund research for protection of the Atlantic Salmon. In an April 6th interview with the *Portland Press Herald*, Edward Baum said the state turned its back on him and his research five years ago. Baum is the only state official to publicly support the federal government's proposal to list the fish under the Endangered Species Act. He says his decision is based on what he's learned during 25 years of salmon management. The state strongly opposes listing. Instead, Governor Angus King has supported the views of the aquaculture, blueberry and timber industries, which argue that such a move would devastate the economy of eastern Maine where most of the wild salmon rivers are located. Contact Dieter Bradbury at (207) 791-6328 or at dbradbury@pressherald.com)

► **ESA—Canada lynx:** While state officials have been protesting a proposal to protect Atlantic Salmon under the Endangered Species Act, Susan Young of the *Bangor Daily News* reported on March 22 that there was hardly a reaction when the federal government listed Canada lynx as threatened under the act. Lynx live in the working forest of northwestern Maine. But landowners and federal officials say the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list them should not have a noticeable effect in Maine because logging does not appear to be detrimental to lynx in the region. Preservation of the lynx in the West has been more contentious because of potential limitations on logging on federal lands. Nearly all of Maine's forest is privately owned. Contact Susan Young at (207) 990-8000.

MASSACHUSETTS

► **Bio-tech Protest:** A March 27 story in the *Daily Evening Item* reporter that more than a thousand protesters marched in Boston during late March where the BIO 2000 conference was held. The relatively peaceful demonstra-

tion focused on the dangers of genetic engineering, cloning procedures, genetically modified foods, chemical additives, gene patching and other technologies already in use but without the benefit of thorough scientific testing. Contact David Liscio, (781) 593-7700, ext. 236 or dlliscio@aol.com.

► **EPA pollution permits expired:** According to a March 21 story in the *Daily Evening Item*, environmental regulators in Massachusetts and most other states have allowed pollution permits for wastewater discharge to expire. A survey and "report card" released by the Friends of the Earth indicated the U.S. EPA faces a backlog with some permits expired for 235 months. The EPA has vowed to address the problem. The permits, issued under the auspices of the federal Clean Water Act, regulate the content and amount of wastewater that every factory, machine shop, electric utility, sewage treatment plant or other polluter can dump into the nation's waters. Contact David Liscio at (781) 593-7700, ext. 235 or dlliscio@aol.com.

► **Whale protection:** Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo announced he will drop plans to build the world's largest industrial salt plant on the shores of San Ignacio Lagoon in the Baja Peninsula, according to an April 2 story in *The Boston Globe*. The news was heralded as a victory by ecologists, environmentalists, poets and movie stars who have fought to keep the waters uncontaminated. The lagoon is a breeding ground for gray whales. Contact Richard Chacon at (617) 929-3000.

► **Celebrity fights power plant:** Erin Brockovich, the environmental activist played by actress Julia Roberts in the new film named after the heroine, is looking to bring her celebrity clout to the Massachusetts coast, according to a *Boston Globe* story that ran April 1. Brockovich used her savvy to fight power plant pollution in California. Her success against PG&E, the utility company, spawned the film and increased her name recognition. In Massachusetts, a group calling itself Healthlink has been battling PG&E, which operates two coal and oil-fired electricity generating plants in the

Boston area. Brockovich has pledged her support. Healthlink has planned a fundraiser to continue its fight against PG&E and enlisted support from Jan Schlichtmann, the real-life attorney played by actor John Travolta in the film *A Civil Action*. Contact Raphael Lewis at (617) 929-3000.

► **No dumping techno junk:** Massachusetts is banning dumping of cathode ray tubes because lead and other chemicals leach into the groundwater after being deposited in landfills. The March 31 *Boston Globe* story reports that the ban spurs recycling initiative and causes pile-ups of old TVs and computer monitors at charity stores. To ease the transition, the state Department of Environmental Protection has spent \$200,000 to create a system to reuse or recycle TVs and computers. Contact Cynthia Graber at (617) 929-3000.

