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STICKY NOTES

An Environmentalist-Owned Daily—Blessing or Burden for the E-Beat?

The April 15 headline over an item in Jim Romenesko's media news column at the Poynter Institute's website was a bit jarring: "Environmentalist has dreams of owning the Sun-Times."

Huh? The Chicago Sun-Times?

Clicking through to the original story referenced by Romenesko led to an article in the Chicago Reader, which revealed that, yes, a local environmental activist and businessman named Paul Kakuris had assembled a team of investors to make a bid for the then-for-sale Sun-Times.

Quoting from a proposal by these prospective buyers, the Reader reported that the Sun-Times and smaller newspapers in Hollinger International's Chicago Group—part of the same proposed deal—would operate "in a unified manner toward a common goal of environmental awareness, stewardship, and meaningful, pioneering journalism focusing on controversial environmental issues."

Furthermore, the Reader reported, Kakuris envisioned increasing the Sun-Times' editorial ranks impressively—from 180 to 300 or more—with special focus on building up the investigative and Sunday staffs. Also, an environmental editor would be appointed. The potential buyers said

—see *Sticky Notes* p. 2



ENVIRONMENT Writer

New NSF, EPA Grants Secure Science Journalism Workshops Project

Science and environmental journalists and climate and marine scientists will continue meeting over the next two years as part of a national workshop project aimed at better understanding the working cultures and practices of scientists and journalists, with a goal of improving public understanding of science through the mass media.

The multi-year project is being managed by the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting, publisher of *Environment Writer*, based at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography. The science journalism workshop project is funded by a newly announced two-year grant from the Paleoclimate Program, Division of Atmospheric Science, National Science Foundation, and by a second-year grant from the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Air Programs. In-kind travel support for invited workshop participants is being provided by the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Ocean Service. The EPA workshops project

grant is being provided through the nonprofit Environmental Law Institute.

In the first year of the planned three-year project, Metcalf hosted two-day workshops involving up to 12 invited science and environmental journalists and up to 12 climate/marine scientists. Detailed workshop reports on both of those sessions are available online at <http://www.gso.uri.edu/metcalf> and at <http://www.environmentwriter.org>.

Journalism participants at the initial two workshops included reporters and editors from new organizations such as the Associated Press, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Science and Nature magazines, BBC, CNN, and leading regional newspapers. Scientists involved in the initial two workshops have included leading atmospheric, climate, and marine scientists, including two winners of the 1995 Nobel Prize for Chemistry.

The first two workshops were held at the University of Rhode Island's W. Alton Jones campus (November 2003) and at the

—see *Workshop Projects*, p. 2

Media at Nieman Session Weigh Climate Change, Water Resource Issues

Bud Ward

Several dozen invited journalists met recently at the Nieman Foundation, Harvard University, for a two-day environmental conference focusing on climate change and water resource issues.

Those familiar with such meetings likely would have recognized many of the faces and names of the journalists present, both the presenters and the students. That led to concerns that the meeting amounted to, in effect, "preaching to the choir" in which the [information]-rich get richer and the [information]-poor stay poor. That's not an uncommon problem given the relatively

small universe of established environmental journalists nationwide and the natural tendency of conference planners to draw from past recruits and to skim what they see as the top of the barrel.

The meeting, held at Nieman's venerable Walter Lippmann House in Cambridge, billed itself as "Coming to Terms With Complexity: Covering the Environment in the 21st Century." The formal agenda called for consideration of "How good a job are we doing in covering it?" at the end of major panel discussions.

—see *Scientists and the Media*, p. 3

STICKY NOTES (from p. 1)

there was “incalculable value and growth potential” in their concept.

At first reading, the idea seemed like an environmental journalist’s dream come true. After all, many newsrooms’ under-emphasis on the environment, woeful understaffing, and insufficient (if not nonexistent) attention to in-depth reporting are perennial subjects for journalists’ bellyaching.

Soon after reading the Reader’s article, however, second and third thoughts crept in. Even with all the obvious benefits that the Sun-Times plan appeared to offer for the cause of more and better environmental reporting, would it really be something that an environmental journalist would wish for?

That, of course, would depend on which environmental journalist you’re talking about. Objective-reporting traditionalist? Save-the-world muckraker? Unabashed and unashamed advocate? All are valid and valuable forms of journalism, but views are bound to differ between (and within) the different interests.

As one who has spent most of his reporting life at traditional daily newspapers—the “corporate media” derided by the left and “liberal media” decried by the right—I’d have to say that working for an environmentalist-owned and environmentalist-directed daily likely would be a decidedly mixed blessing.

The chance to work for bosses who “get” the importance of environmental issues—and who put their money where their mouths are—could certainly be exciting and invigorating. At the same time, however, I’ve got a nagging worry that no matter how scrupulously an environmentalist owner might instruct the reporting and editing staff to adhere to traditional and sound journalistic practices—and to all the high-minded watchwords of traditional newspapering—there would be a price to be paid.

And I fear it would be paid in terms of the newspaper’s (and individual reporters’) credibility, at least with some members of the public who would be suspicious about underlying agendas every time they read a news story on an environmental topic.

This is no small concern at a time of declining newspaper readership. In June, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reported survey results showing that “political polarization is increasingly reflected in the public’s news viewing habits,” and that “the public’s evaluations of media credibility also are more divided along ideological and partisan lines.”

