The Burn Issue

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IRA GLASS TALKS PODCASTS JOURNALISTS AND WILDFIRE FREELANCERS FIGHT BACK
THE BURN ISSUE

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Journalism, by its nature, is outward-looking. We survey the world and take note of our surroundings. We are gatherers of information, learning and absorbing so that we may process, analyze and report back to an audience. But it has always been necessary for journalists to periodically turn our attention inward, surveying our own reflection for flaws.

That mirror can be messy, and while scrutiny of East Coast media hubs is prevalent, journalism in the West is often overlooked. But Montana and the rest of the West are not immune to the complications and issues the industry faces.

At Montana Journalism Review, we pursue stories that cover media in our state and neighboring regions, offering a bold, affectionate and sometimes irreverent look.

Each year, we tackle a theme and explore its many facets and interpretations. Our departments focus on media coverage in Montana, the West and the year to come, while our feature stories take a long-form approach to issues both domestic and global.

As the oldest journalism review in the country, MJR has its roots in tradition while striving to evolve with new digital storytelling methods. Founded in 1958 by J-School Dean Nathaniel Blumberg, the magazine is produced by journalism students at the University of Montana and has been under the guidance of Editor-in-Chief Henriette Löwisch since 2012.
REPORTING FROM THE PERIPHERY

Nine million acres across the United States went up in flames in 2015, along with more than half of the Forest Service’s annual budget. Old growth forests in Washington and Oregon, peat bogs in Alaska and subdivisions in California fueled the fires.

Every year, reporters across the country recount the many stories of spreading wildfire. Every year, many miss the bigger picture.

Contrary to public belief, the number of wildfires lighting up the West is not rising. Individual fires are, however, burning bigger and burning longer, and the Forest Service is left to play “catch up” instead of proactively managing the burns.

As journalists join this annual circus, they become trapped on a merry-go-round of coverage that is merely reactive instead of critical. Acres burned, communities evacuated, structures lost, repeat.

There is a practicality to such news that is often necessary, but it leaves little room to step away from the cycle and report deeper, see wider. Context falls short. But as renowned photographer and Guggenheim Fellow Donald Weber summarizes in his advice to storytellers, “the periphery is where it’s at.”

For our 2016 cover story, we sent staff writer Andrew Graham and photographer Jake Green out to find what journalists are missing as they cover the wildfire beat. Their story, “Lost in the Smoke,” is a dispatch from the periphery, a stab at getting a handle on some of that context.

In the wake of such a volatile fire season, as well as several metaphorical house fires closer to home, the word “burn” struck us as a singularly apt theme for all the features in our magazine. It led us to a vast and playful breadth of stories, a variety of literal and figurative paths to explore.

From a legacy publisher closing its capital bureau to freelancers negotiating business deals, we probed several ways journalists are feeling the burn.

We dove into culture desks along the Pacific Coast and the Rocky Mountain slopes where newsrooms are lighting up with reviews and commentary on legalized marijuana.

And we ourselves came under fire after the exposure of several errors in last year’s cover story.

This year’s staff took a hard look at our fact-checking system, analyzed what went wrong in MJR’s last issue and changed the workflow to ensure an even higher level of self-scrutiny. We expanded our social presence to include behind-the-scenes stories on Medium.com and reimagined our website to archive this and past issues’ stories and artwork.

After a semester of hard work, we feel ready to take the heat. ♦

NICKY OUELLET
MANAGING EDITOR, EDITORIAL

CElia TALBOT TOBIN
MANAGING EDITOR, CREATIVE

HENRIETTE LÖWISCH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Brennen Rupp was terrified when he stepped into the small Christian school in Libby, Montana. He was looking for Ruthanne Dolezal, mother of Rachel Dolezal—the head of the Spokane NAACP who resigned after her parents outed her as a white woman. She identified as African American.

Rupp had started working for The Western News, Libby’s local paper, when the Dolezal story broke. He saw the video interview in which an ABC broadcast affiliate in Spokane confronted her about her racial identity and watched the story spread to national outlets like BuzzFeed News, Gawker and MSNBC.

Ruthanne Dolezal and her husband, Larry, talked to many national news sources but later disconnected their phone and refused to talk to any Montana media after the national firestorm. Until Rupp.

A college football recruit before writing for a sports beat in Minnesota, Rupp had only interviewed people for sports stories before the Dolezals.

“I found out from the people that work there that this is where Rachel is from — Libby, Montana. I was like, are you kidding me?” he said. “In one of my first two weeks working there I can do this huge potential story.”

When Rupp arrived, the bi-weekly had covered the sensational story about its famous local on tiptoes using Associated Press copy. Other Montana news organizations also relied mostly on AP stories. Some ran editorials and letters to the editor about their opinions on Rachel Dolezal’s racial identity.

The Missoulian wrote about the story’s effect on the Dolezals in mid-June, but was unable to contact her parents. The article ran in two other Montana papers without comment from Dolezal’s parents.

Rupp’s editor, Bob Henline, was hesitant to publish a story about Rachel Dolezal. He said the story had already gotten too much attention from the national media.

“He thought that the one story did it justice,” Rupp said. “And he didn’t want to keep going on and on about the story because he thought that people were probably getting sick of it.”

Rupp pursued the interview nonetheless. He had a difficult time getting in contact with Dolezal’s parents and tracked Ruthanne down by finding her at her workplace. When he identified himself as a reporter, he said Ruthanne Dolezal “kind of went white.”

She granted him the interview because he was from the local paper and was able to relate to her in a way others couldn’t, Rupp said.

Maybe after being burned by the national media, it’s easier to talk to somebody your own size.

PHOTO BY AARON ROBERT KATHMAN VIA CREATIVE COMMONS
As if paying for a funeral wasn’t expensive enough, small-town obituaries now have a price tag to boot.

The trend of small papers charging for obituaries only started within the decade, and for many, just within the past five years. These papers are from towns of 20,000 people or fewer and charge an average of $20 per obituary.

While small-town newspapers explore obituaries as a new source of revenue, larger dailies continue to increase their prices. Obituaries have become an industry of their own, earning an annual revenue of $421 million, with an average cost of $190 per obit, according to the Inland Press Association, a not-for-profit with the goal of helping newspapers increase profit margins.

Seeley Lake, Montana, resident Sheila Murphy recently attempted placing a 150-word obituary with both the Great Falls Tribune and the Missoulian. For the same obit, Murphy said, the Tribune wanted more than double what the Missoulian asked for, nearly $120.

Montanans like Murphy now have to pick and choose where to place their obits based on prices, rather than on the paper’s proximity to the deceased’s hometown.

But there are still some newspapers that view obituaries as a free public service. The Choteau Acantha is one of them. The paper’s editors and publishers, Melody and Jeff Martensen, said “we don’t think the life of a person should be reduced to the cost of inches in newsprint.”

Out of 19 Montana newspapers contacted, 8 said they started charging for obituaries in 2010.

- **Western News**: Free, as long as the deceased have ties to Libby and the paper keeps editorial control.
- **Glasgow Courier**: Free, as long as the paper keeps editorial control.
- **Choteau Acantha**: Free, as long as the paper keeps editorial control.
- **Sidney Herald**: Flat-rate price went from $0 to $50 in five years. The rate will increase again to $70 over the next couple of months.
- **Billings Gazette**: Has the highest per inch price for obituaries at $30.50 per column inch.

INFOGRAPHIC BY OLIVIA KEITH
The media landscape is changing rapidly, and student-run media like the Montana Kaimin are no different. In April 2015, the Kaimin shifted from publishing four times a week to publishing a print edition once a week and publishing every day on the web, including weekends.

It hasn’t been a simple transition, nor did the newspaper staff expect it to be one. But the new model is teaching students to excel, adapt and master different kinds of writing. They’re focusing on features and long-form writing for the paper, and smart, quick, breaking news and analysis for the web. They’re still working on striking the right balance between the two, but I’m confident it’s helping mold journalists who are better suited to tackle the modern media world than ever before.

Kevin Van Valkenburg, a 2000 graduate of the University of Montana School of Journalism, is a senior writer with ESPN The Magazine. He lives in Baltimore with his wife Jen and their two daughters. He advised the Kaimin and was the fall 2015 T. Anthony Pollner Distinguished Professor at the UM School of Journalism.
Learning the language of gender and sexuality

BY DECLAN LAWSON

Gender and sexuality issues took the national media by storm in 2015, from hate crimes against transgender people to the Supreme Court’s decision to legalize gay marriage. But policies guiding journalists on how to articulate stories with sensitive content are not always consistent.

Montana Journalism Review surveyed nine news organizations in Montana to identify their policies on the LGBTQ acronym and gender pronouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Style guide</th>
<th>No policy</th>
<th>Acronym used</th>
<th>In their Words</th>
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<tr>
<td>KPAX 8 Missoula</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td></td>
<td>KPAX respects source requests for using gender pronouns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>KRTV 3 Great Falls</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>LGBT / LGBTQ</td>
<td></td>
<td>“As far as pronoun selection, we haven’t had an instance where we had to ask the person we were interviewing whether they considered themselves ‘he’ or ‘she.’ It’s usually very evident during the interview,” said News Director Joel Lundstad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>KTMB/KWYB ABC Fox Montana</td>
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<td>LGBT</td>
<td></td>
<td>ABC reporters try to be “conscious and sensitive” when it comes to transgender stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miles City Star</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td></td>
<td>“It hasn’t come up yet,” said Managing Editor Marla Prell of creating a policy for gender pronouns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Falls Tribune</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>LGBT in headlines LGTIIQ or LGBTQ in story</td>
<td></td>
<td>GFT tries to be sensitive when reporting on LGBTQ issues in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missoula Independent</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Indy follows guidelines set by the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Stylebook Supplement on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, &amp; Transgender Terminology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowstone Public Radio (Billings)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Read in full</td>
<td></td>
<td>YPR follows the National Public Radio Ethics Handbook: for each story, reporters ask sources to introduce themselves with preferred pronouns during sound check.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montana Public Radio</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Read in full</td>
<td></td>
<td>MTPR reporters use preferred pronouns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trail 103.3 (Missoula)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Read in full</td>
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<td>In interviews, reporters ask sources to identify themselves with pronouns, job titles or personal titles.</td>
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Records go online

BY CLAIRE BURGESON

With Montana joining the growing number of states with digital library archives, researchers from all over the world can now access state documents without buying a plane ticket to the “last best place.”

Since 2008, the Montana State Library has digitized 8.7 terabytes of information, or over 23,000 historical state documents. The documents go back to the 1800s and one can find everything from local newspapers to bear management plans. Researchers have already downloaded 3.5 million documents, State Publications Librarian Jim Kammerer said.

But some question if these digital files are as durable as paper and microfilm. University of Montana librarians say to ensure lasting access to digital publications, there must be constant diligence on preservation. Should they get corrupted or their formats outdated, a piece of information can be lost forever.

For now, online accessibility trumps longevity. So historians hoping to get in some fly-fishing while on a research trip to Montana should hide this article from their funders.

ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN HAWK

Ryan Hawk is a graphic artist and motion designer, freelancer for many and avid green tea enthusiast.
In Montana, a state recognized for its “right to know” laws, newspapers can usually count on access to booking photos of convicted felons; not so for the Livingston Enterprise and The Big Timber Pioneer.

The Livingston Enterprise was repeatedly denied requests for mug shots of arrested persons at the Park and Gallatin County Detention Centers, due to what Enterprise Editor Justin Post calls vague wording in Montana’s Criminal Justice Information Act (CJIA) of 1979.

In the end, it took a judge to get the detention center to cough up the photos. But the larger question of how to interpret Montana’s CJIA remained unaddressed.

Police Lt. Clifford Larson of the Park County Detention Center said his office has always seen booking photos as private to convicted individuals, and has never made them available to the media.

To challenge and clarify the statute and force the Park Detention Center to supply the booking photos, Post contacted Park County Attorney Bruce Becker and Montana Freedom of Information Hotline lawyer Mike Meloy.

Becker filed a motion on behalf of Park County, asking the court to clear up the statute’s meaning. The statute states that “fingerprints and photographs” are confidential, but daily jail occupancy and initial arrest records are public information. Several Montana county attorneys are interpreting “photographs” to mean booking photos, Meloy said.

A 10th Judicial District Court judge ruled in favor of the Enterprise’s request for the mugshot of an inmate in late October, on the grounds that the photo couldn’t be used as evidence. Big Timber Pioneer editor Lindsey Kroskob called it a small victory.

“The fact that he said that the photo had no evidentiary value is significant,” she said.

As MJR went to print, the larger issue had yet to be addressed.
In an era when the federal government repeatedly pressures journalists to compromise sources, legal protection for Montana reporters got a bit stronger.

The 2015 Montana Legislature overwhelmingly passed a bill that extended the state’s shield law into the digital realm. Now notes made in Google documents or on other online platforms and emails between reporters and sources are safe from state or local government subpoenas.

It’s the first law of its kind in the country, and a proactive measure for Montana.

“The real question was: do we need to see an abuse occur before we start protecting our rights?” Rep. Daniel Zolnikov, the Billings Republican who sponsored the legislation, said.

Mike Meloy, a Helena attorney who has long been a First Amendment advocate, said the bill was more symbolic than substantive. With one of the best shield laws in the country, Montana’s old law would have likely covered digital servers.

The upside is third-party server operators now know to withhold information if a court order comes in the mail. Plus, maybe the idea will catch on.