► **Curtains for Charles River:** Boston's Charles River will be temporarily fitted with an underwater curtain to help ensure cleaner swimming water along a stretch near Boston University known as Magazine Beach. The U.S. EPA is launching the pilot project to determine if the curtain, which will hang by floats and weights, can keep out pollution. The curtain, made by Gunderboom, an Alaskan engineering firm, was originally developed in 1995 to contain a dredging project. The 100-foot arc will be hung for several days in August. A Gunderboom spokesman described the material as "sort of like black felt" but made of polypropylene and polyester. The story ran in *The Boston Globe*, April 14. Contact Robert Braile at (617) 929-3000.

► **Landfills vs. recycling:** When buildings are demolished in Holland, contractors separate steel, glass, concrete and other materials, which are then recycled. The practice is so widespread throughout the country that architects are now designing structures with eventual disassembly in mind. Not so in the U.S., according to a March 2 story in the *Daily Evening Item*. Construction and demolition debris takes up nearly 50 percent of existing landfill space in Massachusetts, which is forcing waste haulers to travel

farther distances, according to a report by the Coalition to Reduce Waste, MassPIRG and the Haverhill Environmental League. The report is entitled "Construction and Demolition Debris: Reducing Waste in the Construction Industry." For information contact David Liscio, (781) 593-7700, ext. 236 or dliscio@aol.com.

MINNESOTA

► **Forest fire risk:** State and federal fire fighting agencies will be on alert this summer in Minnesota because of the potential for a Yellowstone-scale fire in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area wilderness, according to the *Star Tribune*. Last summer a massive windstorm blew down hundreds of thousands of trees across one-third of the 1.1 million acres in the northern Minnesota wilderness, as well as another 150,000 acres in adjoining lands and 100,000 acres in southeastern Ontario. The U.S. Forest Service is conducting four environmental studies on the affected areas, including the need for prescribed burns during the next five years to fragment the dead timber and to reduce the risks of a massive fire. Officials have announced a ban on campfires this summer, local counties have prepared evacuation plans, and emergency funding has been secured to contract for additional aircraft and crews for fire fighting. Contact Tom Meersman, (612) 673-7388.

► **The history of deformed frogs** during the past several years has been chronicled in *A Plague of Frogs* by William Souder. Scientists have not discovered the causes of the deformities, but Souder concludes that pesticides, parasites, ultraviolet radiation and other factors may all play a part in the widespread developmental problems affecting amphibians, including missing, shortened, branched and extra legs, as well as displaced eyes, excessive webbing and fused skin, incomplete jawbones and other abnormalities. Contact Souder at souder.elmo@worldnet.att.net

NEW MEXICO

► **Land preservation:** Big chunks of the Guadalupe Mountains around

Carlsbad Caverns would become a 130,000-acre national monument under a controversial proposal from eight conservation groups, according to an April 15 story in the *Albuquerque Tribune* by environmental reporter Tania Soussan. The monument would give permanent protection to the area west and north of the Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains national parks. But some state, local and federal leaders oppose protecting the area, saying protected status would limit too many uses. Contact Soussan at tsoussan@abqjournal.com or at (505) 823-3833.

► **Grazing:** Ranchers would get a say in how to meet environmental standards on federal grazing lands and federal requirements would take ranchers' financial needs into account under an agreement between the BLM and the state of New Mexico. The agreement is the first of its kind in the country where the "human dimension" must be taken into account, according to an April 7 story in the *Albuquerque Journal* by staff writers Tania Soussan and Wren Propp. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is expected to approve the standards even though environmentalists are opposed. Contact Soussan at (505) 823-3833 or tsoussan@abqjournal.com

NORTH CAROLINA

► **Rebuilding flood plains:** In stories that ran March 12—marking the six-month anniversary of Hurricane Floyd—*The News & Observer* of Raleigh, N.C. found that in the rush to put lives back together after record floods, much of eastern North Carolina is rebuilding on familiar and vulnerable ground. Against the advice of disaster experts, many towns and counties are allowing new homes to be built in 100-year flood plains—the places with an estimated 1 percent chance of flooding every year. State and federal politicians have been reluctant to meddle with local land use, even though they're paying the bill for past mistakes that put homes, businesses, even junkyards and sewage plants in the path of flooding rivers. Contact James Eli Shiffer at jshiffer@nando.com or (919) 836-5701, or Richard Stradling at rstradli@nando.com or (919) 829-4739).