Among both Republicans and Democrats, the survey recorded a “growing credibility gap” for broadcast news and newspapers. From 2000 to 2004, for instance, the segment of Republicans saying they “believe all or most” of what they read in their daily newspapers dropped from 21 to 16 percent. Among Democrats, there was a decline from 31 to 23 percent.

Citing the Pew survey, along with the popularity of Michael Moore’s “Fahrenheit 9/11” and Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News, Los Angeles Times columnist Tim Rutten wrote in early July that unless America’s news media are lucky, “this election cycle may be recalled as the point at which journalism’s slide into partisanship became a kind of free for all.”

It would be unfair and unwise to declare that the Sun-Times proposal prefigured a dramatically “partisan” remolding of the newspaper. The Reader article quoted Sun-Times publisher John Cruickshank describing the practical effect of Kakuris’s plan as something far more understated—“a single page of environmental coverage in the paper every day.” This was “a great idea” and “not a bad thing to do,” Cruickshank said, though he dismissed the notion that it would “transform your coverage and readership.”

In any event, environmental journalists will have to wait to see what an environmentalist-acquired daily newspaper might mean: More resources and emphasis for their beat, within an essentially traditional context? An influential stride toward a European-style party press in the United States? Some combination of the two? None of the above?

In late May, Hollinger announced it would seek to sell only the British properties in its media empire. The Chicago Tribune reported that at the end of the time that company’s Chicago-area newspapers’ were on the sales block, just two prospective buyers were still interested. The environmentalist-led investment group was not one of them. ■

—Bill Dawson

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Metcalf
METCALF INSTITUTE FOR MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

Workshop Projects (from p. 1)

Institution of Oceanography, in La Jolla, California (March 2004). The third workshop is to be held November 8–10, 2004, in cooperation with the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington.

The workshop project focuses not on breaking news in the climate science field, but rather on communications challenges facing journalists and scientists in reporting on science-related news in today’s mass media.

Beyond the planned University of

Washington November meeting, additional workshops in the project—each involving a new and expanding set of invited journalism and science participants—are being planned in the Southeast and in the Midwest, with exact university-affiliated locations and dates still to be decided.

Additional information and details on the workshop project will be reported in Environment Writer and via the Metcalf Institute website in coming weeks and months. ■

Scientists and the Media (from p. 1)

As it turned out, however, the official presentations by panels of presenters dealt by and large with the technical, economic, and political substance behind each issue, rather than with journalism on that issue. Some veteran journalists, having covered both sets of issues extensively, likely felt they gained few new insights from the official panel discussions.

On the other hand, final-day presentations on Saturday, May 15, involved more journalism-oriented exchanges, with that day's formal presenters consisting entirely of current or former science and environmental journalists.

The Problem with Objectivity

Cornelia Dean, former science editor, *New York Times*, on leave from the paper to work on a book on misuse of science for policy reasons, advised the room full of reporters about what she called

“the problem of objectivity,” which she said can risk elevating or overstating the seeming importance of uncertainty or debate.

“Fringe opinions” can appear to warrant the same merit as mainstream scientific perspectives, she cautioned, in particular on issues such as climate change.

But Dean emphasized that she does not think all the blame for shortcomings in reporting on scientists lie solely with the media. She told the group that “the culture of science needs to change” so that civic involvement and working responsibly with the news media are rewarded, and not penalized, by the science community.

Look for, Expect Uncertainty

Former science reporter for the Washington Post, Boyce Rensberger, now director of Knight Science Journalism Fellowships at MIT, told the group that “meek science can be made to appear

—see *Scientists and the Media*, p. 9



The Walter Lippmann House, home of Nieman Foundation, hosted the “Coming to Terms With Complexity” meeting of environmental journalists.



Mark Schleifstein of New Orleans Times Picayune offers reporters suggestions on how to pitch major series to sometimes reluctant editors.

Off the Record in a Room Full of Reporters—Oh, Really?

What happens when a speaker at the podium asks a room full of journalists if his remarks are on or off the record?

Not necessarily what you might expect, given two experiences at the Nieman Foundation's May 13-15 “Coming to Terms with Complexity” journalism conference.

ITEM: David Goldston, chief of staff for moderate New York Republican Sherwood Boehlert's House Committee on Science, took the podium on Friday morning and announced that he had understood his comments would be “off the record.”

Agreed?

No. Not so, the journalists pretty much unanimously agreed.

Goldston acquiesced. Instead, he said, in the event he made news with his remarks, the media should simply identify him as a “House staffer or something.” Nothing more specific.

Not a peep from the reporters at that point. Why not? Would they, should they, be held to honoring that request? Should they have aired

their perspectives on it? Why didn't they? (It's arguable whether Goldston indeed said something newsworthy, but it wouldn't have been a stretch to see at least some media report on his comments, given that Boehlert and he are frequently not-in-synch with the House Republican leadership on environmental issues.)

ITEM: Another speaker, addressing the group on water resources issues that Friday afternoon, simply showed an initial PowerPoint slide saying he was “off the record.”

Not a peep from the reporters when Harvard engineering professor Peter Rogers laid out that ground rule. No discussion. No dissent. No apparent acceptance or denial...or questioning.

Whether Rogers indeed “made news” is perhaps less clear than with Goldston. But that's beside the point. Why did a room full of veteran journalists not balk? Or talk? Or walk? Perhaps stand up conspicuously and exit-stage-right? Perhaps bellow out, “No way, Jose,” or, in this case, Pedro?

But they didn't. Go figure.

