

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1992

Relationships between environmental groups and daily newspapers: A western Montana perspective

Michael William Howey
The University of Montana

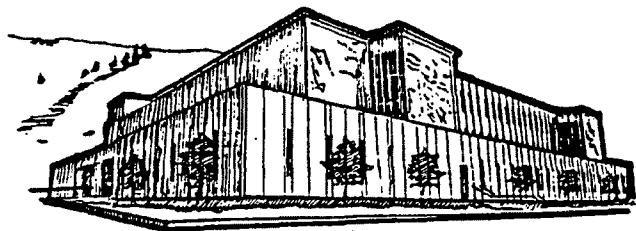
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Howey, Michael William, "Relationships between environmental groups and daily newspapers: A western Montana perspective" (1992). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 5058.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/5058>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



Maureen and Mike MANSFIELD LIBRARY

Copying allowed as provided under provisions
of the Fair Use Section of the U.S.

COPYRIGHT LAW, 1976.

Any copying for commercial purposes
or financial gain may be undertaken only
with the author's written consent.

University of
Montana

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS AND DAILY NEWSPAPERS:

A WESTERN MONTANA PERSPECTIVE

by

Michael William Howey

B.S.-Liberal Arts, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, 1989

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

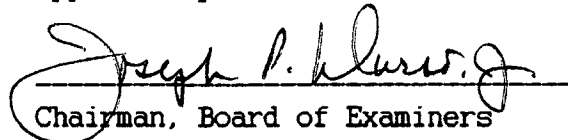
for the degree of


Master of Science

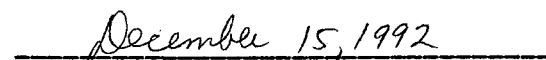
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1992

Approved by:


Chairman, Board of Examiners


Dean, Graduate School


Date

UMI Number: EP40522

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP40522

Published by ProQuest LLC (2014). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

1-13-93

Howey, Michael W., M.S., December 1992

Environmental Studies

Relationships Between Environmental Groups and Daily Newspapers:
A Western Montana Perspective (116 pp.)

Director: Joseph P. Durso, Jr.

JPD

Do daily newspapers reflect the underlying causes of pollution and environmental degradation, or is their coverage of such issues merely superficial? What can be done to present issues more fully?

The purpose of this study is to answer these questions by examining relationships between environmental groups and daily newspapers and analyzing the consequences of these relationships with regard to the public and the environment, and by exploring paths that advocates might take in order to more effectively express their messages and pointing out ways that members of the press can improve upon their handling of environmental coverage.

The methodology used to enact this study involved approaching key representatives of several environmental groups and daily newspapers with standardized but flexible lists of questions.

It is ironic that the body of this document consists primarily of quotes, because it is noted several times in the following pages that there is a tendency in the media to focus on what the "talking heads" say at the expense of in-depth analysis. Nonetheless, the probing nature of the interviews conducted and the length of this study have allowed the "players" to go beyond the usual soundbites and rhetoric and delve into the soul of the matters in question.

The following general conclusions are revealed within this study: Daily newspapers in western Montana lack the commitment of staff, resources and time that is necessary to thoroughly and effectively cover all of the environmental issues in this area. To advance their causes, conservation advocates oftentimes must initiate and develop stories for reporters or arrange their agenda with regard for a given newspaper's commitment to environmental coverage or its marketing philosophy.

If newspaper management assigned more personnel, resources and time to environmental issues and somehow coordinated their coverage with neighboring papers, then more issues could be covered and they could be covered in greater depth. If immediate and ongoing, "hot" and "luke warm" environmental issues were all receiving serious attention, then conservation groups could spend less time filling in holes left by the press and more time healing the wounds of this planet.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Numerous people helped me through this thesis project and kept a smile on my face even during the tedious days of editing.

Thanks to Journalism Dean Charlie Hood and Environmental Studies Director Tom Roy for academic and personal support during a watershed phase of my life. I am also indebted to committee chair Joe Durso, Jr. for encouraging my study and steering it to completion.

Continued thanks to "Mom" for too many things to mention, and to my father and Dean Nancy Zimpher for providing scholastic inspiration.

I am grateful to Mark Howey and Laura Stevens for long-distance psychotherapy and for living in a desirable getaway spot.

Thanks to Brock Applegate, Dean Loosbrock, Tom Voss and Frank Rives for providing needed breaks in the research, and BIG thanks to Dan Buhrdorf for letting me take "a couple," "a few" and "a few more" days off from work.

Special thanks to Jen and Megan McGee for turkey sandwiches, pumpkin pie and coffee at a crucial time.

And finally, thanks to Peg Persico for making me take a "stand" of my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. CASE STUDIES.....	3
1. THE CLARK FORK-PEND OREILLE COALITION WITH THE <u>MISSOULIAN</u> AND THE <u>MONTANA STANDARD</u>	3
The Players.....	3
Interdependent Relations.....	5
Defining Effective Environmental Advocacy.....	10
Community Politics.....	17
Times of Transition.....	22
Changes in the Newspaper Business.....	25
The Team Concept of Coverage.....	31
Analysis.....	34
2. THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE COALITION WITH THE <u>BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE</u>	37
The Players.....	37
Reaching Out in Polarized Times.....	39
Blending Energy with Experience.....	42
Knowledge of the Media.....	43
Beyond Knowledge of the Media.....	49
Tactics.....	50
Words of Praise and a Note on Journalistic Pride.....	53