► **Hog farms:** Sinking under low hog prices, tighter regulation and last year's devastating floods, the owners of 79 eastern North Carolina swine farms have offered to give up their businesses in exchange for a check from the state. Hog growers are competing for \$5.7 million set aside by the state to get rid of flood-prone storage ponds for swine waste. Twenty-six growers were flooded during Hurricane Floyd, losing thousands of hogs and dumping millions of gallons of sewage into rivers. The story ran March 11 in *The News & Observer* of Raleigh, N.C. Contact James Eli Shiffer at jshiffer@nando.com or (919) 836-5701.

OREGON

► **Clearcutting:** In the Feb. 28 edition of *The Oregonian*, then-staff writer Hal Bernton told the story of three federal whistle blowers who challenged logging plans in Oregon's timber breadbasket for potentially harming imperiled cutthroat trout. Fish biologist Don Rivard of the Bureau of Land Management's Roseburg office joined two staffers of the U.S. Forest Service in sending a letter around their agencies' bureaucracy directly to fish-protection agencies. The whistleblowers charged that plans to conduct de facto clearcuts on patches of forest surrounded by heavily logged land would harm protected fish. The National Marine Fisheries Service sided with the BLM and USFS, but U.S. District Court Judge Barbara Rothstein sided with the whistle blowers, ruling that the agencies' plans "were not rationally calculated" to achieve federal-lands conservation goals. For more information contact Bernton (503) 292-1016 or (206) 464-2581, or hbernton@seattletimes.com.

PENNSYLVANIA

► **Chemical inferno's aftermath:** An eight part series beginning on April 30 in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* described an inferno of toxic sludge at one of the worst illegal chemical dumps in the nation—and the 20-year tale of horror that followed. The year was 1978, and the Federal Superfund was born, in part, from this cauldron. Of the 200 firefighters, police and paramedics who answered the call, 45 became seriously

ill—and of those, 28 died. The cause of the blaze remains unknown, but fuel for the fire was 3 million gallons of toxic industrial waste illegally dumped on a three-acre rubber-shredding plant. *Inquirer* reporters Susan Q. Stranahan and Larry King reported the series, entitled “Beyond the Flames.” The complete series with corporate documents and a study of cancer rates is available at <http://www.philly.com/specials/2000/fire>.

TENNESSEE

► **Fumes:** Rural Warren County High School made headlines in November 1998 when more than 100 students and faculty ended up in the emergency room, complaining that mysterious fumes made them ill. A report in the Jan. 13 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, written by doctors from the Tennessee health department and Vanderbilt University, attributed the nausea and dizziness to “mass hysteria” and found nothing wrong with the school building. The article angered school officials, but extensive blood, urine, soil, air, and water tests conducted by the EPA and Tennessee OSHA showed nothing unusual. Anne Paine reported this in *The Tennessean* February 7. Her number is (615) 259-8071.

► **Lead contamination:** One of Memphis’ most toxic landmarks has been dismantled. Owners of Refined Metals Corp., a lead smelter that had been contaminating the air in one of the city’s poorer neighborhoods for almost 50 years, decided to tear the plant down because they couldn’t afford to clean it up. In December 1998, the health department had ordered the plant to pay a \$440,000 fine and make \$1 million worth of improvements. The company spent several million to remove the buildings and contaminated soil, and will continue to monitor the site. Tom Charlier reported this story in *The Commercial Appeal* January 24. He can be reached at (901) 529-2572.

TEXAS

► **State park system threatened:** A five-part series in *The Austin American-*

Statesman on May 14-18 examined how inadequate budgets, thin staffing, lack of land acquisition, pork politics and gaps in stewardship threaten the Texas state park system. The series, by environmental writer Ralph Haurwitz, is posted on the paper’s Web site at www.austin360.com/recreation. For additional information, contact Haurwitz at (512) 445-3604.

VERMONT

► **Possible Superfund site:** South Strafford area residents are struggling to maintain local control of the cleanup of an abandoned copper mine that could become a federal Superfund site. The Elizabeth Mine has been closed since 1958, but the 45-acre tailings pile continues to leach roughly a ton of heavy metals every day into nearby Copperas Brook, which drains to the Ompompanoosuc River. Elevated levels of copper are detected 10 miles downstream of where the Ompompanoosuc empties into the Connecticut River. A citizens group, which includes two former U.S. EPA officials who live near the mine, has raised objections to a \$10 million federal plan to cap the 45-acre tailings pile. The group argues the cleanup would be worse than the problem and might not clean up water quality. For more information contact Jim Kenyon, *The Valley News*, jimkenyon@valley.net or (800) 874-2226, ext. 212.