“What this bill does, I think, is call attention to the fact that there is a gap in most shield laws around the country which could be exploited,” Meloy said.

In Montana, that gap has been filled.

A University of Montana journalism school and Montana Journalism Review alum, Alexander Deedy worked at the Helena Independent Record before moving to Hawaii to freelance.

ILLUSTRATION BY AUSTIN HOFSCHELD
Austin Hofschield lives in Los Altos, California. He is an aspiring actor and longbowman.
Freelancers ignite

4 ways to earn your fair share in the business

BY AUSTIN SCHEMPP

When Jacob Baynham pitched a story to a travel magazine and received an offer for $1,000 in return for writing about his experience traveling on horseback through Afghanistan’s Pamir Mountains, he thought he had landed his first big break in freelance journalism.

When Baynham sent in photos, the magazine used them in advertisements to boost subscriptions. When he submitted his feature, the magazine “forgot” his byline.

And when he asked for his $1,000 paycheck, the editor reassured Baynham money would come. It never did. Shortly after, the publisher went bankrupt.

“I don’t know the rules of bankruptcy or whether he had to pay me, so he didn’t,” said Baynham, now a freelancer living in Polson, Montana. He has published stories in magazines like Outside and Men’s Journal.

“The editor kept toying with me, saying, ‘Oh we’ll pay you.’ Eventually I had to walk away from it to stay sane because I’m a very tenacious person, especially when it comes to getting paid for something that you’ve done.”

Almost a decade has passed since Baynham was first burned. Since then, he has slowly built up a solid portfolio and relationships mostly through the traditional route of sending in story pitches to editors.

Baynham’s experience isn’t unique and exploitation of writers isn’t new. Across the U.S., media organizations capitalize on freelancers, who often lack the business skills necessary to negotiate for fair pay.

Unstable financial models and the constant push to create more content faster—a result of the move toward mobile and online-first publishing—make it difficult for a freelancer committed to producing well-reported stories to earn a middle-class salary.

But in the same digital environment that shook the news industry and pillaged staff jobs, there are a few leaders driving the conversation of fair pay for independent journalists. These voices are creating their own communities to act as buffers between freelance journalists and publications.

CREATING COMMUNITY

Scott Carney is helping turn the tide in writers’ favor by building a community based on shared knowledge, a “Yelp” for writers.

Carney, an investigative journalist who’s written long features for magazines such as Wired, believes there’s money in publishing, if journalists negotiate. But they’re scared.

“It really comes down to a sense of writers feeling inferior, feeling like they’re replaceable, like you feel like if you don’t take this offer right now they’re going to go to some other writer,” Carney said.

Last spring, Carney published an open source Google Doc with a range of rates that magazines paid freelance writers. It became so popular that it led him to start a...
checks, and could be turned into documentaries and movies.

It’s true that writers can get a paycheck by churning out a high volume of stories per year, but Carney said this is more difficult and doesn’t make as much financial sense as trying to find a unique story and selling it at a higher rate.

“My feeling is that if I’m a creative person I want to create the best possible thing that I can and I want it to go as far as it possibly can,” Carney said. “Why would I waste my energy writing something that’s going to get a couple views and then be forgotten in a couple days?”

Brooklyn freelancer Noah Davis understands the struggle of piecing together shorter stories to earn a living. With the competitive and limited nature of print magazine work, Davis and other freelancers target online publications as a way to make money, but often this doesn’t add up to a livable wage.

In 2013, Davis reported a story about the economics of freelance publishing online for a small online-only magazine, the Awl. What was unusual about Davis’s piece was his transparency; he recounted the rates magazines paid him for stories and admitted he was a poor negotiator.

Then, in September 2015, Davis decided to follow up on his first piece for the Awl to show how the industry had changed. His story, “If you don’t click on this story I won’t get paid,” showed the instability of online publishing ad models and how most stories don’t actually make the publication break even.

After interviewing several sources in the industry, Davis found that rates had generally improved since his story from 2013, thanks in large part to new online-only outlets like Vox and Buzzfeed that look to compete with traditional powerhouse magazines.

But, as Davis writes, “The question is, how long will the relative good times of getting paid to write on the web last? Even venture dollars are exhaustible. While a few sites will probably survive, the existing (and
future) business models can’t support all the ones that are currently vying for writers and eyeballs.”

Davis believes fellow freelancers want to help each other out, but in an industry that has a broken revenue model, he questions if there is even enough money to make their efforts for fair pay and rights worth their time.

“It’s sort of a self-perpetuating thing. If it doesn’t succeed at first, then it’s not going to succeed,” Davis said of these communities. “What I’m trying to say is I think the jury is still out.”

SIGN UP SUBSCRIBERS

Even in a world that continues to see an increase in remote workers, physical location still presents its own unique challenges and advantages.

Montana, despite its large area, has always had a small media market. There are no large-circulation magazines like those found in New York. Being a journalist in the Treasure State most likely means working for a newspaper or a television station or going it alone.

Like in other states, staff jobs at Montana media organizations can be difficult to find and present conditions that are less than luxurious. Because of this, storytellers like Erik Petersen are turning to freelance careers in order to pursue stories that may require more time than what’s afforded in a newsroom.

For 12 years, Petersen worked as a staff photographer for the Livingston Enterprise and the Bozeman Daily Chronicle in southwestern Montana. As the newspapers’ ad revenue declined and other photographers lost their jobs, he found himself working to feed the daily grind. He felt unfulfilled. He needed to get out.

“I didn’t want to be the last man standing in a job that was once so fulfilling and amazing,” said Petersen, now a graduate student and adjunct instructor at the University of Montana School of Journalism. “I covered the Iditarod for [the Chronicle], I floated the length of the Yellowstone River from Gardiner to North Dakota… I had done some really amazing projects and we weren’t able to do those anymore because the staff was so thin.”

Being a staff photographer in a small Montana community where people recognized his face helped Petersen gain clients and make ends meet after leaving the Bozeman Daily Chronicle.

Another Montana-based writer, Colter Nuanez, also began work as a freelancer after leaving the Chronicle. The former sports editor joined a growing movement among freelancers to find their own independent outlets—an opportunity presented by the same digital age that cut so many jobs statewide.

During his six years in the newspaper industry, Nuanez watched talented reporters lose their jobs. Each time, management at the Chronicle made it clear to Nuanez that a raise wouldn’t be coming anytime soon, despite the increased workload.

“The corporation doesn’t really care about the quality of the content,” Nuanez said. “They would rather have a young ambitious person who will work for overtime without charging them, rather than someone who’s been around the business for a long time and has good credentials.”

So Nuanez started his own subscription-based blog. It has grown into Skyline Sports, a sports news website he runs with...
Co-founder of Skyline Sports Colter Nuanez interviews Montana State senior defensive tackle Taylor Sheridan in Bozeman, Montana, on August 9, 2015, during fall football camp. PHOTO BY BROOKS NUANEZ
How the Lee papers are changing capitol coverage in Montana

BY CORIN CATES-CARNEY

When Lee Enterprises pulled two of its most senior political reporters from Helena in May 2015, concern grew over the health of Montana’s political watchdog.

The loss of Chuck Johnson and Mike Dennison from the state’s largest newspaper chain spurred political bloggers, tweeters, editors and readers around the state to rant, reminisce or speculate about the future of political coverage in Montana.

Johnson said he and Dennison were called into what they thought was a meeting about story ideas in their state bureau coverage. Instead, they learned their work in the state bureau was no longer a part of Lee Enterprises’ plan.

According to Johnson, he and Dennison were told the revenues of Lee Enterprises’ newspapers in Montana no longer supported the kind of state bureau they’d had.

“The editors wanted to make changes and they offered Mike and me jobs as roaming reporters,” Johnson said. “We were offered those jobs at a substantial cut in pay, or a buyout.”

The pay cut ranged from 40 to 45 percent, Johnson said. Both reporters took the buyout.

Johnson’s 40 years of state political coverage began in the 1970s, and he covered the Montana Constitutional Convention in 1972.

In August 2015, Montana Governor Steve Bullock appointed Johnson to the state Historical Society Board of Trustees.

Dennison clocked over 30 years as a reporter with more than two decades in the state capital and the last 10 years with Lee Enterprises.

In the later years of their work in Helena, Johnson and Dennison contributed their knowledge of the state capital to discussions with Sally Mauk of Montana Public Radio, bringing listeners the political analysis program, “Capitol Talk.”

After they accepted the buyouts, Johnson retired and Dennison went looking for other work.

“The older reporters are probably making more money, they have more vacation time, it costs a lot more to have a longtime reporter working than a young reporter,” Johnson said.

It’s Lee Enterprises’ prerogative to change directions, Johnson said. They’re the ones paying the bills.

Billings Gazette editor Darrell Ehrlick broke the news to Johnson and Dennison about the new direction Lee Enterprises was going in their state and political coverage.

Ehrlick told Montana Journalism Review he couldn’t talk about what happened in a private conversation with employees and said the reason for the changes stemmed from reader expectations and changes to the Lee business model.

“I would say that we have two state reporters and they are covering the state,” Ehrlick said. “Are they covering the state in the old bureau form, no, we’ve changed the way we’re doing it.”

According to Ehrlick, the change involves two reporters traveling around the state gathering stories that aim at shifting Lee Enterprises’ content on state and government to the perspective of people being governed, rather than the politicians in the government.

While this change may be driven by a new strategy of telling stories, it comes at a time when Lee Enterprises is struggling to stay afloat in journalism’s digital age and state bureaus around the nation are shedding reporters.
In December of 2011, Lee Enterprises filed for protection against bankruptcy. The company has since reorganized and is paying down its debt, aided by a strategy of stringent cost cutting.

Between 2010 and 2014, the newspaper chain reduced its total workforce by 26 percent, according to company fiscal year reports. Lee Enterprises reported a total of 4,700 employees in their 2014 annual report. It didn’t specify how many of those employees work in its newsrooms.

Nationwide, newsroom numbers have been declining, Associated Press Western Regional Editor Traci Carl said. Carl oversees the AP’s news coverage in 13 states.

“It’s been unfortunately dwindling across the nation. It is something we are very aware of,” she said.

Since 2000, more than 18,000 full-time professional news jobs at newspapers have been lost, according to a study by the Pew Research Center in 2013.

“That leaves the industry at 38,000 full-time professional editorial employees,” the Pew report said. It’s the first time that figure has dropped below 40,000 since 1978.

The number of statehouse reporters has declined by 35 percent from 2003 to 2014, according to the Pew Research Center.

“We’ve seen it from everywhere from California to smaller states like Montana,” the AP’s Carl said. “There just isn’t as many journalists in statehouses as there used to be.”

While traditional reporter numbers dwindle, others aim to fill the gap. Non-traditional media outlets now account for about 17 percent of all the reporters in statehouses, while students account for 14 percent. But Lee Enterprises’ state bureau isn’t gone, according to Holly Michels. Michels, 31, is one of the two new reporters taking on the state and political coverage for Lee’s Montana newspapers’ new strategy.

“There were two reporters covering Montana and there are two reporters now,” Michels said.

She was frustrated with reports that announced the departure of Chuck Johnson and Mike Dennison as a closure of the bureau.

“That’s not what’s happening,” Michels said.

Michels, along with 24-year-old Jayme Fraser, will continue covering the Montana Legislature when it’s in session.

According to Billings Gazette editor Darrell Ehrlick, there isn’t a designated office space for Michels and Fraser to work in the state capital, but there will be room for them in the Helena Independent Record offices.

When the 2017 legislative session kicks off, Ehrlick says Lee Enterprises will have housing arranged for them.

Michels is looking forward to the traveling aspect of her job. In the new style of coverage, she said Lee Enterprises encourages her to find people outside the capital who are impacted by the decisions made in Helena.
“I think it is such a cool opportunity for our readers,” Michels said. “Where they can’t go, I get to go there for you and bring you that story.”

Jayme Fraser thinks that because the legislature is only in session every other year, this move made sense.

During the lull in the legislative cycle, Fraser and Michels will have opportunities to report on the ripple effects of the last legislative session.

“This is the part where we hold the government accountable for the legislative decisions and also for the things they’ve failed to get done,” Fraser said.

For example: the legislature’s inability to pass an infrastructure bill. While Chuck Johnson and Mike Dennison did report on infrastructure legislation, and were scheduled to continue coverage in the fall of 2015, Fraser is coming at it from a different angle.

During her first few weeks on the job, Fraser focused on various Montana communities that don’t have the capacity to grow due to infrastructure problems like old, decrepit water plants.

“That’s a practical effect of the legislature not being able to come up with their share of the funding,” she said.

Fraser and Michels both report to Montana Standard editor David McCumber, who said writing about legislative issues in this way is effective.

“I think that the idea here is that it really doesn’t make sense to lock reporters in an office in Helena year-round when the legislature is in session 100 days every few years,” McCumber said. “It makes much more sense, I think, to have these reporters out around the state seeing how government is affecting Montanans and reporting on it.”

Dennis Swibold, who supervises University of Montana student coverage of the state legislative session for a network of Montana papers, said while Johnson and Dennison didn’t drive all over the state for their work often, they were telling Montanans how government played a role in their lives.

“They were telling the governed what was happening so they could participate,” Swibold said. “I am the governed. I want to know what the governors are doing.”

Swibold said the UM’s student coverage in the capital may increase with the addition of a photographer in the future, but that’s not a sure thing. He said it will be a big test to see if Lee’s new strategy for covering legislative sessions works.