An Environmental Reporter who Enjoys the Job.....	54
A Writer's Paper in a Writer's Market.....	56
Looking Past the Talking Heads.....	59
Analysis.....	61
 3. THE MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION'S FLATHEAD CHAPTER WITH THE <u>DAILY INTER LAKE</u>	 63
The Players.....	63
A Passionate and Energetic Visionary.....	65
Media Relations and the Importance of Public Involvement.....	67
A Troubled Relationship.....	71
Finding Ways Around the Problem.....	75
Getting the Message Out.....	81
Swaying the Citizenry.....	81
Analysis.....	82
 4. FRIENDS OF THE BITTERROOT WITH THE <u>RAVALLI REPUBLIC</u>	 83
The Players.....	83
A Grassroots Operation.....	84
Dealing with the Press in a Divided Community.....	85
From the Reporter's Viewpoint.....	87
A Determined Approach.....	89
The Dynamics of a Small Newspaper.....	89
A Few More Words From the Editor.....	91
Difficulties of the Beat.....	92
Looking for Credible News Sources.....	95

Ideas of a Veteran News Source.....	96
Ananalysis.....	99
III. DISCUSSION.....	100
1. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.....	100
Daily Newspapers are Providing Incomplete Coverage of Environmental Issues.....	100
Environmental Groups are Pandering to the Weaknesses of Daily Newspapers.....	100
The Public is Receiving a Distorted View of Environmental Issues.....	101
2. SUGGESTIONS FOR DAILY NEWSPAPERS.....	101
Review the Fundamentals of Good Journalism.....	101
Devote more Personnel, Time and Resources to the Issues.....	102
Develop Team Approaches to Coverage.....	102
3. SUGGESTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS.....	103
Review the Code of Environmental Ethics.....	103
Keep Working Hard.....	103
Stay Focused on the Message.....	104
4. EVOLVING ROLES.....	104
Notes.....	109
Sources Consulted.....	111
Appendixes.....	114
Appendix A - Basic Questions for Advocates.....	115
Appendix B - Basic Questions for Newspaper Personnel.....	116

I. INTRODUCTION

Northwestern Montana is known as "Glacier Country." It's a place defined by living glaciers, mountain-fresh streams, pristine lakes, wild rivers, dense forests and Rocky Mountain wildlife, and it's home to all or part of eight national wilderness areas—Anaconda-Pintler, Welcome Creek, Selway-Bitterroot, Rattlesnake, Missions, Cabinets, Bob Marshall, and Great Bear—and Glacier National Park.

Southwestern Montana is comprised of "Gold West Country" and "Yellowstone Country," wherein lie blue-ribbon trout streams and rivers, remote wilderness areas, Paradise Valley and world-famous Yellowstone National Park.

The people of western Montana, understandably, care about the land they live in. Conservationists are plentiful and their concerns make news.

This thesis focuses on relationships between environmental groups and daily newspapers whose collective membership, circulation and area of influence range western Montana in its entirety. Four case studies are included: the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition with the Missoulian and the Montana Standard; the Greater Yellowstone Coalition with the Bozeman Daily Chronicle; the Montana Wilderness Association's Flathead Chapter with the Daily Inter Lake; and Friends of the Bitterroot along with the Ravalli Republic.

Both environmental representatives and media personnel were approached with standardized but flexible lists of questions, and the body of this document is based upon interviews conducted during the spring of 1991 and over the course of the spring and summer of 1992.

Amongst the assortment of individuals interviewed for this project are a former executive director of one of the conservation groups, a representative of the Environmental Protection Agency, an environmental consultant, and a former natural resources reporter for one of the newspapers who wrote a book that offers a personal view of how environmental matters are being managed by the mass media.

The goals of this thesis are to examine relationships between environmental groups and daily newspapers and analyze the consequences of these relations with regard to the public and the environment, and to explore paths that conservation advocates might take in order to more effectively express their messages and point out ways that the press can improve upon their handling of environmental coverage.

II. CASE STUDIES

1. THE CLARK FORK-PEND OREILLE COALITION WITH THE MISSOULIAN AND THE MONTANA STANDARD

The Players

The Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition is a grassroots alliance of citizens, organizations and businesses working to improve surface groundwater quality and quantity, wildlife populations, streamside habitat and quality of life in the Clark Fork-Lake Pend Oreille basin.¹

This watershed starts east of Butte, Montana and encompasses most of Montana west of the Continental Divide, a large part of northern Idaho and small portions of eastern Washington and southern British Columbia. The Coalition's membership base is located in the same area, with concentrations in Missoula, Montana, site of its home office and where some 400-500 of its roughly 1,000 members reside, and Sand Point, Idaho and the Lake Pend Oreille area in general, where close to 300 members reside.²

The Coalition's staff consists of three people in Missoula and a three-quarters time person in Sand Point, and there are plans to add a three-quarters time person in Butte.³

Located kitty-corner and across the Higgins Avenue Bridge from the Coalition's Missoula office, is the headquarters of Lee Enterprises' Missoulian newspaper. The paper serves nine counties in western Montana and has a daily circulation of about 30,000.⁴ Approximately two-thirds of circulation is in the Missoula Valley area.⁵

Missoula has a growing city population of 41,700 and an expanding county population of 78,400.⁶ The dominant forces in Missoula's economy

include the wood products industry, the University of Montana, government agencies, the medical community, the retail and service industries, and tourism.⁷

Missoulian Editor Brad Hurd describes the newspaper audience in Missoula as "somewhat unusual in that, compared to national readership, we're probably a little higher educated and a little lower income." The Missoulian has "high numbers for subscribers and non-subscribers who have read the paper in the last 24 hours," he says. "It's in the high 80 percentage range."