► **Politics and green power:** Sam Wyly’s environmentally based political ads may have helped Gov. George W. Bush in his successful effort to derail Sen. John McCain’s presidential hopes, but they nearly backfired on Wyly’s Vermont company. Wyly, who has supported Bush in past political endeavors, invested more than \$100 million in GreenMountain.com, a firm that markets environmentally friendly electricity as states deregulate.

Wyly’s shadow organization, Republicans for Clean Air, paid \$2.5 million for ads in March that challenged McCain’s environmental record while touting Bush’s green accomplishments; environmentalists attacked the ads as inaccurate. Officials with GreenMountain.com backed away from Wyly’s

political activism even as environmental groups suggested that those who care about clean air be leery of supporting a company whose chairman backs candidates with poor environmental records. For more information contact John Dillon at the *Barre Times-Argus*, (802) 479-4039 x 1150.

► **Acid rain and maple decline:** Vermont’s signature sugar maples are under environmental and economic siege. In a day-long conference at the University of Vermont, researchers reported that there’s reason to be concerned about the effects of acid rain on sugar maple health. Vermont sugarmakers, who make roughly 500,000 gallons a year of maple syrup, are under increasing competition from sugarmakers in Quebec. Global warming could make matters worse, some researchers predict. Steven McNulty, program manager for the U.S. Forest Service’s southern global change research program, says a national assessment of the effects of global warming on the nation’s forests suggests that sugar maples will essentially disappear from Vermont by the end of this century. Contact Nancy Bazilchuk at *The Burlington Free Press* at (800) 427-3124 ext. 1873 or nrbaze@aol.com.

VIRGINIA

► **Wetlands:** Gov. Jim Gilmore has approved landmark environmental legislation to protect Virginia’s nontidal wetlands, Scott Harper of *The Virginian-Pilot* in Norfolk reported April 11. The law sets July 1 as the deadline for ending the unregulated draining of such wetlands—a land-clearing practice called Tulloch ditching. The law also will require developers and property owners, beginning in October 2001 to obtain permits and replace wetlands lost during construction of homes, roads and shopping malls. For more information, contact Harper at (800) 446-2004, ext. 2340, or sharper@pilotonline.com.

► **Growth** is a growing issue in Virginia, Will Jones and Rex Springston of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported March 19. For the second year, a group of counties and cities asked the General

Assembly for laws to help control development. They left largely empty-handed, but officials with the Virginia Coalition of High Growth Communities say they will be back. Contact Jones at (804) 649-6911 or wjones@timesdispatch.com, or Springston at (804) 649-6453 or rspringston@timesdispatch.com.

► **Power Line:** The State Corporation Commission's staff has endorsed plans for a 765,000-volt power line to meet the current and future needs for electricity in southwest Virginia, Ron Nixon and Lois Caliri of *The Roanoke Times* reported April 13. But the staff said there may be a shorter and less environmentally damaging option to the route proposed by American Electric Power. The Corporation Commission will hold hearings on the plans in May. Members of the Alliance for the Preservation and Protection of Appalachian Lands plan to travel to Richmond to protest against the project. A consultant for the opponents says American Electric Power wants to build the power line to boost profits, not to meet customer demands, Nixon and Caliri reported March 23. The company called the consultant's report "simplistic, erroneous and misleading." Contact Nixon at (540) 981-3347 or ronn@roanoke.com, or Caliri (540) 981-3117 or loisc@roanoke.com.

► **Waste shipments:** A federal judge struck down Virginia's 1999 statutes on solid waste shipments to the state's landfills—laws meant to limit importation of trash from New York and other large cities, Tom Campbell of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported Feb. 4. The laws "unconstitutionally interfere with interstate commerce, in violation of the commerce clause," U.S. District Judge James R. Spencer wrote in granting summary judgment to Waste Management Holdings Inc. and the other entities that sued the state last year. Virginia Attorney General Mark L. Earley said the state will appeal Spencer's decision. For information contact Campbell at (804) 649-6416 or tcampbell@timesdispatch.com.