In August, Montana Television Network hired Mike Dennison as their full-time chief political reporter for their network. He’s based in Helena.

“The only entity that has beefed up the reporting is TV stations,” Dennison said.

Along with the recruitment of Dennison, two years ago MTN hired print political reporter Sanjay Talwani to cover Montana’s capital.

“The appetite for political coverage in Montana, I think, has always been strong. And it still is,” Dennison said.

While the appetite for political and state coverage remains, readers won’t have to wait for Lee Enterprises’ new flavor of reporting.

Holly Michels and Jayme Fraser are already in their new positions.

Fraser graduated from the University of Montana School of Journalism in 2012, when she was named a Hearst fellow. The fellowship took her to the Houston Chronicle, where she was a data-driven and multimedia journalist.

Michels also graduated from the UM journalism school and has worked for nearly every paper owned by Lee Enterprises in Montana. She was the city editor at the Billings Gazette, as well as the managing editor of the Helena Independent Record.

As their bylines are added to Lee Enterprises newspapers, which circulate 90,000 papers around the state, it will be up to readers to decide if Montana’s watchdog has lost any of its bite.
“We don’t always answer that why.”

New Missoulian Editor Matthew Bunk promises more behind-the-scenes stories about state and local politics

SALLY MAUK: What do you think is the difference between a small-town weekly newspaper and a daily paper that serves a large population in terms of the paper’s role?

MATT BUNK: Traditionally the community papers are far more, a lot of times they’re more informative. And you’re doing a lot of “here’s what’s going on this week” type of news. And at some of the daily papers I worked at, you’re focusing more on the watchdog journalism and you’re doing a lot of investigations, and that’s really tough in a small community.

MAUK: Because?

BUNK: Well, you’re so close to your sources. You have to sometimes do things that make people uncomfortable. In a small paper, you’re going out to get your groceries and you run into the people that you are writing about. You see these folks everyday so there’s a huge responsibility to be fair, accurate and all that, but there’s a lot of pressure also to keep things positive and that’s not something journalists generally like to think about as positive or negative news.
MAUK: Do you see bringing that sort of approach of being informative and positive about the community to a paper that has been historically a watchdog paper?

BUNK: I think what you’re going to see is the Missoulian continuing to be a watchdog and probably even more so under my direction. I think that we do a great job in many, many areas, but there are a lot of behind-the-scenes stories I think that aren’t being told.

MAUK: Give me an example of the stories you’re talking about.

BUNK: I think we just need to follow the money a little bit better sometimes. There’s a lot of moving parts right now with the Mountain Water case with the city of Missoula and a lot of unanswered questions there and it’s coming out little by little. It’s just one area where there’s just a lot to dig into and I think that might be a good example of where we want to look a little bit more deeply into some of the machinations of what’s going on with that purchase.

MAUK: Lee has undergone a lot of changes – Lee Enterprises your corporate owner – and some of the changes they’ve made in Montana have made news as you well know. The two veteran statehouse reporters, Chuck Johnson and Mike Dennison, were essentially let go, and that got a lot of blowback from the public. And they’ve been replaced with two younger reporters.

BUNK: We’ve got two really good journalists. Holly Michels is one of them that’s going to be based in Butte. Jayme Fraser is the other person that started recently with us at the Missoulian. She’s going to be a data-driven reporter, do investigations, but largely a lot of data work.

MAUK: The coverage of state government though obviously is going to change for your paper and the other Lee papers because they’re not going to be based in Helena. How will they cover state government from Butte and Missoula?

BUNK: That’s one of the things we’re working on right now. I think they’re going to be down there for sure during the legislative sessions.

MAUK: Which is four months every two years.

BUNK: Correct. And then they’ll be down there quite a bit for any kind of interim committee hearings that they’re having. A lot of that is viewable online as far as legislative hearings, so there’s that option. But I think our focus is getting them to Helena as much as possible. While they’re not based there full-time, I think after a few years, a few sessions, they’ll be pretty tapped in.

MAUK: So, the coverage of state government in your opinion won’t change all that much – or will change? And if it does change, how do you see that change?

BUNK: During the session you’re still going to be getting good daily updates on what’s going on at the legislature. The thing that we think is going to be an enhancement to it, is that these two reporters both have a very deep background in enterprise work, telling a larger story, answering the “why.” We do a good job of who, what, when and where a lot of times, but we don’t always answer that why. We’ve done a lot of reporting from the talking heads down at the Capitol, you know, lawmaker X says this, lawmaker Y says something else. What these reporters are really going to focus on is finding the real people out in the world that are affected by this stuff and letting those people drive the story. And so I think you’re going see the same type of information coming out but maybe told in a more engaging manner than we have in the past.

MAUK: In addition to the change at the Lee state bureau, you’re replacing a longtime editor at the Missoulian. There is some public perception that Lee has made these moves, both in Helena and here, to save money at the expense of news content. How do you answer that perception?

BUNK: I don’t think that’s the case at all. I’m not going to talk about people’s salaries, but that’s not, I don’t believe, part of this mix. I think the readers are going to like what they’re going to get out of this, actually, more than what we had from the state bureau and beyond. I know I can tell you for sure that as a journalist, as a reader and as an editor, I am thrilled at the direction we’re going.
A high school paper reignites after nearly closing up shop

PHOTOS AND STORY BY JAKE GREEN

When the Hawk Tawk is in session, a dozen or more students cram into their small newsroom on the second floor of Bozeman High School. The student newspaper is riding a wave of success and excitement, only three years after nearly closing its doors because too few students had registered for the class. Back then, in 2012, with the help of the local community, students convinced the school to keep publishing the Hawk Tawk.

In 2014, a new adviser came on board. Emily Donahoe, a reporter turned English teacher, led the staff to win best high school newspaper in Montana. Buoyed by their success, 18 student journalists set out to prove in 2015 they can produce a newspaper as good as, if not better, than last year. ♦

Emily Donahoe, the adviser of the Hawk Tawk, teaches Hailey McMahan how to use Adobe InDesign to create a layout for the students’ stories. She thinks it is important for every one of her students to have this skill. She said the Hawk Tawk was slow to start last year because only certain students knew certain processes, and that motivated her to make every student a well-rounded journalist.
Donahoe holds a class meeting to explain to students how to perform copy edits on the newspaper. The class has both learning days and work days. On work days, the class will meet for the start of the period and then split up to work on individual stories. Donahoe also uses this time to teach students specific skills, like design or editing.

Co-Editor-in-Chief Justice Geddes answers a question posed by Rachel Holler during the writing and editing process for the October 2015 edition of the Hawk Tawk. Sometimes students choose a theme for their paper. Once they have chosen a theme, they begin to pitch and create story ideas, report and write. Geddes serves as an editor, guiding writers and refining their stories.
Geddes interviews Bozeman Deputy Mayor Carson Taylor. Previously, he had collaborated with Hawk Tawk reporter Sage Bennett on profiles of three mayoral candidates running in the 2015 election. Taylor was not one of them. The Bozeman High School (BHS) reporters often pursue stories beyond school walls.

Geddes takes notes during his interview with Taylor, which coincided with his lunch period. Geddes was one of three returning students from last year’s award-winning staff and is one of the Hawk Tawk’s driving forces this year.

Reporters Sage Bennett and Ella Cole perform a final check on Shanoah Eck’s article about marijuana use at BHS. Eck interviewed students who smoked marijuana and took a poll to get an idea of how many students used the drug. She found that of the 139 students, 56 had tried pot. In January of 2015, the Hawk Tawk published a “Fitting In” edition. It was cited as one of their strongest issues for its graphics and content, which addressed topics like being gay, having a poor body image and being an introvert.
Cody Bodman and Molly Kelly read the Hawk Tawk in Wild Joe’s Coffee Spot in Bozeman. The printing is celebrated by eating donuts and reading their freshly printed paper in class on the day of publication. But as soon as class is over, the students begin to pitch and create stories for the next edition.

Features Editor Emma Bowen, one of three returning students, works on copy editing a page of the October paper. Before a page is considered finalized, two students separately view the page and, using a checklist, confirm the paper does not have any factual or grammatical errors. Geddes and reporter Grace Bryant deliver the October edition of the Hawk Tawk to classrooms throughout BHS. The Hawk Tawk prints as a part of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, which gives it a circulation of almost 15,000 readers. It funds itself by selling ads and using the money to pay the Chronicle to print and distribute the paper as an insert.

Jake Green is a junior at the University of Montana. He has a passion for people and is intrigued by their stories. He enjoys digital photography but spends much of his time shooting film. Jake loves bicycles and food and will work for money or puppies.
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When a police officer in Casper, Wyoming, shot and killed a man, local news organizations had to decide if outing the officer would put him in danger.

The July 12, 2015, shooting came in the midst of a summer news cycle dominated by cop stories. The Casper Police Department received threats before the officer was named and was worried the public’s perception would stick, even if he were cleared of any wrongdoing.

The department asked news organizations not to publish the officer’s name. Mark Hyman, K2TV news director, said his station obliged. But when the officer was cleared on September 2, K2TV news anchors reported that the police department’s request “fell on deaf ears by the Casper Star-Tribune.”

That day, the Casper Star-Tribune’s front-page story, “DA: Casper officer who fatally shot man was justified,” published the name. “The Casper Star-Tribune stands by its story,” the paper wrote in an e-mail statement.

Hyman said he was shocked to see the police officer’s name published both online and in print.

“If there wasn’t a target on his back, there really was now,” Hyman said.

Andrew Seaman, chairman for the Society of Professional Journalists’ ethics committee, said in most cases it’s standard to include an officer’s name, but the decision should be thoroughly discussed with police and editors.

“If there were threats against officers, maybe that would be reason to hold back,” he said. “Talk with a bunch of people until you feel secure in your decision and have a rational reason to print.”
BUCKING CENSORSHIP OF STUDENT SPEECH

BY HUNTER SCHMITZ

In April 2013, an anti-abortion poster was removed from the hallway of Griggs County Central High School in Cooperstown, North Dakota, after a parent complained about it. The poster was displayed as part of a class assignment to address current issues.

The Alliance Defending Freedom, a non-profit advocate of religious liberty, sent a letter defending the student’s right to hang the poster. The school’s principal decided to allow the poster after deliberating with officials.

As of April 2015, the school’s decision to remove the poster would be illegal thanks to the John Wall New Voices Act, which prohibits censorship of student speech unless it’s unlawful or infringes on the rights of others. In the past, North Dakota schools followed precedent established by the 1988 Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier ruling, which says schools don’t have to promote certain types of speech.

The new law, which was unanimously passed by the legislature in April 2015, expands student free speech in public high schools and colleges by following the 1969 case Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District. Under the Tinker ruling, schools cannot censor student speech unless it poses a substantial disruption to the learning environment.

The John Wall New Voices Act law, which went into effect in August 2015, has already impacted student journalism in North Dakota.

“The law is a very welcome addition,” said Alexander Bertsch, editor-in-chief of the student newspaper at the University of North Dakota.

North Dakota is the eighth state to legislatively expand free speech laws in schools. Next door in Montana, student speech has no such protection.

“I’m sure a law like North Dakota’s would help other student journalists at different Montana schools,” said Aidan Reed, co-editor and head writer at Helena High School’s “Helena Nugget.” He said he hasn’t experienced any kind of censorship in Helena specifically.

Reed said he is encouraged to write risky pieces such as reflections on student suicides and a criticism of Christmas. But Helena High may be an exception to the rule.

Joe Cohn, the legislative and policy director for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), said that schools often try to review student publications before they are published. Because students know an administrator has to approve their material, they are less likely to pursue controversial stories, he said.

“In jurisdictions where prior restraint by school administration is permitted, the risk of self-censorship is not only real, it’s routine,” Cohn said.

The likelihood of self-censorship is sufficient motivation for groups like FIRE and the Student Press Law Center to pressure other states to expand student speech. Both groups pushed the North Dakota Legislature to pass the law.

“We’re optimistic in the next few years for a breakthrough in both federal and state legislatures,” Cohn said.

He also said FIRE will continue to defend student speech in state legislatures in the hope that all 50 states will soon be more like North Dakota, a leader in free speech protection for student journalists.
WASHINGTON- The Washington Administrative Code’s section on student rights may provide public high school students with additional protection against administrative censorship. WAC 382-40-125 was enacted August 1, 1977.


WYOMING- Wyoming, along with South Dakota, Idaho and Montana, does not currently have a student free-expression or free-speech protection guaranteed in the state’s education code.


COLORADO- The Colorado State Free Expression Law provides high school students in the state with protection, in addition to the First Amendment, from administrative censorship. Colo. Rev. Stat. Secs. 22-1-120 was enacted June 7, 1990.

NORTH DAKOTA- The John Wall New Voices Act, signed into law in April 2015, ensures the free-speech rights of journalism students in North Dakota public schools and colleges.
Catastrophic death tolls, billions of dollars in damage and impact to nearly 140,000 square miles was the picture painted by an article in The New Yorker. Published in July 2015, “The Really Big One” outlined threats of a super earthquake and subsequent tsunami that would destroy Oregon and Washington. In the weeks that followed, the story went viral and received every kind of media attention, from local papers to Fox News.

Most people in the Northwest knew the risks, says Ali Ryan, an earth science information officer with the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries. The group researches the Cascadia Fault, which would be the origin point of “quake-nami.” But the national coverage opened the conversation up to people across the country.