In terms of the newspaper's environmental coverage, Hurd believes that "the issues have a wide appeal that cuts through age, gender, income and education." The Missoulian staff includes an environmental reporter, two general assignment reporters who cover some natural resource subjects, and an editorial page editor who previously worked the environmental beat.

While management is trying to make the newspaper more visually appealing and readable, it wants to keep the environment a preeminent issue and is willing to do whatever it takes to draw more people into the stories.

One-hundred and twenty miles southwest of Missoula, at the headwaters of the Clark Fork-Pend Orielle Basin and the country's largest geographic Superfund site, lies the historic mining city of Butte—home of the Montana Standard.

The consolidated city/county population of Butte is 33,737 and declining.⁸ Major employers in Butte include mining industries, public utilities, medical services, and the public schools.⁹

Rick Foote, editor of the Montana Standard, describes the paper's market as a 90-mile circle around Butte and the demographics of that area as "by and large, aging." Daily circulation for the Standard is about 16,000, the bulk of that in Butte and Anaconda.¹⁰

Environmental reporting is a priority for the news staff says Foote, "but it isn't designated as one person's beat because of the complexity of the issues." The Standard has three reporters with primary environment-related responsibilities and is adding a fourth.

Interdependent Relations

Formed in 1985 as a river watchdog group, the then-named Clark Fork Coalition started off with about 300 supporters.¹¹

"With a limited mailing list," says former Coalition Executive Director Peter Nielsen, "you need to get your message out in some way and when you don't have money to buy ads, you are going to take advantage of the media to whatever extent you can."

"If we had a big meeting coming up, we could usually get the newspaper to put a little blurb in," he says. "If we got it in the newspaper, the TV stations and the radio stations read the paper and decided what to cover. So it was better than doing press releases."

"You got some background from the TV station, and then the newspaper people watched TV. It just kind of built on itself. We couldn't always get it hyped up and going, but we tried."

Nielsen, who now serves as an environmental health supervisor for Missoula County, believes that initiating communication is the key to getting media coverage and says that the reporters he has dealt with

over the years have had difficulty covering all of the river issues with which the Coalition has been concerned.

"They've got wildnerness, they've got wildlife, they've got pulp mills, they've got forest fires, they've got endangered species, they've got Superfund, they've got mining—all that stuff," he says.

Reporters would "occasionally initiate something or hear about something before I did...occasionally," Nielsen says. "But there is no investigative reporting going on.

"They rely on people to tip," he adds matter-of-factly.

"I viewed it as part of my job to help make the reporter's job easier," Nielsen says, "which involved knowing what was news, developing it, getting together the information that I wanted presented, and pitching it."

Sherry Devlin, who covers the environment for the Missoulian, says that while there really isn't any one set way she gets news leads, she does count on special interest groups to keep her informed. "With each of the dozens of issues that I am responsible for," she states, "I have a list of sources and to some degree I rely on them to call and let me know when there is something new happening or some new development on an issue we've been following."

"You can't rely on them to do a whole lot of digging," says the Coalition's Conservation Director Bruce Farling in reference to local reporters. "If you can essentially prepare them and get them as much stuff as possible and be helpful—tell them who the contacts are on both sides, give them the phone numbers, and provide them with the background documents and stuff like that—it really helps."

"All of what I do ends up depending a great deal upon time and on the immediacy of other things going on," Devlin says. "The sad reality of the job is that some of the really great stories that may be of a more enterprising nature don't get done because there is so much breaking news or daily developments or continuing coverage of this or that issue that I have to do."

Devlin's limitations on the environmental beat are compounded by the size of the Missoulian's reporting staff. As she explains: "There are other responsibilities that I have in a small newsroom. When certain people are gone, we all have to cover for them. So there are times when I don't even write about environmental things. This Friday and Saturday I am the police reporter."

Devlin credits Coalition staffers for their media awareness. "They understand that reporters who are covering environmental issues in this state have a lot of different things going on," she says. "They know that we are following certain issues and, probably more than any other organization, they are tuned into calling us about developments."

"We try to develop a story for the reporter," then-Coalition Director Peter Nielsen said in a 1991 interview. "The fact is that we don't have, at any of the papers we we're dealing with, reporters who have the time to do a lot of investigative digging. They rely on us to tell them when something is happening--almost always."

"Actually," Devlin says, "the Coalition is so accustomed to [calling us with story leads], that they are kind of unhappy when we end up finding about things in other ways. So they are really the masters at being tuned into the media, and calling you, and bringing

you stuff, and showing you what has happened or pointing you in the right direction."

Coalition representatives have been doing independent research on water quality issues for several years, and this pro-active approach has enabled them to pass along fresh leads and updates to media personnel on a regular basis. Further, their knowledge of the Clark Fork-Pend Orielle watershed and their scientific discipline has earned them a reputation as "credible" advocates.

"We're perceived as being reliable and responsible," Farling says, "and we've been around to develop relationships."