Media 'Unwitting Accomplice'; Laziness, Balance Bashed

Gelbspan's 'Boiling Point' Turns up Heat on Climate Skeptics, Media Coverage

Journalist-turned-self-acknowledged activist Ross Gelbspan turns up the heat—to high—on global warming and in particular on those “skeptics” of whom he is unsparingly skeptical concerning their doubts about climate change science.

The author of *The Heat Is On* (1997), former *Boston Globe* reporter Gelbspan, in his new book *Boiling Point* blisters politicians, big oil and coal and, TA-TA!, the media for what he sees as their role in making a bad situation—make that VERY BAD—much worse.

With the fine eye and writing style of a member of Pulitzer Prize-winning reporting team, which the new book touts on its cover, Gelbspan takes no prisoners. None.

Review

The August release of *Boiling Point*, published by Basic Books, comprehensively pulls together much of the science on climate change that has published during the past seven years or so, much of it lending increased credence to scientific concerns over the climate change. Those reporters—you know who you are—who may have largely slept through this issue during that time would do well to begin here as part of an effort to come up to speed.

Gelbspan makes clear his conviction that climate change is far more than “just another issue” and, indeed, that it goes well beyond being merely an environmental issue. He lays out the case that it is an expansive and all-encompassing economic, energy, political and, perhaps above all else, moral issue.

“We are living on an increasingly precarious margin of stability,” he implores, describing how “we have set in motion massive systems of the planet (with huge amounts of inertia) that have kept it relatively hospitable for the last 10,000 years.”

As have others, he calls for something akin to a Marshall Plan level-of-effort to accomplish what he hopes isn't too late to reverse these suicidal trends.

Gelbspan appears to somewhat relish the attacks that are likely to come from the “skeptics” whom he and others accuse of being in the deep pockets of high-carbon interests. He likely won't have to wait long.

On the book's cover, in his preface and in recent talks, Gelbspan seems almost to enjoy his critics having focused on his earlier claims to a Pulitzer while an editor with the *Globe*. While acknowledging those criticisms as “quite hurtful,” he allows that he “was privately pleased.” He says his coal and oil industry critics couldn't refute his reporting in *The Heat is On* and instead had to resort to character assassination.

He explains in the preface to the new book that he had “conceived and edited” the *Globe* series on systematic job discrimination against African Americans, “helped select the reporters, directed the reporting, and edited the articles.” The *Globe*'s editor and publisher chose him to receive the Pulitzer on behalf

of the paper, and included his photo and bio along with those of other team members under the headline “Pulitzer Prize Winners.” He's posted that and other related information on his <http://www.heatisonline.org> website.

That may not be the only place where some critics will try to fault him. In his new book, his rhetoric rises, for instance, in his “Criminals Against Humanity” chapter, which he opens with an admittedly bizarre quote from Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-Ok), not often considered among the Senate's heavy lifters.

“Nothing has further alienated the United States from the rest of the world than the Bush administration's dismissal of global climate change,” Gelbspan writes.

Nothing? Nothing at all? Written and released in the aftermath of the Iraq War controversies, that unqualified claim at a minimum is open to serious question, even if the underlying science behind humans' influence on climate change may no longer be.

“With the 2000 presidential election, however, the fossil fuel lobby won a victory beyond its wildest dreams,” he continues. “What began as an industry campaign of deception and information was adopted as presidential strategy.”

Bad Press

Lots of what Gelbspan writes in “Boiling Point” may be familiar to those who have followed the climate change issue carefully during the past decade. And much of it has been published previously in a hundreds of different papers, newsletters, and journals.

That is not to take away from the extensive research effort in gathering this information in one place and in presenting it in a readily accessible and highly readable way.

But it is Gelbspan's reporting on the role of the media where he may offer the most interesting news and information, certainly that of most interest to the audience of this newsletter.

Again, Gelbspan takes no prisoners when it comes to sparing the media the lash of his tongue and judgment.

He finds American news organizations at best, missing-in-action, and at worst, complicit.

“The U.S. press has basically played the role of unwitting accomplice by consistently minimizing this story, if not burying it from public view altogether,” Gelbspan writes.

Saying it is political reporting, not the science or environmental beat, that provides a career path to being a top editor, he accuses the media of doing “a deplorable job in disseminating” decade-old scientific information of human impacts on climate “and all its implications.” He says US newspaper coverage suffers by comparison with Western Europe.

Why? Gelbspan points to “the campaign of disinformation perpetrated by big coal and big oil” but also, and perhaps more importantly, to reporters' own myopia.

“Were journalists to look beyond short-term political implications,

—see *Boiling Point*, p. 5

Environmental Health News Summary Adds Archive Search Capability

An already valuable online tool for environmental journalists has become considerably more useful.

The Environmental Health News website recently added a powerful new search engine, allowing site visitors to hunt through the thousands of news stories and opinion articles in its archives and hundreds of advocacy group reports and studies.

Environmental Health News (<http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org>) presents daily, linked summaries of environmental coverage from dozens of publications around the world – usually, articles relating to its primary focus on pollution and environmental contaminants.

Each day, the site highlights several dozen articles in an impressive, but also sometimes dauntingly extensive, list. The new search engine will help users – particularly occasional visitors or those on a particular research mission – sift through the voluminous offerings.

The left side of EHN's Archives page contains the engine, which enables customized searches using combinations of the multiple categories under which articles have been classified in the site's database.