► **ESA:** The Dismal Swamp southeastern shrew, found only in coastal Virginia and North Carolina, has been

removed from the national endangered-species list after 14 years of protection, Scott Harper of *The Virginian-Pilot* in Norfolk reported March 28. The action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will relieve developers and highway planners who had spent time and money avoiding the shrew's marshy habitat. For more information, contact Harper at (800) 446-2004, extension 2340, or sharper@pilotonline.com.

WASHINGTON

► **Canada Goose population woes:** Forty years ago, many Seattle residents saw Canada geese as handsome symbols of wildness. Now, some city dwellers wish the geese would just go away. Locals are frustrated by having to jostle the geese for space at public parks, and they're not alone. Complaints have become so common across the country that the Fish and Wildlife Service is working on a nationwide study. David Williams reported on this story in the March 13 edition of *High Country News*. For more information, contact HCN at (970) 527-4898 or editor@hcn.org, or find the story at <http://www.hcn.org>.

► **Roadkill:** In January, hunters from eastern Washington's Methow Valley delivered 300 pounds of road-killed deer to six western Washington tribes. The delivery signaled the start of a ground-breaking agreement in which the tribes agree to stop hunting in the valley in exchange for the meat. The tribes have a historic treaty right to hunt at any time on all undeveloped federal and state land in Washington, but non-tribal hunters in the Methow Valley weren't happy about the out-of-season hunting. After discussions led by Bill White, a local rancher, and Todd Wilbur, a Swinomish tribal member, the tribes agreed to forgo their hunting rights in the valley in exchange for the roadkilled meat. David Williams reported on this story in the Feb. 28 edition of *High Country News*. For information contact HCN at (970) 527-4898, or editor@hcn.org, or find the story at <http://www.hcn.org>.

► **Snake River dams:** At a public meeting with federal officials in the eastern Washington town of Clarkston on

Feb. 10, many speakers backed the breaching of four dams on the Snake River. Area environmentalists had expected to be outnumbered at the hearing, and they cheered the show of support for the breaching idea. Breaching opponents in Clarkston and nearby Lewiston, Idaho, argued that the dams sustain the region's economy, and they charged that environmental groups stacked the witness stand at the hearing. Eric Barker reported on this story in the Feb. 28 edition of *High Country News*. For more information, contact HCN at (970) 527-4898 or editor@hcn.org, or find the story at <http://www.hcn.org>.

► **Green politics:** A new television ad campaign in Washington state lets voters know which candidates up for reelection have minded their green p's and q's. The \$2 million project, led by Washington Conservation Voters, got underway in mid-January. Rebecca Clarren reported on this story in the Feb. 14 edition of *High Country News*. For more information, contact HCN at (970) 527-4898 or rebecca@hcn.org, or find the story at <http://www.hcn.org>.

WEST VIRGINIA

► **Mining conflict:** In March, *The Charleston Gazette* broke the story that Kathy Karpan, director of the U.S. Office of Surface Mining, was interviewing to replace Richard Lawson as president of the National Mining Association. Because the association represents the mining operators OSM is supposed to regulate, Karpan secretly recused herself from her OSM duties. Interior Department officials confirmed the situation only after the *Gazette* filed formal Freedom of Information Act requests. After *The Washington Post* picked up on the story, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt moved Karpan to another post within Interior. Contact Ward at (304) 348-1702, or kward@wvgazette.com.

► **Mountaintop removal coal mining** remained a big topic of media coverage in West Virginia. In February, the CBS magazine, "60 Minutes," broadcast an investigation of mountaintop removal by correspondent Mike Wallace. The piece included an interview in which

Wallace confronted Gov. Cecil Underwood about the major financial contributions coal companies made to his 1996 campaign. In mid-April, various newspapers reported on the Clinton administration's confusion of what stance to take in an appeal of a federal court ruling to limit the filling of streams with mining waste. National papers also picked up on the story. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* wrote editorials urging the White House to support the October 1999 ruling by Chief U.S. District Judge Charles H. Haden II. Contact Ward at kward@wvgazette.com or (304) 348-1702.