When Dave Fitzpatrick started working for the Standard as the paper's Anaconda bureau reporter, he lacked experience in covering the environment. "One of the first things I did when I was over in Anaconda was to call the Coalition," Fitzpatrick says. "I asked Bruce Farling to send me everything he could on environmental stuff. He was pretty fair. He didn't just send over stuff that they had done."

Fitzpatrick says that the Coalition provided him with informed responses on many of the Superfund issues he covered in Anaconda. "They would go through a study or plan and pick it apart," he says. "I trusted them. I think they were pretty well acknowledged for looking at things that ARCO (the Atlantic Richfield Company) or the E.P.A. (Environmental Protection Agency) presented and then coming out with a respected opinion on those matters."

Although he has been covering environmental issues in the Butte and Anaconda area for over three years, Fitzpatrick says that he still

doesn't understand a lot of the details involved. He refers to the Coalition as "a good resource."

Coalition staff members put in long hours and that often keeps them ahead of the press on certain issues.

Duncan Adams, who took over reporting duties at the Standard's Anaconda bureau about two years ago, says that the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition is "a good advocacy group and they do a lot of the work that I don't have time to do in terms of pouring over documents and what not."

Adams reporting duties include covering environmental issues, the courts, the police beat, and local government.

Recognizing that many of the reporters in the area don't have much time to investigate the scoops they are given, Coalition staffers often use their own time to develop the story leads they pass along.

"In some ways," Adams says, "I rely on them to do some of that initial work."

Adams took a course in science writing while getting his master's degree in journalism. Nonetheless, he thinks that he didn't have enough experience with environmental issues when he first arrived here from Massachusetts two years ago.

He says that Coalition representatives "have been able to take complicated subjects and make them understandable."

Beyond their ability to help reporters comprehend the issues, Coalition staffers are sensitive to the deadlines reporters face.

"They are really good at getting back to me," Adams says. "If I'm working on a deadline that comes to mean a lot. If they are not

in the office when I call, they get back to me as soon as they can and I appreciate that."

Defining Effective Environmental Advocacy

"Our strengths with the Standard," says the Coalition's Bruce Farling, include that "we're the only public interest organization that deals with some of the issues they cover in depth. In a lot of respects, it's the same thing with the Missoulian. With some of the issues we're recognized as 'the water quality guys.'"

This reputation, confirmed by more than one reporter, has been acheived over the course of several years.

Peter Nielsen earned a B.S. and an M.S. in environmental fields. While working as a commercial outfitter and river guide, he witnessed a lot of water problems and made a commitment to do something about them. He volunteered his services to the Coalition in the spring and summer of 1985, helping organize a float trip to raise money and assisting with the production of the group's newsletter. He was hired on as executive director at the end of January 1986, but started working near the first of that month. He put in 40 to 60 hours a week during his six-plus years with the Coalition, and spent many more hours talking to people who approached him on the street. His experience and effort have paid off.

Sherry Devlin describes her relationship with the Coalition staff as "very congenial," and adds that, "in terms of their knowledge of the Clark Fork River and the related Superfund issues, I trust them as people who have really spent some time, beyond just being advocates,

gaining the scientific background and the depth of knowledge to provide some meaningful information."

Part of that trust, Devlin explains, comes from the credibility of Coalition representatives. "They haven't ever led me astray," she says.

"The way I looked at it was very simple," Nielsen says. "We had several people on staff, all with different skills and perspectives, to help answer questions. Whenever I was doing a story and I was asked a question that I didn't know the answer to, or that I didn't feel I could answer as well as somebody else on the staff, then I would try to bring them into the story."

Credibility is an important part of the relationship, Devlin says. "Peter Nielsen was very strong in the science field and led us into some good areas, and Bruce Farling has areas that he has clearly developed expertise in that we and a lot of other people don't have."

"Credibility gets you somewhere," Nielsen says, "but if you're constantly making mistakes, or even making just a few a year, you will ruin your credibility and that is something you can't afford to do. If you don't know the answer, say that you don't know the answer! Or even better, say 'I don't know, but I can look that up and call you back.' I do that a lot. It's important."

Devlin demands honesty from her sources and says that when spokespeople mislead her to get into the newspaper, "it just about ruins them."

"We don't want people to get our attention by overstating something," Missoulian Editor Brad Hurd says. "We want it as close

to the mark as they can possibly make it. What goes around comes around, and over time we get to know who the better sources are."

Hurd believes that the Missoulian has had "a good, professional relationship" with Coalition representatives. "They've always impressed me as being...credible, straightforward, and available."

The credibility of Coalition representatives is in favorable standing with the Standard's Dave Fitzpatrick as well. "They've never steered me wrong," he says. "It's a good relationship."

Fitzpatrick adds that the information he receives from Coalition staffers is always technically accurate: "If they give me a figure, I can call someone at the E.P.A. and they will say, 'Yes, that number is a possibility.' They know what they are talking about, and so I trust them from that perspective."

Coalition personnel are praised for their knowledge of the media as well as for their credibility. A key player for them in this area is Bruce Farling, the group's conservation director.

Farling has a bachelor's degree in environmental science and is working towards a master's degree in journalism. He has spent several years with the Forest Service and logged ten years as a freelance writer. His portfolio also includes experience co-teaching an environmental reporting class at the Univeristy of Montana and time on the staff of High Country News.

While Farling's time and standing with the Coalition placed him in the interim director's seat when Peter Nielsen took a position with the Missoula County Health Department earlier this year, he told the

Coalition's board of directors that he didn't want the job on a permanent basis.