For instance, a simple search for the appearance of the keyword "dioxin" in editorials recently produced a list of 12 items in news outlets ranging from the Marion (Indiana) Chronicle-Tribune to the Los Angeles Times.

Alongside summaries of the editorials were updated options for further refining the search. Choosing one of them – "drinking water" in a sub-list of different types of infrastructure that might be related to dioxin exposure – narrowed the search results to one editorial in the Cincinnati Enquirer.

Another possible search method involves mixing various article categories at the outset.

One such search went like this: News stories about synthetic chemicals, with air as a possible exposure pathway, relating both to ecosystem effects and testicular cancer in humans.

The result was two articles, one in the New York Times and another in the St. Petersburg Times, which was reprinted in the Lakeland (Florida) Ledger.

A huge number of search combinations are possible, with choices possible for type of article (or report), environmental issue, human health condition, contamination agent, exposure pathway, ecological effect, infrastructure, solution (such as "activism" and "regulatory"), type of "emerging science" (such as "endocrine disruption"), location of coverage, name of publication, and date published.

The Environmental Health News website went online in June 2003. About 13 months later, its database included summaries and links for more than 30,000 documents, including nearly 20,000 news stories, nearly 1,000 editorials and more than 500 opinion pieces. The remainder comprised nearly 400 organization reports and scientific studies.

The site is produced by Pete Myers, former senior vice president for science at the National Audubon Society and co-author of "Our Stolen Future," through the not-for-profit Environmental Health Sciences. For a more detailed profile of Environmental Health News, see the April 2004 issue of Environment Writer (http://www.environmentwriter.org/dl/EW_0404.pdf). ■

Boiling Point (from p. 4)

their reporting would bring home how profoundly out of step the United States is relative to the rest of the world," he writes.

He also faults journalists for "laziness" committed "in the name of journalistic balance" and distinguishes the ethic of seeking balance in the case of opinion from those cases "when it's a question of fact."

"When it's a question of fact, it's up to a reporter to dig into a story and find out what the facts are. The issue of balance is not relevant when the focus of a story is factual." He advises journalists to pursue "the time-honored use of background conversations with scientists" to separate wheat and chaff, rather than merely to resort to some artificial "balance."

To Gelbspan, journalists underplaying the climate change story are doing more than simply short-changing their audiences on a critically important issue, they're short-changing themselves and their own careers.

"To sidestep this story is to deprive oneself of an extraordinary professional challenge. This is an immense drama. Its outcome is very

much in doubt. The dramas embedded in the climate crisis offer by far the most important and exciting stories any reporter could ever want to work on.

"The conflicts are there. They are just waiting to be written," he writes.

And, one might add, broadcast.

Reporters on the environmental, science or any other beat would do well to invest a few hours or so of the enjoyable reading it takes to cover Gelbspan's many years of research and writing.

Boiling Point: How Politicians, Big Oil and Coal, Journalists, and Activists Have Fueled the Climate Crisis—And What We Can Do to Avert Disaster, Basic Books, part of the Perseus Books Group, © 2004 by Ross Gelbspan, ISBN 0-465-02761-X, 272 pages. Cloth, to be published in early August 2004, \$22 US/\$31 Canada in book stores and from HarperCollins Publishers Order Department (tel: 800-242-7737, in Canada 416/321-2241). ■

BACKGROUND (Prepared with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation)

Population/Wildlife

Bob Wyss

It is difficult these days to avoid stories about white-tailed deer. The story is not about how magnificent the creatures are when they appear majestically at sunset, but about their unavoidable impacts with people. Even conservative estimates put the nation's deer at 20 million, believed the highest numbers ever. One result, according to the National Safety Council, was that in 2002 there were the 820,000 automobile collisions with deer, 100 human deaths, 13,000 injuries and \$1 billion in insurance claims. The increased herd has also caused a dramatic increase in lyme disease among humans, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Deer are only one of the many wildlife and habitat stories that face environmental journalists: The Florida Panther is down to perhaps 50 adults; in Southern California the coastal sagebrush ecosystem is disappearing; in Michigan the emerald ash borer is threatening to wipe out ash trees statewide; and in Maryland officials have had to dump pesticides into ponds in fear of the snakehead fish wreaking havoc with the environment.

What these stories have in common is the increased impact of humans on habitat and wildlife. In many cases, increasing international and domestic populations are affecting the world around us. How we recognize these issues may make it easier for environmental journalists—and even town hall reporters—to deal in a different way with such old, tired standbys as land use and zoning stories.

The Issue

As the nation's population has increased, America has become increasingly urban. The US Geological Survey reports that 80 percent of the US population live in 20 percent of the land area. But it would be a misnomer to characterize this 20 percent as urban. Increasingly, metropolitan areas are spreading out, pushing into what had been rural areas and significantly changing the ecology. Sprawl is not just a matter of increased population. For instance, the Chicago metropolitan population only grew from 6.6 million to 6.7 million between 1970 and 1990, but the land area to support that population increased from 811 square miles to 1,003 square miles.

Increases in land area developed are more significant where population is also rising, according to a recent study by the US Geological Survey. The nation's fastest growing metropolitan area is Las Vegas, and the USGS found that while the population increased by 171 percent between 1970 and 1990 the land mass supporting it expanded by 193 percent.

John Kostyack, manager of the wildlife conservation program for the National Wildlife Federation, says there is a significant link between population and the expansion of metropolitan areas, and

that it is most acute in the west and south. "The problem is that there is a major demographic shift underway to the sunbelt, and there is a direct correlation between that influx and the loss and decline of many species," he said.