Brian Houston, a professor at the University of Missouri studying the way media frames disasters, said all the chatter makes The New Yorker’s story constructive.

“People in the U.S. love writing and making movies about disasters, but when it comes down to dealing with the risk, they are woefully unprepared,” Houston said.

While the stories recognized a valid threat, it remains to be seen whether the media hype came early enough to spur defensive action.

Courtney Gerard is an environmental journalism graduate student at the University of Montana. When she isn’t writing, you will find her running, playing in rivers or exploring one of Montana’s many mountain ranges.
The reluctant YouTube sensation


That is, until June 30, 2015, when a two-minute, 31-second video of him rapping got over 2,000 views.

“At first, I thought it wasn’t real, then there was a moment where I thought he was intoxicated,” said Boise Weekly news editor George Prentice. “Nothing like that came before and nothing like that has come since.”

The video features Popkey in a hoodie (also a bathrobe, a bucket hat and swim trunks), awkwardly rapping lyrics like “I’m a map god / don’t need a lap dog,” and “I’m rocking polypro / I don’t do cotton so I don’t get soggy, bro.”

The video was produced by Popkey’s two kids and features their recent family vacation to Italy.

The Idaho Statesman ignored the video altogether, while The Spokesman-Review posted it with the caption, “Is this another sign that the end is near?”

Popkey doesn’t seem amused with the attention the video has received.

“Look, it’s something I did with my kids,” he told MJR. “It was just an inside joke with my kids. My son has recently gotten into film and we just did it for fun. I really didn’t think anyone was going to care about it.”

Jessica Murri is a graduate from the University of Montana School of Journalism. She lives in Boise, Idaho, where she writes for the Boise Weekly, hikes, skis, kayaks, backpacks, drives a Subaru and loves her dog.
Cruise ships carry nearly one million tourists a year to Alaska. For Juneau-based entrepreneur Eric Oravsky, those visitors are potential customers. The former University of Montana journalism student wants to tell them stories through their phones, and charge them for it. The app Adventure Flow was born out of an outdoor guide company Oravsky started with his high school friend Patrick Courtnage. Using Courtnage’s experience with programming and Oravsky’s photography and storytelling skills, they are taking their physical tours into the digital world. The app is joining fewer than 10 guide applications for smart phones in Juneau. Marketed to summer tourists, Adventure Flow hopes to both enhance the users’ experience in Alaska and help them remember it.

Last year’s featured entrepreneur Austin Green has been covering basketball games across Spain on weekends while working as an assistant English teacher during the week to pay rent. He is starting to be recognized as an authority on Spanish prospects for U.S. basketball leagues. Green will be collaborating with recently relocated UM alum and photojournalist Gracie Ryan, who will bring her camera to the court.

Ruth Eddy lives in Ketchikan, Alaska. She currently works in radio and the rain. www.theratheddy.com
Girls run the world of online media...

BY TANA WILSON

With media organizations rapidly expanding their online presence, social media- and web-focused positions are becoming more popular. Until recently, journalists hoping to cash in on these new roles had little way of knowing what job titles to pursue and how much to demand for salaries. To change this, City University of New York graduate student Julia Haslanger created Journo Salary Sharer, an anonymous reporting tool, to help new media journalists better negotiate contracts and ask smarter questions about emerging job opportunities.

...And everyone is a “producer”

The 172 journalism salary sharers represented in this graphic identified 20 job titles for online news media positions. Of those, “producer” and “web producer” were the most popular. Female respondents outnumbered males three to two and larger newsrooms averaged higher salaries.
LOST IN THE SMOKE

WHY WILDFIRE COVERAGE SHOULDN'T START OR END WITH THE FLAMES

WORDS BY ANDREW GRAHAM
PHOTOS BY JAKE GREEN
Firefighters often talk about the incomparable beauty of a forest burning at night. Fire fascinates. Its flicker in a campsite has always been mesmerizing. Forest fires are something else entirely, mixing fear, awe and untamed natural beauty.

In the media, wildfire is either feared or fought, and thus mischaracterized and misunderstood. The most specialized scientists, much less reporters, still don’t entirely understand how it fits into the western landscape. For the “Burn” edition of Montana Journalism Review, I set out to understand the role media plays in the West’s evolving relationship with wildfire.

In the news, wildfire often comes across as incomprehensible and unfair. And in many ways, it is—the Valley Fire in California last September burned 1,958 homes and businesses. Four people died. Video shot by an escaping resident shows a harrowing drive through a community transported to the bowels of hell. Ash flies across the windshield and flames run across the ground. A house in the darkness is defined by flames pouring from its windows.

These are desperate, stirring images of a natural phenomenon with the power to swallow homes and towns whole. On the flip side, there is the equally dramatic story of our fight against the flames. Each summer, air tankers etch red lines of fire retardant across our screens and front pages. Smoke columns, flaming trees, firefighters marching in formation, blackened forests and gutted homes are familiar images to those in the West.

“If you want to get media attention, or popular attention or political attention, you basically have to burn up a bunch of houses, kill people or involve celebrities. And a celebrity landscape will do, it could be Yellowstone, Yosemite. That will do it,” Stephen Pyne, a fire historian and professor at Arizona State University, told me.

While this is true of national media, similar criteria holds sway over local outlets. The news is rarely the fire itself; it is the way the fire interacts with those living on the landscape.

It’s the West’s own little war at home, and it’s escalating every summer. Some call the resulting media coverage “fire porn.”

Journalists who cover wildfire in Montana will tell you that if you want to get close to the flames you need to be there as soon after a fire’s start as possible. Once the Forest Service bureaucracy is in place, it’s usually too late. “Don’t get on the phone or anything,” Sam Wilson, a reporter for the Flathead Valley’s Daily Inter Lake told me. “Just get in the car and go.”

I spent the summer tracking fire’s eastward march on InciWeb, a government website that carries information on all active wildfires and is updated by the Public Information Officers (PIOs) on scene. In the second week of August, lightning storms over dry forests ignited a series of fires and the Montana 2015 fire season was well underway.

On Friday, August 14, 2015, the Sucker Creek Fire outside Lincoln, Montana, grew large enough to warrant evacuation orders for more than 50 homes. After a few days of checking in with the PIO, I learned a media tour would be leaving from the Lincoln Ranger Station, about an hour east of Missoula.

In the parking lot, the media put on the yellow non-flammable Nomex shirts that are standard issue for firefighters and were provided for media on site. With me were two broadcast reporters and a photographer from Helena news outlets.

“Hopefully we’ll get some retardant drops for you guys,” said Kathy Bushnell, the fire’s PIO and that day’s tour guide.

“Lovely,” replied one of the reporters.

Air drops make great footage.

For the first few days, there had been none. At the fire’s start Lincoln District Ranger Michael Stansberry addressed this at a public meeting: “I already had a question called in asking ‘why isn’t there an air show?’” He was right. The fire was burning in a forest full of dead lodgepole pines, and the intense heat of this heavy burning fuel meant water from helicopters and fire retardant from air tankers would have little effect. With limited resources and fires burning around the region, no aircraft had gone to Lincoln.

But now houses were threatened and an observation plane was circling the fire. Two helicopters were pulling water out of nearby streams and an air tanker was flying to and from Helena.

The TV reporters framed their shots so that interviews would capture the smoking ridgeline in the background. The smoke column was impressive; the fire burning more than 1,300 acres. With a telephoto lens, you could catch the occasional orange flash of flame.

A hot wind blew and the non-flammable yellow shirts grew itchy as the sun beat down. We were more than a mile away from the fire.

A segment ran on NBC Montana’s evening broadcast for two minutes. “When I was there it was evident that firefighting efforts on the ground and in the sky are far from over,” reporter Milkenzie Frost began.

Against background images of smokey plumes, Frost and officials spoke about air
ABOVE: Karl Puckett, a reporter for the Great Falls Tribune, takes a video of Wayne Phillips, a retired Forest Service ecologist. Puckett brought Phillips to the Reynolds Creek Fire in Glacier National Park to learn how vegetation regrows after a fire. While out reporting Puckett is constantly capturing photos and videos.

RIGHT: Public Information Officers Joe Zwierzchowski (left) and Sara Rouse (center) show reporter Colin Murphy a map of a fire located around 30 miles west of Missoula. Murphy took a media tour of the fire zone led by the PIOs, who act as an intermediary between the media and the fire crews, providing information and leading media tours. Because of the potential danger of fire, personnel are required to wear fire-retardant clothing.
tactics, resources and evacuations. Neither mentioned that most of the threatened structures were vacation cabins.

On one hand, the broadcast was simple breaking news: how many acres were burning, what was threatened and what was being done to stop it. On the other hand, it fell far short of telling the whole story.

Fire coverage, says Stephen Pyne, usually takes one of two templates. A longtime voice in the fire science community, Pyne is a natural historian, former firefighter and author of 15 books on wildland fire—none of which, he notes, has received the media attention or the sales of his other books, which range in topic from the Grand Canyon to the Voyager space missions.

One media template frames fire as a natural disaster, with coverage resembling that of floods or tornadoes. Forest fires are treated as fast moving threats that towns have to brace themselves against, much as cities along the East Coast do with hurricanes.

The other template uses a narrative borrowed from war coverage, with wildland fires as the battleground. “They wear uniforms, they’ve got their armored divisions, they’ve got their air support,” Pyne says. “It’s presented as a military fight.”

Part of that narrative reflects how firefighters themselves talk about fire. Wildfire suppression is managed as a military campaign, with the fire as the enemy. There are paratroopers (smokejumpers), marines (hotshot crews) and air strikes (retardant and water drops). They set up defensive lines to push the fire in the direction they want it to go. They try to flank the fire, but sometimes the fire outflanks them, or overruns their lines.

In 2015, the military narrative became even more poignant when soldiers and airmen were called up to fight fires in Washington state. “We protect our country from all enemies foreign and domestic, so this is, I’ll call it a domestic enemy,” one soldier told a local NBC affiliate.

Tight deadlines and limited resources make it hard to tell a deeper story with fire. Dramatic narratives of firefighters battling a natural disaster are easy, especially with PIOs on hand to tell them and air tankers painting photo opportunities across the sky.

Neither narrative serves the story well. Both avoid the nuanced problems of a unique relationship between mankind and nature, instead portraying large fires as the cost of doing business.

The same day I toured the Sucker Creek Fire with the broadcast journalists, I met Karl Puckett, natural resource reporter for the Great Falls Tribune. He and photographer Rion Sanders were waiting at the ranger station for Bushnell to ferry us all back to her vantage point. I left my yellow Nomex at the station, while Puckett and Sanders kept theirs in their backpacks.

Writing for a daily paper, Puckett faces tight deadlines just like TV reporters. But if you follow his byline, you can see that long experience (he’s covered wildfire since 2000) has led him to explore deeper questions about fire. ☵
Crowdsourcing the War on Fire

When the Reynolds Creek Fire burned through tourist-heavy Glacier National Park’s Going-to-the-Sun Road last summer, a Missouri teen’s footage shot from the backseat of his family’s car demonstrated a breakthrough in fire science. But crowdsourced data like this is nothing new to fire scientists.

WHAT WE GET WRONG ABOUT WEATHER AND FIRE

BY MARK HEYKA

There’s a common misconception that the severity of a fire season depends on the snowpack of the previous winter and spring. This is only partly true. While snowpack does greatly affect the summer fire season, just as important is what kind of weather occurs after the snowpack has already melted.

The weather in June, July and August is vital to what fire season will look like in Western Montana. A great snowpack can still mean a very active fire season if the weather turns too hot and dry after it has already melted. Heavy spring rains don’t necessarily make for a safer fire season, as the plants that feed off the nurturing water can easily turn into greater fuel for fire if dried out by hot summer weather.

The worst-case scenario is a low snowpack followed by a hot and dry summer, while the best-case scenario is a great snowpack that slowly melts throughout the early summer followed by timely rains.

El Niño is back for the winter of 2015-2016, meaning we will have milder and drier-than-normal conditions across the Northern Rockies. El Niño occurs when the Pacific waters off the west coast of South America become abnormally warm. The water is typically cold in this season, and the difference sets off dominoes around the world. While the air above cold water is similarly cool and calm, the abnormal warm water of an El Niño warms the air above it as well. This warm water holds more moisture, which shifts weather patterns.

El Niño winters mean cooler and wetter weather for the southern half of the U.S., which is good news for drought-plagued California. But it’s bad news for the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies, which can anticipate the low rainfall and small snowpack that threaten a drier and more severe fire season.♦

Mark Heyka has been chief meteorologist at NBC Montana for 16 of the 32 years he has worked in broadcasting. He grew up on a Kansas farm and became interested in weather after he saw his first tornado when he was seven years old.

Fire scientists can visit few of the more than 80,000 wildfires burning millions of acres every year. Time and distance mean active fires are difficult to study, so footage shot by media and the public are an important source of evidence of wildfire behavior. Footage collected directly by fire scientists takes years to advance our knowledge of fire behavior, and only in combination with existing footage and data from weather stations, vegetation maps, satellite imagery and documented fire progression.

Both members of the public and television journalists are often serendipitously near wildfires, and the images they capture are vital for fire reconstructions and investigations. With smartphones now ubiquitous, there’s more reliable access than ever to high-resolution photos complete with time stamps and GPS tags. Understanding and interpreting this data, however, requires scientific context in ecology, meteorology and fire sciences to weed out ambiguous implications.