Nonetheless, he says that he made it clear to the board that they should consider media awareness as a top criterion when choosing the new director. "The person has to be able to speak and write and has to know something about the media," he told them. "On the other hand, they don't necessarily have to be the only person who deals with the media."

Farling describes the approach he and Nielsen took as more of a media tandem. "Understanding of the media is one of the reasons that they hired me," he says. "I didn't have a monopoly on this information, but I knew a little bit more than Peter did, and I think he gained a better understanding by having somebody on the staff who knew a little about the industry."

The energies that Farling and Nielsen brought to the Coalition were very different, but the cumulative effect was substantial. Farling gave the group the curious mind of a journalist and a media-wise set of eyes; Nielsen gave the group a scientific body of knowledge and a personable and accessible face.

"Peter liked having his mug in front of the camera and being quoted by the media," Farling explains. "He had the kind of ego where he really liked that and so that worked for us."

For his own part, Farling advised Nielsen not to inundate reporters with Coalition information: "I would say, 'Be more selective and I think we'll get more out of a lot of the reporters'—and I think we did."

The Standard's Duncan Adams is one to confirm this notion.

"Without exception," Adams says, "every time Peter called it seemed to be newsworthy to me. When he called I usually followed up on it."

Farling says that relationships with reporters take careful consideration. "There's this weird balance," he says. "You want them to cover a story that is important to you, and you would really like to have this slant that you want on it—that's natural. On the other hand, you've got to watch your relationship with reporters to make sure that you're not pushing them too much."

Devlin says that of all the environmental groups she has come across while working the environmental beat, the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition "probably has the most successful relationship" with her.

There are several reasons for this, she says, including "the fact that they understand, and I know they don't like it, the reality of the newspaper business—that there is only so much we can do on different things—and they kind of play to that knowledge.

"Some of the groups that are maybe more difficult, or our relationships are more problematic," she adds, "result from their lack of understanding that I have a big variety of things to take care of and, on a given day, their particular issue may not be my top priority."

In fact, each workday Devlin compiles a long list of story leads to pursue. On many of those days she couldn't complete her list even if she worked around the clock—which she says isn't going to happen because, like most other reporters, her life transcends the newspaper world.

"Reporters are human beings," Nielsen says. "If you jump all over them or trash them about some little thing, such as they didn't run your story, or if you don't help them when they know you easily could have or just don't pick them up, then they're not going to feel obligated to pick you up."

Nielsen says that good reporter/source relationships involve give and take from both parties. "It's important for reporters not to burn their bridges with their sources," he says. "It's also important for sources to make sure that they don't burn their bridges with reporters."

Duncan Adams thinks that Coalition representatives are diplomatic in their treatment of reporters. "They express appreciation for you when you look into stories. A certain level of it is all manipulation," he says, "but they're skilled at manipulating."

During his tenure with the Coalition, Nielsen found that it was best to avoid holding grudges against representatives of the media. His approach to passing along information to contacts involved a steady flow of communication, a friendly attitude, and a feel for when issues could be brought to the surface.

Devlin says that she trusts and respects Nielsen because "he is very good at doing interviews, at talking to reporters, at saying things that end up in newspaper stories, and at making quotes quotable."

She also says that Nielsen proves the validity of his leads. "Before he talks to you," says Devlin, "he lines-out kind of logically, with explanations for everything, what he's going to say and what backs that up, and he has documentation: 'Here's the letter to that guy or this guy and here's what we found here and there.'

"He just doesn't throw out wild accusations," she continues.

"He could have spent his time at the Clark Fork Coalition bashing ARCO (the Atlantic Richfield Company) and talking bad about them. He didn't do that, but he certainly bashed ARCO.

"Take the story about the [ARCO] suit," Devlin says. "In the story he plays a very small part, but he is the reason I knew about it in the first place. And while he can have a few things to say about it, he's good enough at this to know that this also serves his purpose.

"It's not him standing around saying, 'Oh, those dirty dogs at ARCO,'" she explains, "which would piss ARCO off and then they wouldn't work with him."

Devlin says she isn't suprised that Nielsen has already become a spokesperson for the Missoula County Health Department.

Nielsen knows how to play the media game. "The attention span of the media is, generally, fairly short," he says, "but that's not the media's fault. I think that it's because people's attention spans are also short. People respond to things that are 'hot' issues at the time. Things are in the public eye for a short period, and in that time you have an opportunity to make your point and make any type of incremental gains that you can.

"The fundamental, underlying issues are always there," he adds, "but it's a symptom-by-symptom, case-by-case approach that you're taking. Things come along and to some people they are crises and to some people they are threats, but they are also opportunities because they made the issues public."

Nielsen says that the recent Conoco spill in Missoula reveals how an issue can develop. "It's gotten the public's attention, it's gotten the politicians' attention, it's gotten the regulators' attention, it's gotten Conoco's attention, and so we're going to be able to focus that attention for a short period of time," he says. "You've got to work with the media during such times to keep things pumped up to some extent and to take advantage of the chance to raise awareness about the issues. We can't make the situation perfect in that short period of time, but we can make substantial improvements."

Community Politics

"Having issues rise to the surface of public priority provides short periods of time with which to make good things happen," Nielsen says, "and the media is part of that process."

"It's not the whole part of it though," he adds. "It's not the part where you do your most important work. It's not the part where you get things done. It's where people see you and it's where people in the street know you from, but it's not where you make things really happen."