As humans and development enter and alter habitat, some species may prosper while others are threatened. A prime reason white-tailed deer are increasing is that predators, especially armed hunters, have fewer areas where they can safely hunt near metropolitan areas.

Michael Bean, chair of the wildlife program at Environmental Defense, says the problem is more acute for endangered species that face diminished prospects as habitat becomes more urbanized and is fractured by roads and development. "Fragmented habitats disrupt the natural regime," Bean explains. The Florida Panther is one species having difficulty because it is increasingly penned in by Florida's rapid development.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service currently lists 990 plants and animals in the US that are endangered and another 275 that are threatened. While there have been some notable successes, such as the bald eagle and the grizzly bear, the numbers endangered or threatened have increased more than three-fold since 1980. The greatest numbers are in Hawaii, California, Florida and Texas.

At least half of the nation's threatened and endangered species are also in danger because of another change caused by population impacts and increased global ties—invasive species. The National Invasive Species Council estimates that new species cause up to \$100 billion a year in damages. It cites, just as one example, how in California an invasive insect, the glassy-winged sharpshooter, has introduced bacteria responsible for \$40 million a year in damages to the local grape crop.

Meanwhile as Americans increasingly expand suburbs and homes into the country, they seem to be more and more naïve and ignorant when they encounter wildlife. The Fund for Animals has a hotline that takes 5,000 calls a year from people confused when a skunk gets into their garbage, or a bat flies into their attic. "Folks in urban and suburban areas just don't seem to be very familiar with wildlife," said Laura Simon, who manages the program and spends much of her time teaching and soothing anxious callers.

Public Policy Options

The Endangered Species Act has been up for reauthorization since 1992, and although both developers and environmentalists want to see changes, the likelihood that Congress will agree on amendments in the near future is remote. Political polls indicate that up to 90 percent of Americans support the act's premise, making changes difficult. While the Bush administration has cut spending, coalitions have worked to devise administrative remedies designed

—see *Population/Wildlife*, p. 7

Population/Wildlife (from p. 6)

to preserve land use options while also protecting species. Bean, of Environmental Defense, has headed one of those efforts.

The public policy response to invasive species is much more aggressive than it was years ago when Dutch elm disease and chestnut blight were allowed to destroy entire ecosystems. Since the emerald ash borer was discovered to have arrived from Asia, a task force of scientists, government, and private officials in the Midwest have worked aggressively to contain the insect and quarantine firewood and nursery stock. The cost of the effort so far totals \$54 million, and the key may be a firebreak across Michigan into Ohio and Indiana in which every ash is felled in order to stop the spread of the insect.

These environmental changes are happening at the local level, and most of the answers must occur locally. Most states and local communities, even in conservative western and southern areas, have embraced a range of zoning, land use, and land preservation efforts. Private organizations such as The Nature Conservancy have bought or succeeded in protecting 15 million acres in the US alone. Government and quasi-government organizations, including land trusts, have set aside millions of acres more.

Models of aggressive programs can even be found in high population areas. For instance, Memphis has been credited with adopting innovative land use approaches to control growth, and Orlando has succeeded in moving development away from valuable wetlands in its northwest and citrus farms in its southwest.

But conflicts seem unavoidable. The Florida Wildlife Federation two years ago brokered a plan in Collier County, Florida, to limit development rights in an area called North Belle Meade, where 19 threatened wildlife species live, including the Florida panther. But some existing owners have been unwilling to give up their rights in an area where real estate is booming. Efforts in Arizona to buy and preserve portions of the fragile Sonoran Desert have struggled, especially as the land's development options become more valuable and prices rise.

Options for Journalists

Even when conflicts arise, stories about development and land use can cause an editor's eyes to glaze over. The answer is to narrow the focus of the story. Research indicates that readers do feel strongly about protecting endangered and threatened species. Some species and stories are easier than others. For instance, the Sonoran Pronghorn is an elegant animal that resembles an antelope that faces threats in the Arizona desert. The California gnatcatcher is in even more danger as the coastal sagebrush disintegrates, but even its name works against it. Readers want to know about animals, they want to know why beavers are returning to their neighborhood, or why portions of their favorite beach are off-limits while piping plovers breed.

The stories two years ago about the snakehead fish in Maryland illustrate both the potential and the problems for journalists. Stories about the ugly Asian fish with a voracious appetite and fins allowing it to walk on land soon went national. Pundits coined it Frankenfish, it was the butt of Jay Leno jokes, and it was featured on t-shirts. Maryland officials dumped poison into three ponds to kill it and other fish. The story illustrated the dangers of importing a foreign species. Researchers are now indicating that some may have over-reacted to the fish, and evidence of a similar imported species in Florida so far shows that it has not caused any dire ecological impacts.

Change is not new to the environment, habitat, or wildlife. However, the impact a rising population is having on it is unprecedented. Finding the time to understand the extent of those changes is critical.