A recent breakthrough in understanding how wildfires spread began in the lab and was corroborated by videos and photographs captured in the last few decades, including footage shot by the teenager in Glacier National Park this summer. The potential for citizens to contribute to the advancement of wildfire research will improve greatly as the means to disseminate crowdsourced data becomes more organized.♦

Mark Finney is a researcher at the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory, a part of the U.S. Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Research Station. He studies forest fuels and how fires spread, and his research has helped develop systems to predict fire behavior and optimize fire prevention through fuel reduction.

♦Mark Heyka has been chief meteorologist at NBC Montana for 16 of the 32 years he has worked in broadcasting. He grew up on a Kansas farm and became interested in weather after he saw his first tornado when he was seven years old.

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To fight fires, the Forest Service receives a certain amount of money from Congress each year. Once it’s exceeded that budget, the agency pulls money from other programs.

In 1995, fighting fire took up 16 percent of the Forest Service’s annual budget. This year, the agency crossed the 50-percent threshold for the first time.

When fire seasons get costly, the vast list of other operations performed by the Forest Service suffers. An August 2015 agency report, titled “The Rising Cost of Wildfire Operations,” outlined the costs to programs outside fire suppression. Wildlife & Fisheries Habitat Management, which aids recovery of endangered species, lost 18 percent of its funding. Programs to inventory and monitor wildlife, critical to making informed environmental decisions—35 percent.

The Deferred Maintenance and Infrastructure Improvement program is dedicated to the highest priority projects in the agency’s backlog of work. These include “serious public health and safety concerns,” the report says. In 2001, it supported around 400 major projects. In 2014, there was money for three.

The report states that if left unchecked, by 2025 over 67 percent of the budget will be directed toward fire. The U.S. Forest Service is on a path to becoming little more than a very large fire department.

Consumer drones have become a nuisance to many authorities, including wildland firefighters. In July of 2014, a hobbyist piloted his drone over a fire in California, endangering aircraft and the firefighters on the ground who depend on their retardant drops.

Jason Bross, also known by his YouTube handle, jayzaerial, was outed by The New York Times in an article about the danger drones pose to firefighting aircraft. Drones hitting wings or engines could bring down aircraft, similar to a bird strike.

“It helped me realize the fire thing is a big deal, that it is hitting nationwide,” Bross said about the article.

Media coverage of acts like this has triggered legislative action.

California’s Senate Bill 168 proposes that emergency responders such as firefighters should be allowed to shoot drones down or disable them with water hoses without having to compensate their owners. Bross found no fault with this measure.

“I think it’s totally appropriate since people keep continuing to fly in fires,” he said.

U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-California) introduced the Safe Drone Act in October 2015, which would make flying drones around wildfires a misdemeanor.

“Our firefighters and airplane pilots should be focused on keeping the public safe—not worrying about unauthorized drones that recklessly interfere with their jobs,” Boxer said.

Bross’s advice to fellow hobbyists: don’t fly your drones around fires.
Reporters for Montana newspapers talk about how once a fire season gets rolling, there's often little time for anything else. Their job becomes limited to the blow by blow of each individual fire: acreage burned, resources on hand, etc.

“In the fire season, the public wants daily coverage that’s the ideal,” Puckett said. In Lincoln, he tried to do that by getting close to the flames.

Tall, broad-shouldered and gruff, Puckett cuts an imposing figure for a reporter.

As the car turned onto a closed road, a sheriff’s deputy at the roadblock jokingly asked if they should put a leash on the media.

There were chuckles from the car, but Puckett just growled, “no.”

We stopped at the same vantage point as before. Puckett moved continuously, peeling in to catch conversations and then walking away, crossing the road and then crossing back to enter the field and try a different angle for capturing video on his phone.

“We aren’t going to see something better than this,” he eventually asked Bushnell.

She couldn’t take them farther, but Puckett asked the Sheriff, Leo Dutton, for a ride and he took us up to the fire’s front. That’s the difference between an elected sheriff and a PIO, Puckett told me afterwards.

By late afternoon, the fire was burning downhill with just a few hundred yards of trees between it and Copper Creek Road. If the fire crossed it, more evacuations would be ordered. We stood on the road with Dutton, his deputy and three trucks worth of firefighters, watching trees torch on the ridge above.

Wildfire burns quickly uphill but slowly on the way down, and though there were grumblings from the fire safety officer, no one on the road was too concerned. For the firefighters, the real excitement was a trophy bull elk standing between us and the fire.

A scraggly line of flame crackled downhill. The smoke was thick and dark. Flames flashed from it like lightning in a storm front. The sight was intriguing, even awe inspiring—it had the campfire effect. I’d never been that close to a wildfire, but I’d like to be there again. It wasn’t scary. This wasn’t California’s deadly Valley Fire, and most aren’t.

Because fires that are quickly put out don’t become news, the public receives distorted images showing only the most destructive, out-of-control fires. Harmless fires are rarely written about, and why would they be? Why does it matter if they aren’t? Fire coverage may seem superficial to some, but from a local news standpoint it does its job by covering evacuations and fire size.

Puckett later told me his story captured a snapshot of what a fire really looks like. “It’s not like a huge flame wall. It’s important to show that.”

But a broader perspective requires one to step back from the flames.

The problem is that the view the public gets of fire is almost exclusively negative. “People think that the normal state of our ecosystems is an absence of fire,” said Mark Finney, a researcher at the Forest Service’s Fire Sciences Laboratory in Missoula.

It’s well known that many fire experts—particularly ecologists—think the Forest Service’s propensity to put out as many fires as possible is a mistake. Some of those experts believe the press helps drive this poor policy.
Wayne Phillips (left), a retired ecologist, shows Karl Puckett (right), a reporter from the Great Falls Tribune, how vegetation has regrown since the Trapper Fire of 2003 in Glacier National Park. Puckett brought Phillips to Glacier to learn how vegetation grows after a fire and how fire aids an ecosystem for an article Puckett was writing.
In his office, I asked Finney for specific examples. “Let’s just go to the Internet,” he said, and brought up an article from the Los Angeles Times: “Valley fire spread with ‘mind-boggling’ speed, experts say.” He took umbrage with the choice of experts, noting that the chief expert source was a climate scientist, not a fire scientist. “They don’t talk to any experts who would know whether it’s mind-boggling or not, and it ain’t mind-boggling.”

It’s been a destructive year for wildfire, but that’s not surprising to those in fire science. If the fires of 2015 have been unexpected, it’s because we have false expectations, Finney says. If anyone in California is surprised by the Valley Fire, it’s because they don’t understand where they live.

There is a choice to be made with fire, which Finney says is not made clear to the public.

“We’ve proven that we cannot keep fire out. It is inevitable, it will occur. Everywhere there’s fuel, you will have fire. Your choice is, when do you want it and what do you want it to do? That’s all you have, those are your choices. Your choices are not whether to have fire or not.”

With an ever-increasing budget to suppress fire, there is a discord in logic that isn’t being questioned. Spending more and more money isn’t leading to better results. Finney calls it dropping wet dollar bills on fires.

In keeping with the militaristic narrative of the firefight, Finney compared the media’s lack of questioning fire suppression to the free ride many say the press gave the U.S. government to justify the War on Terror.

We left his office and moved down the hall to a silo-like room called the combustion laboratory. Finney stopped by a uniform forest of tiny cardboard “trees.” In a few days, they’d angle the cardboard to simulate a forest slope and light the downhill side on fire. Then they’d watch it roar up the hill, record everything on high-speed cameras and study the flames’ spread. The goal is to hone in on how fire moves through real forests.

Finney says fire is one of the most counterintuitive things imaginable. “Almost everything you think you know about it is probably wrong. Not just a little wrong, not just a tiny degree wrong. Exactly wrong.”

A few days after I visited Finney’s office, he emailed me a recent editorial paper in the journal Science, called “Reform forest fire management.”

The paper stated—like Finney, Pyne and many of the experts who study fire—that when fuels in forests are controlled, fire burns at low intensity and can restore health to the forest. These low-intensity fires are akin to those that burned before the settlement of the West and the Forest Service’s ensuing suppression policy. It’s what ecologists have long considered beneficial fire.

The Forest Service’s official policy recognizes this. But the paper suggests the agency rarely allows beneficial fires to burn. In the short term, it is easier and safer to suppress all fires. Firefighters can put out 98 percent of fires at their start. The two percent that get out of control, however, become the invading army.

To fight bigger fires, the percentage of the Forest Service budget dedicated to fire suppression has increased from 16 percent in 1995 to over 50 percent this year. But all this money funneled toward suppressing fires isn’t slowing them down: In terms of acreage burned, the six worst fire seasons the Forest Service has on record all occurred after 2000.

As fire seasons increase in impact, the need for in-depth coverage is growing. So too is the demand for new angles to a story with an all-too-familiar plot.

In 2015, major newspapers ranging from the Los Angeles Times to The New York Times ran pieces about the hot dry summer in the West, the fires it sparked and its connection to climate change.

Two other events over the season brought attention to the wildfire-climate change connection. One was the Forest Service budget report. The other was repeatedly broadcast comments from California Gov. Jerry Brown. “This is the future from now on,” he said of wildfire in a September 14 press conference. “It’s going to get worse just by the nature of how the climate is changing.”

While the science connecting climate change and increased fire threats is sound, the attention to this angle has those seeking a more sustainable fire future worried. For advocates, fire is a good way to show climate change effects in a dramatic and vivid way. As a historian, Stephen Pyne spends more time looking back at wildfire. Looking forward, he worries the story of fire will be folded into that of climate change, making plausible solutions for the first seem contingent on solving the second.

Pyne, who is frequently interviewed by media, found a strong bias this summer toward supporting the message of worse fire as a result of climate change without considering other factors. “If we allow it to be hijacked by that then we’re just going to be playing whack-a-mole with fires for the next century,” he said.

There are some, however, who take a more optimistic view, hoping that fire coverage will improve as the demand for it rises.

Michael Kodas has covered fire for a decade as both a writer and photojournalist. “You used to be able to get a ride in a truck to get a pretty good angle,” he recalls. Today, he is associate director at the
University of Colorado Boulder’s Center for Environmental Journalism.

Kodas has found that crises drive better journalism as they affect more and more people. “We have far more communities in the West that are part of the problem but also threatened by it, so that’s a natural readership for these stories.”

Two types of journalists are rising to the task of telling a more nuanced fire story, Kodas says. One is a growing breed of journalists with backgrounds in science and environmental policy, who bring increased insight to fire. The other variety is more homegrown. Newspapers in the West cover fire every summer, and reporters who stick around long enough are left with the institutional knowledge to cover the long-term issues.

“They might not be as polished a writer or as flashy a journalist as big market people, but are by and large better at this kind of thing,” Kodas says.

For Karl Puckett, the season’s end showed the dual nature of fire coverage. On September 29, the front page of the Great Falls Tribune ran an article of his about a fire burning in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area called the Sheep Mountain Fire. The headline read “Doing what it should do,” and the article portrayed a fire burning through fuels built up over a century. The next time fires start in the area they won’t be able to charge out of the backcountry and toward communities, Puckett’s sources said.

The next day, the front page carried another Puckett article about the Sheep Mountain Fire. This one’s headline was “The Great Escape.” It described a guest ranch evacuation. Among the evacuees was Jack Hanna, Montana’s celebrity animal show host, who was “forced to hightail it out of the woods Saturday after the Sheep Mountain Fire roared back to life.”

Sometimes, breaking news is just breaking news.

The week before the Sheep Mountain Fire made the front page, photographer Jake Green and I drove to Glacier National Park. On the phone, Puckett had told me he would be there with retired Forest Service ecologist Wayne Phillips. Puckett wanted to do a story on forest regrowth, what ecologists call “post-fire succession” in burn zones of varying age.

Under cloudless and bright fall skies we started in a forest that had burned in 2006. New lodgepole pine trees had grown to chest height, while above them the trunks of the trees killed in the fire rose bare and pointed like toothpicks.

From there we moved to the now extinguished Reynolds Creek Fire of 2015. That fire, reported July 21, closed the iconic Going-to-the-Sun Road through the park’s interior, made national news and cost $10 million to suppress.

Uphill from us the ground was black underfoot and the trees charred and dead. But in the small pocket where we stood, the forest was mostly unburnt.

In the burned area, bear grass and Oregon grape, thimbleberry and fireweed were already coming back. The blackened branches of a mountain maple rose nine feet up, its leaves burned off by the fire. New leaves rose around its base. Wayne Phillips dug up chunks of plants with connected root systems to show their ability to survive underground even as flames scorched the surface.

“What’s the big picture, Wayne, for all this?” Puckett asked, interrupting. “What’s the public need to know?”

Phillips, in the roundabout and excitable way of the retiree, was trying to paint a clearer picture of fire’s effects. It’s why he was out there, and why he said he reached out to Puckett in the first place. He’d been reading what he called Puckett’s “in-depth articles” over the course of the fire season, and brought some old photos of post-fire forests to the newsroom.

Puckett had looked at the photos and invited the ecologist on a trip to Glacier. What Phillips thinks the public needs to know is this: “You can read in the newspaper, 10,000 acres burned. But this burned,” he said, gesturing at the barely touched green area we stand in, “and that burned,” waving toward the charred forest ten yards uphill.