Nielsen knows quite a bit about newspaper marketing and the art of public relations. Asked to compare and contrast how he approached reporters at the Missoulian and the Montana Standard, Nielsen starts his answer by focusing on the differences between the two communities in which these papers are based.

"The Standard covers Butte and Anaconda, primarily Butte," he says. "The Missoulian doesn't cover up there at all. They're exclusive markets."

Nielsen says that the Butte paper gave "a lot more ink" to some of the Superfund issues that the Coalition was concerned about. "The Missoula paper gave some ink to them," he adds, "but not from the same angle and not from the same local thrust that Butte was interested in with regards to its own backyard.

"Likewise," Nielsen says, "the Missoula paper covered more things that we were interested in down at this end of the watershed that Butte wouldn't have in its paper unless they were picked up on the wire and were explosive issues."

Nielsen says that there are "fundamental differences of geography and orientation" that differentiate Missoula from Butte, and that the two newspapers are different as a symptom of these circumstances.

"Butte is definitely more pro-industry and pro-business than Missoula is--there is no question about it," he says. "It just stems from their history, it goes way back, and they have a little different orientation in terms of how they cover stories, but more so how they editorialize about things."

"When we were dealing with Butte or Anaconda," Bruce Farling relates, "I advised Peter to understand, as much as possible, the people of Butte and Anaconda and, in our media relations, to make sure that we had the opportunity to always mention that we sympathize with those folks up there."

Farling says that he stressed "the common ground of issues" and that this approach helped the Coalition over time: "We're accepted a little bit better in Butte and Anaconda, to a certain extent, then we were four years ago."

The Standard's Dave Fitzpatrick says that, in his opinion at least, Coalition representatives have been sensitive to the employment and financial concerns that exist in Butte and Anaconda. "They appear to understand that you have to take into consideration the economics of a given situation," he says.

"With a couple of the mining issues, for example, they have said, 'We're not necessarily opposed to the mining, but we want it done right and with respect for the Clark Fork.' That's where they seem to come from most often.

"Likewise, with the clean-up around here," Fitzpatrick adds, "they are concerned about the methods as well as the end result and they want to make sure that the best methods are used to protect the environment. They don't want to sacrifice the economic development, which seems to bode well for them."

Fitzpatrick's opinion, however, is not universally held. The Standard's Editorial Page Editor Jeff Gibson says that Editor Rick Foote has, on occasion, taken an "adversarial position" with regard to the Coalition.

While not directly mentioning the Coalition as a cause, Foote says that there is "a general sense of apprehensiveness" in the Butte area concerning the slow progression of the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund clean-up program.

"It's stifling the development of the community and industry," he says. "It's a limbo situation and it looks like it's going to be that way for some time."

"There is a lot of frustration," says Duncan Adams. "Sometimes I think that people start pushing for remedies that might be more temporary in nature because they want something done and I think that the Coalition often picks up on that. They often say, 'It took us a hundred years to create this mess....'"

While this approach would seem to appeal to common sense, it has its price.

"We're probably perceived as this outside organization going into their communities, Butte and Anaconda, especially Butte, and telling them what to do," says Farling. "They don't like that."

"Butte is a pretty parochial place," says Gibson. "People have a real 'us against the world' mentality."

According to Fitzpatrick, "Anaconda was the same. When the Coalition came in with a plan or an idea for comment, it was frequently tossed out by the public. The feeling was: 'The people from Missoula don't care about us.'"

"People around here are incredibly friendly," contends Adams, who grew up in Virginia and lived around Boston for about five years before moving out here and being stationed in Anaconda, "but if you're an outsider there is certainly a different status and you are viewed in a different way and you are talked about in a different way and that is probably the way it will be for several years. I will probably never be an Anacondan."

He says that the general sentiment in the area for the Coalition is "not necessarily positive. There is a sense, from some people, that they slow down the process because they are asking for permanent-type

solutions. There is a sense that they are sitting down in Missoula and telling us how to do things, and that is not accepted too well.

"And they're not Anacondans," he adds with a laugh.

The Coalition has a strong following from Missoula on downstream to Sand Point, and the community projects, special events and fundraisers that the group sponsors and holds in that area are warmly received. The Coalition's support upstream, however, wherefrom flow many of the wastes that the group is trying to control, is rather weak.

Murray Carpenter, the Coalition's development director, says that the membership numbers in the upper basin, which includes Anaconda and Butte, are "very, very low." He says that this situation is due partly to the fact that many of the Superfund clean-up projects will primarily benefit the people downstream.

According to Adams, people in Anaconda aren't that interested in Clark Fork River issues "unless they involve sportsmen in some way."

Gibson and Fitzpatrick say that the main issues of interest for people around Butte include "things like stream flows, grazing, access to resources and the wilderness debate—and not so much Clark Fork River issues and the Superfund program."

One of the Coalition's current priorities is to employ an upstream resident to dig into the roots of the problem. Carpenter says that the group has recently acquired the money needed to hire a part-time employee from the area to work in the area.

Peter Nielsen thinks that a Butte staffer might be more trusted than someone from Missoula. "I don't think that I, personally, or the Coalition as a whole, ever made too many inroads there," he adds.

"Hopefully," Carpenter says, "having a Butte person working on Butte issues will help the situation."