Players and Sources

Environmental Defense, Michael Bean, chair, Wildlife Program, (202) 234-6049, <http://www.environmentaldefense.org>
 Humane Society of the United States, Washington, (202) 452-1100, <http://www.hsus.org/ace/15631>
 National Invasive Species Council, Washington, (202) 513-7243, Anna Cherry, public affairs coordinator, <http://www.invasive-species.gov>
 National Wildlife Federation, Washington, John Kostyack, manager, wildlife conservation program, (202) 797-6879, <http://www.nwf.org>
 Natural Resources Defense Council, New York, (212) 727-2700, <http://www.nrdc.org/cities/smartGrowth/pwild.asp>
 The Fund for Animals, New York, Laura Simon, coordinator of wildlife hotline, (203) 389-4411, <http://www.fund.org> and <http://www.fund.org/urbanwildlife/>
 US Fish and Wildlife Service, Endangered Species Program, Washington, press contact: Betsy Lordan, (202) 219-7499, <http://news.fws.gov> <http://endangered.fws.gov> and <http://endangered.fws.gov/wildlife.html>
 US Geological Society, Washington, press contact Karen Wood, (703) 648-4447, <http://www.usgs.gov/index.html>
 Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, Ronald Helinski, conservation policy specialist, (202)371-1808 <http://www.wildlife-managementinstitute.org> ■

Bob Wyss, for 28 years a writer and editor for The Providence Journal (18 of them covering environmental and energy issues) is an Associate Professor at the University of Connecticut.

*HEDES AND TALES (from p. 5)***The tales that headlines tell...**

Alaskan salmon escape from Vancouver Island fish farm

—Associated Press, July 16, 2004

EU lowers greenhouse gas emissions

—Associated Press, July 15, 2004

U.S. to Seek Further Waiver For Ozone-Harming Pesticide

—Washington Post, July 13, 2004

Bush Seeks Shift in Logging Rules

—New York Times, July 13, 2004

Bush to discard rules that restrict logging on U.S. forest land

—Mercury News, San Jose, Ca., July 13, 2004

Junked computers, environmental risks

—Baltimore Sun, July 12, 2004

Nevada loses Yucca Mt. waste site appeal

—Associated Press, July 9, 2004

15 of 51 Savannah River tanks have cracked, rusted or leaked

—Associated Press, July 10, 2004

European Environmental Rules Propel Change in U.S.

—New York Times, July 6, 2004

In Hawaii, Alien Species Launches Underwater Invasion

—Washington Post, July 5, 2004

Frogs worldwide face growing number of threats

—San Francisco Chronicle, July 4, 2004

MTBE still fouls half of Calif. city's water

—Baltimore Sun, July 4, 2004

Grading the world's environmental record

—Kansas City Star, July 4, 2004

Air Pollution Clouds Economic Environment

—Los Angeles Times, July 3, 2004

USDA may import fern-eating moth to help the Everglades

—Fort Lauderdale, Fl., Sun-Sentinel, July 2, 2004

Critics Say EPA Is Shirking Duty

—Boston Globe, July 1, 2004

EPA seeks new air-quality steps from states

—Philadelphia Inquirer, June 30, 2004

Cause and Effect: Dry Weather Is Asthma's Enemy

—New York Times, June 29, 2004

Businesses sue to force EPA and GE to remove PCB contamination

—Associated Press, June 29, 2004

Potential benefits of mercury plan are still murky

—Philadelphia Inquirer, June 28, 2004

Report faults EPA refinery oversight

—Philadelphia Inquirer, June 26, 2004

Many child deaths blamed on environment

—Associated Press, June 23, 2004

Toxic Emissions Rising, EPA Says

—Washington Post, June 23, 2004

Toxic pollution rose 5 percent in 2002

—Associated Press, June 23, 2004

Toxic emission figures disputed

—Dallas Morning News, June 22, 2004

Rocket fuel found in milk in California—Not clear if amount imperils children

—San Francisco Chronicle, June 22, 2004

New Army lab to make cleaner explosives

—Associated Press, June 21, 2004

Spread Of Toxic Flame Retardants 'Continuous'

—Los Angeles Times, June 21, 2004

Keeping Chemicals Out of the Home

—Boston Globe, June 21, 2004 ■

Scientists and Media, from page 3

Panelists Phil Shabecoff, Ross Gelbspan, Natalie Pawelski, Chip Giller, and Mark Schleifstein brief Nieman meeting.

Rensberger advised reporters to expect and seek out uncertainty in science, saying it's a good indicator of responsible science. But he cautioned that "scientists have different temperaments in evaluating the same data sets," and he said the media need to better identify facts, areas of uncertainty, and scientists' individual opinions and perspectives on those points.

"How well is the uncertainty described?" Rensberger asked rhetorically, saying reporters can use that question as one marker of responsible science.

"We're supposed to be watchdogs," Rensberger continued. "We bark in the night if there is something wrong." But he added that dogs "sometimes just like to hear themselves bark....And there are also just purring cats."

Cautioning that a normal first human reaction is to feel fear, and then to think a situation through more rationally, Rensberger suggested reporters not act solely on their first instinct...and "avoid a balance based on ignorance."

On climate change, Rensberger said that based on previous scientific understandings 10 or 15 years ago, the media appropriately gave "skeptics" 25 percent or 30 percent of the space in a story. Like the scientific understanding of evolution and creationism, he said, "it's OK now to give skeptics zero percent of the space" in climate science stories.

In a Q&A session after their remarks, Dean pointed to "a larger and larger influence of science" in society. Once told she could rely on "computer models as objective analysis," she recalled a caveat along the lines of "You tell me the objective, and I'll give you your analysis."

And once told that all of her reporters in the science department should have a Ph.D., Dean says she had a simple comeback, "What in?"

Also speaking on Saturday, former journalist and book author Ross Gelbspan (see related story, this issue) told the reporters that journalism "sometimes is institutionally antagonistic" to issues not fitting clearly into a political or economic niche.