Like the Sucker Creek Fire or even the Valley Fire, there was more to this than the destructive force in the news. The black and green mosaic of a burnt forest is just as strangely beautiful as a forest fire at night, and fire’s story neither starts with the flames nor ends when they go out.
In 2013, two years before Oregon legalized the recreational use of marijuana, Portland’s Pulitzer Prize-winning alternative weekly newspaper, The Willamette Week, hired its first cannabis columnist.

“We said, you know what, let’s get ahead of this thing,” said Martin Cizmar, the Week’s culture editor.

By the time sales began October 1, 2015, the Week had well-established cannabis sections both in print and online, produced an annual magazine called Potlander and was busy churning out reviews of the city’s dispensaries and an ever-growing list of new psychotropic varieties with names like “White McWidow” and “Sour Chunk.”

It makes sense this would be a high-stakes beat in counterculture’s capital city, where hippies and hipsters converge to support the world’s largest collection of craft breweries, countless coffee shops, organic farms, wine bars, grocery co-ops and high-brow restaurants.

“We saw from the beginning this was something our readers wanted,” Cizmar said. “So we developed a team of writers, not just one dude who is our pot guru. It’s part of our culture here now, and it has become part of the paper the same way booze has always been a part of journalism.”

The Week’s staff even launched an interdepartmental contest the day recreational pot became legal, pitting pot plants in six divisions of the paper in a no-holds-barred ganja “grow off.”

The competition did raise at least a few eyebrows.

“People were thinking this was illicit. Technically we have more plants than is allowed. The law says four plants per household, and we have six,” Cizmar said. “We told the police, ‘We are a newspaper. We make these things happen all the time. We need to try this. Let’s see what happens.’ Indeed, the police showed up the next day, and I met with them. They said, ‘This is crazy, but we love it. It’s a party idea, and we can’t wait for the next time.’

But our police are the nicest guys in the world.”
FROM THE PACIFIC COAST TO THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT, THE CANNABIS BEAT GROWS WITH A BUDDING INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC APPETITE FOR COVERAGE

readers, ‘don’t make it weird, guys,’ and told them to chill out, that it’s open to interpretation.”

In fact, when it comes to the legality of growing, reviewing and otherwise supporting what is still a federally outlawed product, Cizmar is unflinching.

“This is the people’s republic of Portland,” he said jokingly. “Technically I guess the federal government has some sort of authority over us, but I don’t really feel it, and I don’t think anybody here does. There has never been a point where I’ve been in any way concerned about the legality.”

Cizmar says he hasn’t heard of a single journalist running into trouble with pot coverage or reviews.

But what about journalism outfits with a more conservative readership? Portland’s other Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper, The Oregonian, is the West Coast’s oldest paper and has the largest circulation in the Pacific Northwest, including readers of the distinctively non-Portlandian variety—folks that might not recycle every page, or look kindly at sections celebrating reefer.

In August 2015, Oregonian staff writer Noelle Crombie posted a job announcement to the Oregonian’s website “seeking a freelance critic to review marijuana strains, infused products and highlight consumer trends unique to Oregon’s robust cannabis culture and marketplace.”

Crombie declined to comment for this article, but said the paper had a flood of media attention after the posting. The paper followed a path blazed by The Denver Post, a newspaper of similar size with a similarly diverse readership.

After Colorado voters passed an initiative legalizing recreational use of cannabis in November 2012, Gov. John Hickenlooper

et al.: The Burn Issue

Published by ScholarWorks at University of Montana, 2015
We developed a team of writers, not just one dude who is our pot guru. It’s part of our culture here now, and it has become part of the paper the same way booze has always been a part of journalism.”

“We’re going to have some fun—with a mix of news, entertainment and culture stories,” Post News Director Kevin Dale wrote in a November 2013 editorial announcing their hiring of a pot editor. “Say what you want about the newspaper industry, but The Post is the most powerful news organization in the region. We know how to cover big stories. And with pot, you ain’t seen nothing yet.”

A week later the Post announced it was putting entertainment editor and music critic Ricardo Baca at the helm of the new section, who proudly partook in pot himself, though he said in an interview announcing his hiring that he was “not a full-on stoner.”

The Post’s cannabis section soon became known as The Cannabist, with an edgy online layout independent from the rest of the paper, only mentioning its affiliation with the Post at the bottom of the page. The section is also striking in its juxtaposition of hard news stories and magniloquent reviews, including a “Strain of the Day” for hot new varieties of the drug.

Aleta Labak, digital producer for The Cannabist, came to the section after working for the Post as a copy editor and designer in news, features and sports since 1999.

“We needed to create our own very specific cannabis coverage,” Labak said. “It offers the opportunity to explore the cultural aspects and the normalization versus it being purely policy changes and regulations.”

She said longtime readers’ reactions to it have varied, with some accusing the paper of being anti-marijuana, and others saying the editorial staff is advocating for its use.

“It’s been fun watching history unfold,” Labak said. “I think we started out with a good strong foundation. We cover everything from how laws are changing to reviews and how it’s
In 2015, the Willamette Week launched The Potlander, which claims to be Portland’s first complete dispensary guide. COURTESY OF THE WILLAMETTE WEEK

Growing in acceptance. But questions are being raised every day about how it’s being regulated. Right now there is a lot of focus on how marijuana is being grown commercially, the pesticides that are being used, as people try to figure out what’s safe and what’s not.”

That question of safety turns out to be one of their big legal concerns when it comes to reviews.

“The reviewers are trying these products and reporting what the effects are to them, but we’re just careful not to say that any will treat a certain medical condition, because marijuana hasn’t been qualified as such on a federal level,” Labak said. “I don’t think it’s our place to make any recommendation as far as a particular strain having a certain medical impact.”

Regardless of the flowery details of The Cannabist’s reviews, they are geared as much toward the novice as the hardcore stoner, Labak said.

“We’re just trying to help give more information about the various products on the market so that people can be more informed when they go into a shop and are faced with six different strains out there.”

Paul Queneau is a 2002 graduate of University of Montana’s School of Journalism and has worked as conservation editor at the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation’s magazine, Bugle, for the past 12 years. He’s also taught at the J-School as an adjunct professor and edits Communiqué, the J-School’s alumni newsletter. This is his third article for MJR.
It was just a shitshow for the most part.” That is how Madelyn Beck remembers November 6, 2014, the final night of editing on Montana Journalism Review issue 44. Beck was deputy managing editor and she, with most of MJR’s 21-person staff, started work on the final draft during the regular 80-minute class period. At 6:30 p.m., class should have been over, but Beck and her team would stay hard at work in room 305 of Don Anderson Hall for the next eight hours. She wouldn’t leave until 2 a.m.

Around 7 p.m., a copy editor noticed a problem with the cover story, “Transients of the Digital Age.” Written by Bjorn Bergeson, the eight-page spread examined the growing need for journalists to span the divide between print and broadcast media in order to stay relevant and keep jobs. To exemplify the trend, Bergeson focused his reporting on four Montana journalists from Missoula, Helena and Billings. But something was wrong. The MJR staff hoped that only a few words were off, but soon they realized the copy of the story was an early, unedited draft of Bergeson’s story, not the fact-checked version. Even worse, the edited copy was nowhere to be found, caught somewhere between the university server and a separate dropbox system the staff used while working from home. All they could do was start re-editing the story from memory.

“Until that point I thought we had done a great job, and this entire process that we were responsible for had essentially fallen apart,” said Jesse Flickinger, one of the three copy editors assigned to the cover story. At 8 p.m., pizza was ordered. Some staff members slouched in chairs and others sat on the floor, trying to fix design problems stemming from the departure of MJR’s art director early in the semester. Stressed, frustrated and tired, they devoted an entire night to correcting errors to ensure that MJR would be fit to print.

But in the end, it wasn’t. In mid-December, an email from Darrell Ehrlick, editor of the Billings Gazette, reached MJR Editor-in-Chief Henriette Lowisch. Ehrlick expressed concern over the cover story, specifically references to “massive downsizing” at the Gazette, which had, in fact, never occurred. The Gazette also voiced other grievances: factual and logistical errors such as inaccurate dates and an assertion that a Gazette employee had been fired. He had actually left of his own accord to take another job with a Billings television station. All were errors that could have been avoided with more thorough fact checking. At the copy slam the staff had focused more on design flaws than on accuracy, and when publication time rolled around the effect was immediate. 😞
A version of the article “Transients of the Digital Age,” which was published in the print edition of MJR 2015, contained several errors:

The article stated that Greg Tuttle, online editor at Q2, left the Billings Gazette because he was laid off as part of a massive downsizing. We failed to double-check this information. In fact, Tuttle said he left out of his own volition and there was no massive downsizing at the Gazette, according to editor Darrell Ehrlick.

The article stated that at Q2, Tuttle took the job of Kyle Rickhoff, the Gazette’s digital media director. While it’s true that Rickhoff went from Q2 to the Gazette, this occurred five years before Tuttle’s move in the opposite direction, so Tuttle wasn’t hired to replace Rickhoff, as the sentence implies.

The article stated that Rickhoff started working at Q2 when he was 15, and that he worked in the control room and made commercials there. In fact, Rickhoff first worked at KULR-8, another television station, before he moved to Q2 in 2002. The Gazette hired him as online editor in 2008 and promoted him to digital media director in November of 2013.

The article stated that, once he was at the Gazette, Rickhoff brought on four other Q2 employees. In fact, he brought on two former Q2 employees.

The article stated that Rickhoff wanted to be a VJ, or video jockey, in his youth. What Rickhoff meant to say was that he wanted to be a radio DJ.

The article stated that Sanjay Talwani, a former print reporter, joined KXLH in January of 2014. In fact, he joined KXLH in October of 2013.

In addition, the caption for a photo on page 22 also contained an inaccuracy. It states that Emily Foster creates the entire 4:06 show by herself. In fact, she works with a colleague who edits the video and posts it online.

We regret the errors, which were immediately corrected in our digital editions.
Now there was a new problem: how does an annual publication go about correcting errors when it will be 11 months before the next issue? The five Lee Enterprises newspapers in Montana requested a correction letter be mailed to the entire MJR mailing list of about 750 people, but ultimately Lowisch and University of Montana School of Journalism dean Larry Abramson decided against it.

Abramson said the mistakes were certainly serious and needed to be corrected immediately, but he didn't agree they were damaging to the Gazette's reputation. “Some errors are simple errors of details and some errors really undermine the entire article,” he said. “I didn't feel like this undermined the entire article.”

Extensive review of the cover story began as soon as concerns were raised, and staff writer Bjorn Bergeson said he immediately started calling back his sources to confirm what had been said during interviews. “It was a crazy and humbling experience in a lot of ways,” Bergeson said. “It sucks to have to call a source up after a story's already gone to print.”

Instead of the requested letter, an online correction was published as quickly as possible on the MJR website, as well as associated Facebook and Twitter pages. A printed correction was produced and inserted in copies of MJR that had yet to be mailed. Ehrlick appreciated the effort, but didn’t feel the Gazette’s requests had been adequately met. “We were satisfied with the correction part of it,” he said. “We were just a little disappointed...not a little, we were very disappointed in the distribution part of the correction.”

After the errors were noticed and pointed out, managing editor Austin Schempp contacted the Student Press Law Center (SPLC), an advocacy nonprofit based in Washington, D.C. Schempp wanted to make sure MJR took the best possible steps to rectify the situation, and SPLC Executive Director Frank LoMonte believed it did. He said an online correction was the best recourse for an annual publication.

MJR is annual and the magazine is staffed four months of the year. It’s a student publication of a different kind, the product of a UM senior capstone class offered every fall semester. An entirely new staff is selected each year and beginning with the start of classes, students have two and a half months before MJR goes to print. It’s one of the most authentic and professional experiences a journalism student at UM can get. It offers opportunity for more than just writing and editing; it allows for an experience of what it’s like to really screw up.

Peggy Kuhr, dean of the UM School of Journalism from 2007 to 2012 and now Vice-President for Integrated Communications at the university, thinks the long-term effects of last year’s mistakes will be more positive than negative, because for the new staff, “the game’s been upped.” And even after what she calls last year’s “shitshow,” Madelyn Beck agrees. “We’re going to be able to learn from it which is part of it, part of the whole reason to do MJR,” she said. Now, when MJR alumni become professional journalists, they’ll know exactly what it’s like to be in the hot seat, and what to do if they ever find themselves there again.

MJR has striven for perfection in reporting since the beginning, but as all journalists know, there’s always room for improvement. So this year, some changes were made to streamline the editorial process and guard against future mistakes:

■ In previous years, MJR hasn’t had an editorial handbook for authors and editors to abide by. This year, the staff developed one in order to have common guidelines of fact checking, copy editing and formatting.

■ While many of the articles published in this magazine come from seasoned outside contributors, staff writers are asked to keep and submit their notes to fact checkers for story corroboration.

■ In a turn for the old school, all fact checks and copy edits are made on hard copies of each story rather than electronic versions. This eliminates the risk of being left high and dry without the edited version of a piece.

■ Once editing is complete, changes are reviewed by one of MJR’s four senior editors and entered onto the digital file with the story’s fact checker.

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Matt Robbins and Bryan Denton met in Marjah, Afghanistan, in 2010. It was mid-February, and the U.S.-led offensive to drive the Taliban from a stronghold in the country’s south had just begun.

Neither remembers the exact day the then 19-year-old marine from Alabama caught a glimpse of the towering 6-foot-6, 27-year-old freelance photographer from California. But the two recall almost word for word what Robbins first said to Denton.