Another new path for the Coalition has unfolded in the form of a name adaption—near the end of 1991 the Clark Fork Coalition became the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition.

"The reason we changed the name," explains Carpenter, "was to increase the emphasis on the lake, which receives all of our pollution."

Times of Transition

While working to reform its niche both upstream and downstream from Missoula, the Coalition is dealing with home reconstruction as well.

Since Peter Nielsen left the group, and even a few months prior to his departure, both Coalition staffers and newspaper reporters alike have noticed a lull in communications. The reasoning or, more accurately, the guesswork used to explain this situation is varied—the Coalition is going through an interim period; Superfund is in a less active phase; the newspapers aren't going after things as much—but there is a consensus agreement that things are different now.

"It's mostly changed in that Bruce isn't exactly the same person as Peter," Sherry Devlin says. "He's not bad, he's just different."

"Certainly the relationship hasn't deteriorated," she adds. "It's just been quieter and that's been more because things have been quieter with them. I think. Maybe they haven't been. Maybe they'll tell you, 'We've got all this stuff going on and she hasn't been doing a thing.'"

"I'm not sure what it is with Sherry," says Bruce Farling. "In the last year, she has only interviewed me for a story once where I got

my name in the paper; or I brought stories to her and she never jumped on them.

"It may be me, but I don't know what I've done," he adds. "Among other things I'm a journalist, and that might have something to do with it.

"For some reason," he concludes, "I don't think we've been getting the same level of coverage, when I've had to take the lead, that we've had in the past. It's probably just a relationship that hasn't been fully constructed yet."

In an interview conducted roughly a year before Farling expressed these comments, however, then-Coalition Executive Director Peter Nielsen revealed similar concern regarding the Missoulian's coverage: "There are more story ideas that we send over than get covered—especially lately."

In a more recent interview, Nielsen, the county health official, reflects that "Sherry tended to be overwhelmed with her beat and perhaps was overcommitted to other things outside of her beat at the paper and, therefore, was not able to develop some of the bigger stories and bigger leads that we gave her—and that was frustrating for some folks within our organization."

According to Devlin, the Missoulian's city editor and managing editor "kind of set the priorities" of coverage. "Probably the first of those would be the Clark Fork River issues and Superfund clean-up," she says, "and that seems to come and go.

"There was a period of time, probably about a year and a half or so ago, when I was writing a lot more about that and it seems to be in a

quieter phase now, and I don't know if that's because I'm busy with all these other things, but it just seems like it's quieter."

Farling believes that Devlin is "very overworked" and that "she does more work than any other reporter at that paper."

Devlin has been covering Montana's congressional race. She says that the campaign "is currently the one thing that I cover that is not on my beat. They divided up all the political races to different people and, actually, I asked for that one. First of all because it is such a hot one, and second because it has a great deal to do, from time to time, with the environment."

"Overall, the Coalition generally gets decent coverage," Farling says. "There are always complaints, and I have these—that they're not covering the right things or that they have an emphasis in one particular area. There are also things that we work on that don't get in the paper very much and that should get in the paper more."

"On the other hand," Farling says, "we don't really do anything differently when we're not getting stuff in the paper."

Getting in a word or two on how to improve relations with media representatives, Peter Nielsen concludes:

"Know your facts, have your stories well developed, help the reporter do his or her job, and cultivate your relationships over a long period of time."

"Don't hassle reporters about their stories after they write them," he continues in a slow and deliberate voice. "If you do have to say something to a reporter about a story after it's written, do so in an apologetic way: 'Sorry, I'm not trying to criticize your story, but

I thought that you should know that what actually got into your story, and it may have just been edited that way'—don't cast blame—but there is a fact wrong there and you may want to know that for the next time.

"'You know, I'm not asking for a retraction, god dammit!'" says Nielsen, still play-acting. "Don't ever do that! Ever! I don't care how bad it is. Shine on. Forget it."

Nielsen says that while there were instances when he succumbed to the internal pressure to react, he tried to maintain his cool.

"Rick Foote used to personally go after me and eventually he came around," Nielsen says. "The best thing to do is let it ride. Don't fan the fire."

Changes in the Newspaper Business

USA Today, with its multitude of colors and graphics, sidebars and summaries, became enormously popular in the 1980's. In correlation, there are those who have described a changing nature in the newspaper industry toward a more broadcast style of journalism.

"Changing?" says Bruce Farling. "It's changed.

"I haven't seen it with the Standard," he says. "I've seen it with the Missoulian. When you get ten stories on the front page and then a handful of stories in a review column—that wasn't what the Missoulian was ten years ago."

Peter Nielsen has also noticed a transition. "I think it has taken place to some extent at the Missoulian," he says. "It's been more difficult to get the more in-depth stories covered because they require a lot more work and a lot more space."

"I'm not doing anything differently," says Sherry Devlin. "I know that the newspaper would like to go that way, but it hasn't yet. I know that there are a lot of new readership studies out nationally, done by the Poynter Institute, that show people aren't reading newspapers; that they aren't reading pass jumps; that a lot of the things we assumed readers were doing all along, they weren't doing. I fully expect that to have an influence on what every paper looks like, not just the Missoulian."

"We're doing some things to make the paper more efficient and easier to read, there's no question about that," says Missoulian Editor Brad Hurd. "We are doing a lot more with information—graphics, charts, sidebars, and summaries of stories—but I don't say that apologetically."