"When it's a question of facts, it's up to the reporter to get off his or her ass and get at the facts," Gelbspan said, agreeing on risks posed by an over-reliance on journalistic "balance."

Pitching a Series... Get Angry, Be Conniving

The Times Picayune environment writer Mark Schleifstein offered reporters some practical advice on newsroom politics to advance enterprise stories or an in-depth series.

"Get angry" at editors and others, he suggested. "Be conniving" about the politics of the newsroom so you can determine which editors can best go to bat to support your story ideas. He said he came to do a major series on fisheries upon realizing that "The fisheries beat no longer exists. It's covered by a variety of people who cover it when a story comes up. But no one spends all their time messing with it."

Reporters' Compelling Devotion to Environment Beat

Concluding the workshop, Nieman Foundation Curator Bob Giles, former editor and publisher of the *Detroit News* and then a senior officer of the Freedom Forum, told the group that he was struck that environmental journalists are unusual among reporters in having "a compelling devotion" to their beat.

He characterized the beat, perhaps only partly in jest, as consisting of lots of "boring and complex material, but still you stick with it."

The environmental beat, Giles said, is "a beat where training matters." ■

Website Publications Continue to Evolve

Bill Dawson

Beginning in 2003 and continuing this year, Environment Writer has published a series of articles profiling online publications producing different forms of original journalism about environmental issues. Several of those publications continue to evolve. Here's a look at some of the recent and pending changes:

Environment News Service

At the end of March, Environment News Service (<http://www.ens-news.com>) one of the internet's first online ventures in environmental reporting, launched a distribution service for paid press releases called World-Wire (<http://www.world-wire.com>).

ENS, which produces breaking news stories about environmental topics in the style of a traditional wire service, last August began requiring paid subscriptions for full access to its own website. News service subscribers are offered the opportunity, on an opt-in basis, to receive the press releases that World-Wire distributes by email.

These releases, which recently have announced activities of companies such as Volvo, Home Depot and HP, are also displayed on the World-Wire website.

"If people do not wish to receive the (emailed) press releases, they can just unsubscribe," said Sunny Lewis, ENS Editor in Chief. "But people seem to like the service. Few have dropped away."

In another change, ENS, which relocated its headquarters to Boulder, Colorado, last year, has relocated again – this time to Hawaii. The service still maintains a news bureau in Washington, D.C.

(A detailed article on ENS appeared in Environment Writer's July-August 2003 issue, http://www.environmentwriter.org/dl/EW_070803.pdf).

Tidepool

Tidepool (<http://tidepool.org>), a website that publishes a daily summary of environmental coverage from the Pacific Northwest along with original articles, is severing formal ties with its publisher, the Portland-based environmental group Ecotrust, which has ceased funding the publication.

An independent nonprofit is to continue producing the website. Ecotrust will let Tidepool retain dedicated grant funds, and the web publication's staff will continue to provide some services for

Ecotrust involving the presentation of news on that group's own website, said Seth Zuckerman, a writer who has contributed regularly to Tidepool and will now be the publication's publisher.

Former managing editor Derek Reiber is Tidepool's new editor, and former editor Ed Hunt becomes editor emeritus. Hunt will continue to write a column and provide consulting and other services on an unpaid basis. A marketing position is being added, Zuckerman said.

One element of the new organization's fund-raising efforts will be modeled after National Public Radio's relationships with underwriters, whose names – though not traditional advertisements – are cited during NPR programming, he said.

The hope is that prospective underwriters for Tidepool will want their identities promoted in this manner to Tidepool's readership, which is heavy with individuals such as journalists, government officials, environmental professionals, environmentalists and students.

(A detailed article on Tidepool appeared in Environment Writer's September 2003 issue, http://www.environmentwriter.org/dl/EW_0903.pdf).

Grist

Grist (<http://www.gristmagazine.com>), the online environmental magazine that promises "doom and gloom with a sense of humor," appears poised to take a leap into greater productivity and prominence.

Recently, the Seattle-based publication has been soliciting applications for the position of managing editor with an announcement that promises "an exciting time of expansion and transition, as the magazine begins publishing more content, builds more content and marketing partnerships, and solidifies our standing as the top online source of environmental news and commentary."

One "content partnership" has been in evidence for several months already, as a number of articles by Amanda Griscom, Grist's prolific political and energy columnist, have also appeared in the general website publication Salon, sporting Grist's logo next to the headline.

A detailed article on Grist appeared in Environment Writer's June 2003 issue. http://www.environmentwriter.org/dl/EW_0603.pdf ■

READING RACK

“The EPA and Oil Refineries,” Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 17–19: Though Texas’ refineries are concentrated along the Gulf Coast, hundreds of miles away from Fort Worth, the Star-Telegram’s Jeff Claassen and Scott Streater, collaborating with Seth Borenstein of Knight-Ridder’s Washington bureau, undertook a three-month investigation of environmental enforcement at the gasoline-producing plants. They concluded that since President Bush took office, federal and state authorities “have sharply cut back on clean-air enforcement at many of the nation’s 145 oil refineries.” Comprehensive air inspections at refineries are down 52 percent since 2001, compared to a 4 percent decline for all industries, they discovered. Meanwhile, violation notices, down 24 percent for all industries, have plummeted 68 percent at refineries. A senior environmental official in the first Bush administration told the reporters the data were a “stunning” indication that the current administration is not “bringing the oil industry to heel.” But a current official said the federal government is forcing refineries to clean up their act by means other than traditional enforcement tools. <http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/news/local/9180248.htm>
<http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/news/9184148.htm>
<http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/news/9189098.htm>
<http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/news/state/9189116.htm>