“You aren’t taking pictures of dead bodies, are you? Because I am liable to fucking shoot you if you do.”

Robbins, backed by a military mission, was in Afghanistan driving current events. Denton, owing his presence to the public’s belief in a fourth estate, was documenting it.

The two men, now 25 and 32, have since stayed in touch. Robbins, whose broad shoulders are a testament to his time with his infantry battalion, is now a photojournalism student at the University of Montana.

Denton works primarily with The New York Times and has offered career advice to the aspiring photographer.

The irony of Robbins’ initial words is not lost on either of them.

The marine-turned-journalist says he was young at the time and was still processing his worldviews.

“I didn’t understand how journalism played such a big role. I thought in black and white. They are trying to kill us and civilians are here taking pictures,” Robbins said about his mindset as a soldier on the frontline. Though he still offers fairly conservative views on media access to the battlefield, he now thinks there is a place for journalists in combat zones.

While cooler heads prevail in times of peace, the question remains what rules, precisely, should govern the tension between the military and the press when they meet on the battlefield.

Journalists and press freedom advocates are currently demanding that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) rescind or at least rewrite guidelines regarding journalists outlined in the June 2015 release of the first ever DoD-wide Law of War Manual.

The press corps is unnerved by the manual’s guidelines that spell out the potential for journalists to be classified as “unprivileged belligerents,” defined as “persons engaging in spying, sabotage, and similar acts behind enemy lines or private persons engaging in hostilities.” The guidelines also remove “rights afforded to enemy combatants.” Reporting on military operations can be “very similar to collecting intelligence or even spying,” the manual’s authors go on to say.

Journalists are mentioned on no more than nine pages in the almost 1,200-page document, but the pithy text is enough for the media to decry the manual as a dangerous affront to the profession. “This broad and poorly defined category gives U.S. military commanders across all services the purported right to at least detain journalists without charge, and without any apparent need to show evidence or bring a suspect to trial,” wrote Frank Smyth, a senior adviser for the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in a scathing analysis of the manual.
Reporters fear the wording puts them on ambiguous footing.

“I worry the military is trying to remove their responsibility,” said Jackie Spinner, a former reporter for The Washington Post who covered the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. “It’s too easy for them to say ‘that wasn’t really a journalist—that was a spy.’ Who is a spy and what does that mean?”

Others are afraid that the rule adds a degree of aggression to an already dangerous situation.

“In some ways it feels like open season on journalists right now,” said Holly Pickett, a University of Montana graduate and photojournalist based in Istanbul who has covered several war-torn countries with U.S. military presence, including Iraq and Afghanistan. “What’s troubling to me is that’s how dictatorships and other governments do see journalists, as belligerents and fair game as far as being a target. That’s what’s troubling, puts us in the same category and gives other governments justification that journalists are spies and helping one side or another.”

The publication of the Pentagon’s Laws of War coincided with what advocacy groups characterize as a worldwide deterioration of the freedom of information. Two-thirds of the 180 countries surveyed for Reporters Without Borders’ 2015 World Press Freedom Index performed worse than in the previous year. The United States dropped three places to 49th place.

The Pentagon has fielded several press inquiries regarding journalists’ concerns since the manual’s release. It consistently responded that the manual has been misinterpreted and emphasized its commitment to the freedom of the press. Yet DoD spokesman Army Lt. Col. Joe Sowers stated in an email that concerns raised by members of the fourth estate will be taken into consideration in future versions of the manual. “Our plan is to update the manual on a regular basis,” he said, adding that DoD officials were meeting with bureau chiefs as part of “ongoing efforts to understand the concerns that have been raised by journalists and to seek to clarify misconceptions.”

Two of the organizations that have been the most outspoken about the manual, the CPJ and The New York Times, both told Montana Journalism Review they had not been approached by the Pentagon as of October 2015.

Smyth suspects the language used in the manual cuts at deeper issues with reporting that make the U.S. government uneasy.

“The real issue is the Pentagon wants the ability to jail anyone who has a relation with an insurgent group,” he said. Smyth specifically referred to journalists from other countries, explaining that in order for a reporter to tell all sides of a story, it is often necessary to have contacts with groups the U.S. government might classify as insurgent or terrorist organizations.

In fact, the manual could prove most formidable for local journalists who bear the greatest risks in reporting on conflict. Naseer Nouri, an Iraqi native and former correspondent, translator and fixer for the Washington Post, said U.S. military authorities often are more wary of local journalists than of their American colleagues.

“Suspicion comes first,” he said, “They look at them like they are bad unless they prove otherwise.”

On the other hand, Barry Johnson, a retired army colonel who served as a public affairs officer in Iraq during four combat tours, says he has personally come up against the issue of insurgents posing as journalists.
Some individuals with press credentials, he claims, have either been forced or chosen to work with groups the U.S. labels as the enemy, which puts soldiers’ lives at risk.

“Part of the reality of warfare today is that they aren’t looking for tactical victories. They aren’t looking to beat us on the ground,” Johnson said. “They need journalists.”

While Johnson understands the uproar the manual has created, he thinks even if the wording was changed or deleted, it would leave a grey area unaccounted for in conflict zones.

“What I believe is really lacking on both sides on military and journalist organizations is a real sincere discussion of what it means to report in war zones. It’s not what is was before.”

Indeed, while the manual could engender dangerous consequences for journalists risking their lives as eyewitnesses, it is also seen as a reflection of the changing dimensions of warfare. Since World War I, U.S. journalists have been adapting to evolving military policy. Now they face an era where wars are waged virtually, via YouTube, or remotely, through drones.

The drone program, currently operated in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, keeps U.S. troops out of harm’s way but is denounced for its lack of transparency and civilian death tolls. By default, it removes Western journalists from the battlefield, placing more of a burden on local journalists to cover these no-go zones. That’s why Denton, the photojournalist, thinks the new manual hasn’t made a bigger splash in some journalism circles.

“If ominous as it is, most of us haven’t heard because we haven’t rubbed against it,” he said. “Local press that could be declared unprivileged belligerents under these newer flexible rules of engagement would likely be in increased danger.”

As the U.S. military shifts from deploying ground troops to assisting local forces on a case-by-case basis, journalists witnessing battles increasingly find themselves on shaky ground.

Sig Christenson, a veteran journalist who embedded with troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, is adamant that if the Pentagon does not reassess its rules of war manual regarding the press, a public relations nightmare or worse is waiting to happen. He draws on personal experience from his time in Afghanistan to create a possible scenario of how ambiguous language can be interpreted and used as a form of control.
“We were in the middle of a battle in downtown Kabul when the Taliban came in and tried to take down [former Afghan President Hamid] Karzai and blow up a mall,” Christenson said. “What would have happened if a commander came up to us and said, ‘Who the hell are you and what are you doing?’ What if he said, ‘I am not sure who you are. I think you are an unprivileged belligerent and I am taking you into custody.’ That is a form of control that is extremely dangerous and creates a situation that everyone is sorry for later.”

Christenson, who is also president of the Military Reporters and Editors Association, an organization with a mission to ensure that journalists have access to places where the U.S. military and its allies operate, believes the Pentagon likely did not intend to wage war on the press. “The DoD was attempting to protect itself against threats from unidentified sources, he said. “Let’s face it, they do have a problem,” he said. “The military in these places do not know who the enemy is.” But Christenson stresses that the war manual’s language will not end up protecting anyone.

“I understand that language and guarantee you that language is trouble,” he said. “Because one day, a local commander will do something hot-headed. This will create an incident that someone at the very top will have to fix. You can see this mess coming from a mile away.”

The war manual in its current form just doesn’t make sense and will have to be rethought, agrees Colleen McGuire, a retired brigadier general and University of Montana graduate. McGuire frequently worked with the press throughout her military career and in 2010 was appointed the Army’s Provost Marshal General. If the U.S. hopes to keep the often tectonic-plate-like relationship between the armed forces and their watchdogs from combusting, clearer rules are needed, she said.

“If it’s confusing to journalists, then it would be confusing to a commander in the field,” McGuire said. “The Department of Defense needs to go back to the chalkboard.”

Katie Riordan is a freelance journalist currently pursuing a master’s degree in Environmental Science and Natural Resource Journalism at the University of Montana. She has reported from Yemen and the Horn of Africa.
Nearly every story on the Billings Gazette website includes a bar at the bottom where readers can post comments. At least two stories, however, lack that bar.

Both of those stories are about Steve Zabawa, owner and co-founder of Rimrock Auto Group, which buys ads in the paper every week, according to the Gazette’s advertising department.

The stories document Zabawa’s failed 2014 effort to organize a petition to ban medical marijuana in the state of Montana.

Kyle Rickhoff, digital director of Billings Gazette Communications, said the newspaper removed the comment bars on those stories after the discussion “went off topic and was no longer discussing the medical marijuana issue.” He wouldn’t say what the discussion had turned to.

Rickhoff said advertising had nothing to do with the decision, while Darrell Ehrlick, editor-in-chief of the Gazette, declined to say if the paper has a policy about removing comments on stories that may reflect poorly on advertisers.

Zabawa launched a new anti-marijuana campaign in 2015. The comment sections on the most recent articles are enabled.

Media ethicists and editors of newspapers and television news programs all over the nation are struggling with comment bars, which often spur off-topic, inflammatory, ill-informed and even libelous reader comments. And that struggle can be even more difficult when advertisers are involved, testing the traditional wall between news and advertising.

The issue risks to become inflamed in rural areas, where the temptation to protect advertisers can be great, as they may be more difficult to replace if they choose to leave.

Is it wrong to shield advertisers from the barbarous area at the end of online news articles?

According to Kelly McBride, a media ethicist at the Poynter Institute—yes. She says free speech in online comment sections needs to be upheld.

“Comments are problematic, and they are also important for democracy,” McBride said. “Journalism exists to further civic engagement, and when you don’t allow the public to engage around your content, you push them away and they will go somewhere else to engage.”

This is true even in rural states like Montana in the digital era. People now have options—if newspapers police comments, readers can flock to social media websites like Facebook and Twitter or the sites of other news organizations.

Rickhoff said the Billings Gazette’s comment policy is to “let it fly, and then if someone thinks something is inappropriate they”
will flag it to us." The newspaper does all their monitoring in-house, while many outlets have at least some done through a third party.

"If the entire thread is shifting into a section which we don't want, we sort of remove that entire discussion," Rickhoff said. He said the Gazette removes comment bars less than a dozen times a year. However, he could not point to any stories, aside from the two about Zabawa, where comment bars were removed. Ehrlick also declined to point out any additional stories where comments had been disabled, but said it happened only rarely.

The paper has written several other stories about Zabawa that focus on his business interests. Those stories include comment bars.

Several Montana news outlets are struggling with the Wild West of online comments.

Kellyn Brown, editor-in-chief of the Flathead Beacon in Kalispell, said comments can be problematic at a small news organization.

Brown said his newspaper contracts with a third-party company to monitor comments. Part of this filtering includes establishing a database of words that are often associated with racist, sexist or otherwise inflammatory remarks, Brown said. The company automatically flags comments containing those terms to make sure they do not go live on the website.

Brown said the Flathead Beacon has never had an issue with commenters defaming their advertisers online, but if it did, the paper might consider taking those comments down. He said the paper's policy has been to let readers deal with issues with local businesses on their own, because claims made on the website are difficult for the paper to confirm.

NBC Montana uses Facebook Comments Plugin to monitor comments, according to digital manager William Miller. That helps, but the recent plague has come from memes that can't be picked up by the text monitoring software, he said.

Miller said the station's comment
policy is simple: don’t attack other readers personally and be civil. He said he would consider taking down comments that attacked advertisers, though he also said that has never happened.

It turns out that news organizations face little to no legal risk for what appears in their comments section, including potentially slanderous or libelous statements.

Lee Banville, a media law professor at the University of Montana School of Journalism, said news organizations are protected from responsibility for what others publish on their site. The Communications Decency Act of 1996 exonerates news sites from all the indecent comments readers may post.

“The same laws that help the critical reviewers out there are the laws that help the trolls,” Banville said. “This is the American take on free speech. More is better than less. More means a little bit of anarchy, and sometimes a lot of anarchy when it comes to what is being said.”

Banville also said news organizations that police comments are more liable than ones that leave them all up, because it shows they are monitoring comments for content. If an organization that has a history of taking down comments leaves something up on their site, it appears they have deemed it appropriate. If that comment were libelous, the paper would have a higher risk of getting into legal trouble.

News organizations have reacted to this reality in a myriad of ways. Sites like CNN, Gawker and the Chicago Sun-Times have all drastically scaled back or halted comments altogether.

In 2013, the magazine Popular Science completely removed the comment bars on its website.

In an editorial from September of that year, the magazine’s online content director said “comments can be bad for science,” and cited a University of Wisconsin–Madison study that said readers exposed to negative comments ended up with a much more polarized view of the content found in the article.

“Even a fractious minority wields enough power to skew a reader’s perception of a story,” Suzanne Labarre said in the editorial.

But most media outlets don’t use such a radical solution.

The Billings Gazette, for one, merely closes comment bars on selected articles, including articles involving advertisers. This leads some to question the paper’s priorities.

“You don’t make news judgment based on who your advertisers are,” said Ed Kemmick, editor-in-chief of the Montana online news and commentary site Last Best News. Kemmick, who used to work for the Gazette, stressed he had no specific knowledge of a policy or instance of comment policing since leaving the Gazette two years ago. In his opinion, newspapers should be upfront about what their comment policy is.