► **Acid mine drainage:** Jenni Vincent of the Morgantown *Dominion Post* continued to report on acid mine drainage pollution by coal mining in north-central West Virginia. In early April, Vincent wrote about an annual conference of the West Virginia Surface Mine Drainage Task Force. Roger Calhoun, director of the Charleston field office of OSM, said regulators are still working to stop new acid mine drainage from occurring. Regulators also want to make sure bonds posted by mining companies are adequate to cover the long-term treatment of acid mine drainage, Calhoun said. Contact Vincent at (304) 292-6301.

► **TRI:** Newspapers, radio stations and television outlets all reported on the annual release of the National Institute for Chemical Studies West Virginia Scorecard. Charleston-based NICS compiles EPA Toxics Release Inventory data into a statewide report that tracks water, air and land emissions. NICS compiled similar studies, through voluntary emissions reporting, even before EPA required companies to report their emissions to the TRI program. The NICS Scorecard is available on the internet at www.nicsinfo.com. For information about media coverage of Scorecard, call or e-mail Ward at (304) 348-1702 or kward@wvgazette.com.

WISCONSIN

► **Sacrificial doves:** A proposed hunting season on the mourning dove has triggered new debate over who can best

protect wild species. Many hunters are backing the season, arguing hunting money will then go toward improving species habitat. But some hunters and many non-hunters argue it's inhumane to kill the mourning dove, which happens to be Wisconsin's symbol of peace. The dispute has been widely covered by Wisconsin newspapers, radio and television stations. NPR's "All Things Considered" also interviewed Wisconsin DNR ecologist Keith Warnke. Contact Chuck Quirnbach, Wisconsin Public Radio, at (414) 227-2040.

► **Land preservation:** Wisconsin has authorized 460 million dollars in new spending on a land preservation program. The debate is now over where to focus those dollars. Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* reporter Don Behm wrote in May about efforts to spend a large chunk of the cash in the Kettle Moraine area west of Milwaukee. Contact Behm at (414) 224-2000.

► **Whooping cranes:** Wisconsin hopes to set up a summertime nesting area for the whooping crane. The only other such site in the northern regions is in Canada. Several Wisconsin media are regularly following the progress of this rare effort. For more information, try Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* reporter Jo Sandin at (414) 224-2000.

WYOMING

► **Snowmobile ban:** On March 13, Yellowstone National Park officials announced that snowmobiles will likely be banned from Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks beginning in the winter of 2002-2003. Snowcoaches—vans on caterpillar tracks—will be the only motorized travel allowed during the winter. The announcement followed the EPA's comments in February that a snowmobile ban was the only way to clean up the park's air. Rachel Odell reported the *High Country News* story March 13. Contact HCN at (970) 527-4898 or editor@hcn.org, or find the story at <http://www.hcn.org>.

► **Nuclear waste incinerator:** Last April, Wilson, Wyo., resident Mary Mitchell discovered that the Idaho

National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory planned to burn nuclear waste at its site in southern Idaho. INEEL had asked for public comment from Idaho residents, but Wyoming residents had not been invited to participate. Mitchell rallied Jackson Hole residents and helped launch a nationwide campaign to stop the incinerator. On March 27, the Department of Energy agreed to scrap plans for the incinerator until it explores other options. Rachel Odell reported on this story in the April 10 edition of *High Country News*. For more information, contact HCN at (970) 527-4898 or editor@hcn.org, or find the story at <http://www.hcn.org>.

CANADA

► **Homeless PCB's:** *Edmonton Journal* reporter Charles Rusnell alerted the country to a scheme to sneak eighty-one tonnes of PCB-contaminated waste into Canada in a story March 28. A Chinese ship carrying U.S. military waste was bound for the port of Vancouver. From there, the U.S. waste disposal firm Trans-Cycle Industries would truck the cargo to northern Ontario. But last year Ontario rejected the waste company's application to import any PCB-contaminated material from outside Canada. The Chinese ship tried to store the contaminated waste temporarily in Seattle, but dock workers there refused to unload it. The ship left North America for Japan, where officials say they don't want the material either. Contact Charles Rusnell at crusnell@thejournal.southam.ca or (780) 429-5100, or visit <http://www.edmontonjournal.com>.