“Wine Town With a Water Problem Is in Deep,” Los Angeles Times, July 19: “Lookin’ for a pot of gold,” the narrator in one of Creedence Clearwater Revival’s lesser-known 1960s songs ends up “stuck in Lodi again.” As Times reporter Lee Romney relates, that California municipality is itself now stuck in a huge legal, financial and environmental mess, stemming from a failed plan to borrow millions of dollars that would pay for lawsuits that city officials were persuaded would clean up a major groundwater pollution problem at no ultimate cost to the city. The article might seem to have limited relevance beyond California, but Romney’s account is a skillfully written example of how to explain a complex, multidimensional environmental issue in an engaging way. <http://www.latimes.com/news/science/environment/la-melodi19jul19,1,7612806.story?coll=la-news-environment>

“Seeds of Doubt,” Sacramento Bee, June 6–10: Anyone who thinks huge, labor-intensive newspaper projects are a thing of the past in an era of shorter stories aimed at short attention spans should check out this sprawling five-day series on genetically modified crops. From Mali to Mexico and back to California, Bee staffers produced a series that examines unfulfilled plans for international assistance, unintended migration of genetically modified seeds, industry funding of university research, the regulatory “patchwork” for biotech crops, and food-labeling issues. Bee reporters Tom Knudson, Edie Lau and Mike Lee wrote the series, which

is showcased attractively on the Bee’s website with features like Knudson’s audio slide show and galleries of arresting photos. Anyone averse to reading thousands and thousands of words on a computer screen should be aware, however, that this is an extremely long project. <http://sacbee.com/biotech>

“An Unlikely Cause of Pollution in Bay: Dentists,” San Francisco Chronicle; June 30, 2004: With mercury one of the most potent pollutants found in the San Francisco Bay, California advises residents, especially women of child-bearing age and children, to limit sport fish because of health hazards. Even small amounts can impair neurological development in fetus and children. “In an attempt to reduce mercury, the state regulators in May issued a plan to cut mercury discharges into the bay by 40 percent over the next 20 years to produce fish that are safe to eat,” writes Jane Kay. About 600 dental offices will be required to get wastewater treatment permits to prevent the toxic metal from ending up in the bay, where the organic matter transforms the mercury in the silver fillings into the potent neurotoxin methylmercury. Many of the dentists will be installing dental amalgam separators so the heavier amalgam particles settle to the bottom. These residues would then be sent to licensed disposal companies for recycling, Kay reports.

“Endangered Species Act’s Protections Are Trimmed,” The Washington Post, July 4, 2004: A slow holiday-weekend Sunday, but Post environmental reporter Juliet Eilperin’s gets page-one, above-the-fold treatment in reporting that the Bush administration is “succeeding in reshaping” the Endangered Species Act in ways legislative action has so far been unable to do. Interior Secretary Gail A. Norton’s “new environmentalism” has led to changes “which have ranged from recalculating the economic costs of protecting critical habitats to limiting the number of species added to the protected list,” she writes. Needless to say, perhaps, environmentalists see a gutting and mawling of the statute, Interior P.R. officials just a more efficient way of getting to the same end goals. Some stats Eilperin sites: 9.5 species listed a year under President Bush, compared with 65 a year under the Clinton administration and 59 a year under Bush “Critical habitat” designations given “only half the acreage recommended by federal biologists.” And key decision-making authorities transferred from U.S. Fish and Wildlife to “other agencies with different priorities.” abstract of article: <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/658482151.html?did=658482151&FMT=ABS&FMTS=FT&date=Jul+4%2C+2004&author=Juliet+Eilperin&desc=Endangered+Species+Act%27s+Protections+Are+Trimmed> Full article for sale from site. ■

WEBS OF INTEREST

Dartmouth Toxic Metals Research Program

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~toxmetal>

Nearly three-quarters of the elements that make up the universe are metals. Though they are abundant in nature, and though many are essential for life, some metals can be toxic to living things when they build up in water, soil or food. Worldwide, there is growing awareness of the extent and complexity of this problem. Dartmouth University's Center for Environmental Health Sciences has formed an interdisciplinary research program to study the way toxic metals affect ecosystems and human health. Viewers can start with a metals primer (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~toxmetal/TX.shtml>) that explains what the metals are; where they come from; what toxic metals are and the difference between heavy metals and toxic metals; what role metals play in living things; how can metals harm living things; and how some metals can be both good and bad for human health.

The metals listed (not all of them have active links) include:

- Arsenic
- Cadmium
- Chromium
- Copper
- Iron
- Lead
- Mercury
- Nickel
- Silver

Each one has a Q&A covering what the metal is; where it is found; how it is used; benefits and detriments to human health; symptoms of exposure; government standards and guidelines; and links to additional information.

There is also an entertaining section, with numerous graphics, called Stories and Histories (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~toxmetal/TXSH.shtml>). It tells the story of the metals' uses throughout history, from murder to chrome bumpers.

The Research section (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~toxmetal/RS.shtml>) covers:

- Scientific Goals
- Current Research Projects
- Shared Technical Resources
- Abstracts and Technical Papers

Other sections of the Web site include News (articles written on toxic metals), Dialog (which allows viewers to ask questions about toxic metals), Resources (quite extensive), and Outreach Programs. ■