“It wouldn’t be so bad if they would come out and say it: Steve Zabawa is a valuable advertiser so we don’t want him publicly shamed,” Kemmick said.

Steve Zabawa, that valuable advertiser, said he had read negative comments about himself before on the Gazette website but had never asked to have them removed. He said he supports free speech and people’s right to comment whatever they please.

“That’s America,” he said.

Peregrine Frissell is a senior journalism student at the University of Montana and a native of Polson, Montana. He spent the summer of 2015 interning at the Nepali Times in Kathmandu, Nepal, reporting on earthquake recovery. Upon graduating, he hopes to find work as an investigative journalist.
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On Campaign Spending

How to spot dark money in the web of native advertising

BY EVE BYRON

Even though the 2016 elections won’t take place for several months, money is already pouring into Montana’s political races. In addition to familiar television, radio and newspaper ads, expect to see paid advertisements on Facebook, pop-up ads on websites and in your email inbox, plus political ads on Instagram and other social media sites. The challenge for journalists will be to account for the money spent by groups not directly affiliated with a candidate or ballot measure—especially in light of the new wave of social media advertising.

While some of this ad spending is clearly from a candidate or ballot measure committee, it’s also flowing from sources not directly affiliated with those groups. Remember the Special Operations for America (SOFA) political action committee, founded by now-Congressman Ryan Zinke but not formally coordinating with him on political advertising in 2014? Often the links aren’t quite so clear, posing a challenge even for seasoned political journalists.

The Center for Responsive Politics reports that by fall 2015, political organizations trying to influence the 2016 elections had already raised more than $258 million, almost 10 times what was raised at the same point during the 2012 election. And that’s just for federal elections.

Understanding how to track political dollars can be difficult because we’re talking about two different pools of money here—one pool is given to candidates and ballot measures, the other is spent by candidates and committees, as well as by outside groups and organizations. While $13.5 million was given to state candidates and committees in 2012, the total reaches almost $27 million when factoring in “dark money” reported to the Montana Secretary of State’s office.

It’s fairly easy to track the amount of money given directly to Montana candidates and ballot measures, since it must be reported. However, for the outside groups making independent expenditures to try to impact elections, it’s a little trickier. Much of that information won’t be available until after the election when groups file reports with the Montana Secretary of State, the IRS or the Federal Elections Commission. While many journalists—and the public—suffer from political fatigue in the aftermath of an election, it’s still important to track those dollars and compare that to the legislation that’s put forth by those elected officials.

All of this money in politics may be a boon to newspapers and local news stations. But in this era of targeted marketing and social media, it’s difficult to predict whether those organizations will reap the benefits of more money in politics, or whether direct marketing will pull from the traditional “legacy” media outlets. You can bet, however, that the legacy media will do everything they can to tap into the election advertising market; social media will continue to evolve to fight for those dollars; and intrepid reporters will need to put on their running shoes to track down all of the money in politics in 2016.

Eve Byron is a former reporter and current media outreach director for the National Institute on Money in State Politics, which received a $1 million MacArthur grant in 2015. She can be reached at eveb@FollowTheMoney.org.
When journalists decide to write about science, the experience can be both intimidating and frustrating for everyone involved. Reporters vie for charismatic characters and gripping footage, while researchers hedge and hide behind scientific jargon. Angela Luis, a population ecologist at the University of Montana who specializes in science communication, has seen this process play out many times.

“The stories likely to be missed by journalists are those that are inaccessible because they require too much specialty background knowledge to understand, which isn’t always the reporter’s fault,” Luis said.

But if you ask UM scientists for stories that need more, and better, media coverage in 2016, you’ll be surprised: rather than focusing on incremental scientific advances, they’ll be delivering big-picture ideas.

**MICHAEL DEGRANDPRE**

*Professor of chemistry and biochemistry
On Sea Level Rise*

“It’s bad. It’s one thing to have warming and have the distribution of organisms change and some species go extinct. But when you’re talking about thousands of square miles getting inundated with water, that’s a major refugee problem. You talk about the possibility of Bangladesh flooding, but people don’t give a damn about them here in the U.S., of course. But if you talk about Florida and Manhattan, it definitely starts to raise some eyebrows. Those politicians will go down in infamy for not doing something sooner.”

**CARA NELSON**

*Associate professor of restoration ecology
On Conservation Practices*

“Conservation in decades previous was about setting land aside and not touching it and preserving populations at the brink. Now, people have recognized that an important component of conservation is actually having people assist in the repair of degrading ecosystems. So that’s something really new. It’s interesting that in restoration there are almost always strong social benefits and those are important in their own right. But without articulating and telling the story of those social benefits the projects are at risk.”
KELSEY JENCSO
Montana state climatologist and watershed hydrologist
On Water Supply

“Water is going to become the new gold. It’s a precious commodity. Investors and large global corporations and investment firms see that opportunity. And it’s really important for Montanans to start understanding that we need to know how much water we have. We need to make sure that we keep those resources within Montana and that we don’t farm the ability to make those decisions out to people that aren’t from Montana. We need to make sure we own our water and that we keep track of it so that we can effectively manage it.”

STEVEN W. RUNNING
Regents professor of global ecology
On Oil and Fracking Booms

“The oil and fracking business in the Bakken is another classic boom-and-bust cycle of the energy industry. They’re just like a damned 1800s gold rush where they come storming into town to try and get as rich as they can. As soon as the play runs out they’re off...The fact that we let them flare off hundreds of millions of dollars of gas because they don’t want to bother collecting it and selling it—why do we let them do that? I don’t think our state journalists scrutinize this hard enough. It’s a manifestation of we as a society just letting the fossil fuel industry just do what it wants.”

TONY WARD
Associate professor, School of Public and Community Health Science
On Increasing Seasonal Forest Fire Smoke

“I think we will be seeing bigger impacts from climate change and one of the impacts is forest fire smoke every single summer from here on out. Before ’97, like once a decade, it would be a bad fire season. Now it seems like every summer there’s smoke. The forests are getting drier. You’re getting more intense fire seasons that are lasting longer. It not only impacts the populations outdoors. We did some measurements inside the laboratory during the forest fire season and it showed there’s actually high levels of wood smoke inside.”
"One good story can be your calling card."

IRA GLASS ON FINDING GOOD STORIES AND TELLING THEM WELL

BY CHERI TRUSLER

Cheri Trusler caught up with This American Life host Ira Glass to chat about the future of radio, the West and being heard. Glass came to Missoula to perform a solo show as part of Montana Public Radio’s 50th anniversary year.

What is the future of podcasting? Is this just the start of something or will its popularity fizzle out?

I can talk authoritatively about the little corner of journalism that I’m in, right? That is long-form narrative journalism. In our little corner of the world, it has never been better. It’s hard to believe with millions of people downloading these podcasts that there’s not going to be a way for that to continue.

Nationally, radio stories from Montana and small places seem to be underappreciated; how can we make ourselves heard?

I mean if you find a good story, people will want to run it elsewhere. Things are going on here that other people around the country, I’m sure, will want to hear. I don’t know anything about Montana at all. But I can tell you, I and lots of people have hours of airtime to fill and we are looking for stories that people haven’t heard before. If that’s what you guys have, you should be aggressive and let us know what they are.

So, it’s about finding the one thing that you’re best at telling?

It’s about finding a story that’s really great and telling it well. The way you do that is by making a bunch of stuff. You just keep making stuff and you be rigorous about it. You have people listen to it and critique it and you make your stories better and better. That’s something I did as a baby reporter.

Is there a difference between radio in the West and in the East?

Are you trying to start a rap war? I know nothing about the difference so I can’t help with this, but the notion that you guys would have a hip-hop war with the Columbia Journalism Review, I completely support that. Because those guys are definitely suckers.

Cheri Trusler grew up listening to radio on her family ranch in Eastern Montana, practicing her own radio voice. College led her to the world of podcasting. She works at Montana Public Radio as the evening newscaster.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRENDAN CASEY

Brendan Casey is an art school drop out who uses his humble skills with the pen to make silly little comics for the Montana Kaimin.
Why journalism values need a radical reboot

BY STEPHEN J. A. WARD

Some journalists today, troubled by disorientating change, avoid philosophical questions and fixate on particular problems. How should journalists use social media on breaking stories? What corrections are required for live blogging? How should news outlets use drones?

The attention to the practical is natural. Newsrooms are news-production centers, with limited time — and tolerance — for theoretical discussions.

Yet the hard-nosed attitude of “just decide what to do in this situation and stop the philosophizing” is utterly inadequate in an era of digital and global media where journalists disagree on the fundamental aims and principles of the practice.

The most serious problem for journalism ethics today is conceptual: the sorry state of the very framework of ideas we call journalism ethics.

This framework, inherited from a non-global, pre-digital journalism, portrays the journalist as a professional gatekeeper who serves the public by informing citizens truthfully, impartially, objectively and independently. She uses time-consuming verification procedures. Given this interpretation, we have a common means of evaluating practices.

The media revolution undermined the framework.

Principles, such as impartiality, are questioned. New practitioners prefer an interpretive journalism far from the “straight” reporting admired by traditional journalism ethics. Even if time-honored principles such as accuracy are maintained, there are disputes as to their meaning. What does accuracy mean in an era of instant updating?

Where reinterpretations of principles such as objectivity are not available, we are left with a conceptual “hole” in the middle of our ethics.

The result: We lack an agreed-upon framework for evaluating practice. Journalism ethics is like Humpty Dumpty after his big fall. It’s a mess.

In Radical Media Ethics: A Global Approach, I argue that the only way to rescue journalism ethics from sinking into oblivion is to think radically in terms of new ideas. I offer new principles in an experimental spirit.

For example, the traditional notion of objectivity as “just the facts” needs to be replaced by what I call pragmatic objectivity. The latter is a method for evaluating stories viewed as interpretations, not facts-only reports. Pragmatic objectivity uses a wider range of criteria of evaluation, from consistency of beliefs to surviving the scrutiny of the public.

The tweaking of ideas, as seen in recent revisions of codes of ethics, is a temporary, localized fix. In my book, I reformulate the aims of journalism in global terms, making the advancement of a global humanity the primary goal of journalism, not the advancement of national interests.

Without a framework, we have a clash of values with little common ground. We need to be radical in thought and in practice.
Film Reel

THREE STRIPPERS, TWO CAMERAS, AND A DIFFERENT VIEW OF MONTANA

Still frame from the documentary film “Stripped.” PHOTO BY MELISSA BRING COULIER
Through a hole in a rigged purse, a camera films a woman sliding half-naked down a pole. Faces fade in and out of darkness, dollar bills pile up and talking to filmmakers could result in termination. The images of Montana in the new documentary, “Stripped,” are a far cry from the landscape-filled scenes the public is used to seeing.

Montana born filmmakers Melissa Coulier and Fleur Phillips bring audiences into the life of fast cash, bright lights and internal struggles led by exotic dancers in the state. For Coulier, the project is about more than dancing—it’s about giving the women a voice.

It took months of scouring websites like XoticSpot and Craigslist to find women willing to be filmed. Even after that, club owners put up roadblocks, threatening to fire dancers involved in the documentary and forcing the film crew to go, at times, undercover.

The all-female ground crew filmed “Stripped” over three months, focusing primarily on three women: a mother living with her child in Missoula, another raising two children and her nephew in Butte and a retired dancer working for an eye care professional in Bozeman.

The Montana Film Office was concerned about any explicit content when Coulier and Phillips initially pitched the idea, said Deny Skaggs, the film commissioner.

However, once Skaggs heard more about the film’s message and found out the filmmakers are from Montana, he decided to support the project.

“They are trying to bring a different point of view to the industry that no one talks about,” Skaggs said.

Coulier hopes Montanans watch the documentary despite the fact that its subject is taboo, adding that any hardworking individual will appreciate its message.

“There may be judgment,” she said, “but the girls aren’t keeping the clubs open, the community is.”

As an environmental science and natural resource journalism graduate student at the University of Montana, Laura Scheer reported on the competition for rail space between Montana grain growers and Bakken crude oil. She is currently a freelance writer based in Missoula. Laura enjoys spending her time outdoors, cooking without instructions and coconut oil in her morning coffee.
The Kids Are All Right

BY CALLAN BERRY

From coding to marketing to illustrating, young journalists are finding work behind the screen in new and creative ways.

I slaved off debt collectors by reporting and cartooning from various conventions and events in the greater Seattle area, and am known for my series ‘Police Reports Illustrated’ in Seattle’s ‘The Stranger’. I’ve never been in a police report myself.

Callan Berry
Freelance Cartoonist

I oversee social content and post submissions for Brand USA, a campaign to market the United States as a travel destination across the world. My job hasn’t been totally defined yet, so there’s more to come.

Lizzy Duffy
Digital Content Producer Manager
Sparkloft

Aside from a few meetings, my job is designed to be different every day. One day I’m walking a reporter through a new app and the next I’m working with editors on social media strategies for a story. I demystify the internet for reporters.

Ric Sanchez
Embedded Social Editor
Washington Post Sports

Dynamic. I wear a lot of hats. If I’m not producing a story or scheduling tweets, I’m coding some Java Script, designing a graphic or tweaking a headline. I do something new almost every day, and I love it!

Abby Dufoe
Web Producer
Climate Central
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