► **Grizzly bear population threatened:** A B.C. government grizzly bear expert was suspended in March and a report seized in which he claimed the provincial government violated its own guidelines for the number of bears that hunters should be allowed to kill. Stephen Hume wrote in the *Vancouver Sun* on March 28 that provincial biologist Dionys de Leeuw was suspended without pay after circulating his paper suggesting B.C. exceeded by 200 percent its own guidelines for limiting the killing of bears to a level which would

sustain the population. De Leeuw was told he couldn't discuss his paper or its conclusions. He predicted the B.C. bear population could crash between 2010 and 2020, based on his various estimates of the bear population and a kill rate at the present amount. Contact Stephen Hume at (604) 605-5264 or shume@islandnet.com.

► **Global warming threatens salmon:** The salmon fishery in B.C.'s Fraser River could be wiped out in a few decades because of global warming, according to a Canadian government study. The report by the Climate Change Secretariat said that predicted temperature increases of two to five degrees Celsius by 2050 would endanger the survival of the world's most productive sockeye salmon river fishery. Last summer and fall, the Fraser River sockeye season was cancelled when only 3.5 million fish made it into the river. From 1990-93, the average was 16.3 million salmon. *The Vancouver Sun* ran reporter Brian Morton's story on Jan. 28.

As the numbers of salmon fell drastically in the fall, villages in B.C. were faced with grizzly bears prowling for food to replace their regular salmon diet, as Jane Armstrong wrote in a March 2 story in *The Globe and Mail*. For more information contact Brian Morton at (604) 605-2000 ext. 2391 or bmorton@pacpress.southam.ca.

► **Atlantic salmon threatened:** Fugitive farm salmon have weakened the gene pool of wild Atlantic salmon and

may be pushing them closer to extinction. "There is evidence to indicate that there has been a reduction of fitness in the wild populations in the short terms when wild and domestic salmonids have interbred," said an internal report from Fisheries and Oceans Canada obtained by Tom Spears of the *Ottawa Citizen*. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service concur. The government report which was the basis of Spears's April 7 story confirmed the fears of conservation groups examined by the reporter in a seven-part series in January. Contact Tom Spears at (613) 596-3700 or tspears@thecitizen.southam.ca.

► **Falcon smuggling:** The story how the fight to save the peregrine falcon from extinction destroyed the career of a biologist would have been forgotten if not for the award of an Order of Canada this year and *Edmonton Journal* reporter Ed Struzik. The award was announced for Richard Fyfe, a government biologist who designed the program which brought the peregrine falcon back from the brink of extinction. But halfway through the program in the mid-1980s, Fyfe's career was ruined by the allegation that he helped mastermind a multimillion-dollar international smuggling ring selling falcons to Arabs, Struzik wrote in his Feb. 6 story. No evidence was ever found to support the allegation. Fyfe was exonerated in 1986, four years after the allegations surfaced, although by that time he had taken early retirement because his work was poisoned by the climate of mistrust.

In the late 1980s, *Ottawa Citizen*

reporter Paul McKay interviewed Fyfe when he wrote a series of articles and a book, *The Pilgrim and the Cowboy*, about a bungled U.S. and Canadian government sting operation to catch falcon smugglers. The number of wild birds the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took from nests to use for bait in the operation was greater than those later proved taken by poachers and smugglers, McKay wrote. Contact Ed Struzik at (780) 429-5100 or estruzik@thejournal.southam.ca.

► **ESA:** Ontario has either 51 or 26 endangered species, depending whether the province or the federal government is counting. Federal wildlife scientists have identified twice the number of endangered plants and animals in Ontario, according to a March 2 story by Martin Mittelstaedt in *The Globe and Mail*. The federal list is compiled by wildlife scientists, but Ontario lets provincial politicians approve its version and delays the process by consulting with affected landowners before adding species.

The federal system for approving the list could become as political as Ontario's with the introduction April 11 in the House of Commons of the new Species at Risk Act. In the proposed legislation the federal government would have final approval of the list. The legislation comes at a time which, under current conditions, could see the number of species on the federal list double in a decade, according to a Feb. 7 story by Donna Jacobs of the *Ottawa Citizen*. Contact Martin Mittelstaedt at (416) 585-5000 or mmittelstaedt@globeandmail.ca.

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