"I don't think that USA Today is bad. It's mostly good. It's a different kind of paper and it's designed for someone who is traveling and kind of in a hurry, and I think that there are parts of it that are wonderful and that have served as a model for other papers."

Hurd says that the Missoulian isn't making any changes at the expense of in-depth reporting. "On the environmental beat," he says, "the issues are so complex that it's tough to spin the yarn in 10 or 12 inches. We'll devote a big chunk of real estate to any issue if we feel that's the best way to convey the information."

"The problem is that they are replacing space with more ads," Nielsen says. "There is more ad space than there used to be. We aren't getting more stories, maybe we're getting less and they're shorter. At least that's my perception."

"It's going to be less often that we get the major story covered," he says. "We will get in some more minor things. Unfortunately, that

doesn't cut it for most environmental stories. Mining, hazardous waste clean-up, forest practices, in-stream flows, water law—these things can't be covered in five paragraphs."

"I do know that there has been some kind of conscious decision over at the Missoulian," says Bruce Farling, "to have more fluff, shorter stories and USA Today kind of stuff."

"They have not done an investigative series or investigative piece dealing with natural resources or the environment in at least three years," he adds.

According to Devlin, her definition of an environmental reporter's role is "probably broader" than that of some other reporters, such as former Missoulian reporter Richard Manning. "I cover a wider variety of issues," she says, "and his definition, at least towards the end when I've looked through his clippings, focused more exclusively on the timber issues."

Devlin thinks that there is "a big variety of issues and people ought to know at least a little bit about these other things. On the other hand," she adds, "how he did it was such that people probably got a lot more in-depth coverage of that one particular issue."

Nielsen thinks that environmental coverage could be improved if reporters were doing a lot of short stories and continuously tracking the issues, but says that he doesn't see this type of coverage happening.

"I don't know which is the right way to do it," Devlin says. "The best way would be if you had both—if you had someone to cover timber issues and that was their one and only assignment."

"There is a reporter at the Eugene paper and he is the timber reporter, and full-time, forty hours a week he covers those issues," she says. "He doesn't worry about the quality of the water in the aquifer in Eugene or the river or the air—unless they were degraded because of forestry."

Devlin says that as the situation stands, she has several pressing subjects to deal with. "Equally important" are forestry, wilderness and water quality issues.

"Air quality is about to take up more and more of my time," she adds, "and that's because, locally, people have decided that they are going to be interested in that again."

"Other things come and go and are hot for a while," Devlin continues. "Endangered species is another area I have to spend a lot of time on, and that kind of depends on what endangered animal is hot and wolves are hot right now. It used to be grizzly bears that were hot."

"If there is a corporate philosophy" that guides the paper, says Editor Brad Hurd, "it is to be relevant and valuable to your customers. It's more of a populist or marketing approach."

The environment is a major issue in the Missoulian's market area, he says. It involves "people's livelihoods--the timber supply, certainly, as it directly relates to a large component of our economy."

"It's a bread and butter issue," Hurd continues. "It relates a lot to recreation--hunting, fishing and camping. It also relates to aesthetics, and it relates to water quality and air quality."

"And then I think that people are really interested in animals," he adds. "We write a lot about bears and wolves and mountain lions, and people of all ages and genders are real interested in critters for any number of reasons. We've asked about that in research."

"I am 100 percent sure that a lot of the story selection that goes on at the Missoulian has to do with: (A) the reporter's personal interests, and (B) things that will sell newspapers," says Bruce Farling, "and that's why I think that there are some things that they cover a little too much and at the expense of other environmental topics."

Farling says that "wolves, grizzlies, and wilderness" comprise the vast majority of the Missoulian's environmental reporting. "I just think that there could be a better balance of environmental coverage or, at least, more environmental coverage as opposed to better balance," he says.

According to Nielsen, advocates have to adapt to the changes being made. "I think that it's important for environmentalists to view it as part of their job to be helpful to reporters," he says. "If you go in there with a chip on your shoulder and say, 'Hey, this is your job and all I'm going to tell you is what's going on and then you do the work and if you ask me to do anything, well, I'm too proud'--then you're failing."

Devlin says that while there might come a time when she won't be writing 45-inch stories, there might also come a time when she will be writing "three 15-inch stories that run alongside three jazzy charts.

"I don't see this as moving away from environmental stories," Devlin adds. "The interest in environmental stories is increasing."

"We did a full-page Sunday graphic on the aquifer," says Brad Hurd. "It was basically a huge illustration, but it was real compelling and it told in pictures and in words the composition of the aquifer and about the threat."

Hurd says that five years ago the Missoulian didn't have the skill and technical wherewithal to do an illustration like that. "We would have served up a hundred inches of text, and the die-hards would have read it," he says in reference to the aquifer graphic. "With this, I think a lot more people were informed. I go out and I see this in classrooms and it really warms my heart that it's become a teaching tool."

"It was real visual, real colorful, very accurate and scientific," Hurd adds. "If that's a trend, I'm all for it."

The Standard's Duncan Adams also thinks that visual elements can improve environmental coverage. While the Standard lacks the resources to do much in the way of graphics, Adams believes that "they really help people to understand the places and issues."

"I have a hunch that there is a large percentage of people who see the word 'Superfund' in the first few paragraphs and then go on to something else," he adds. "A graphic, just a bird's-eye view of the Warm Springs Pond network, should accompany almost every story because it's really hard to picture it in your mind."

According to Brad Hurd, "Effectiveness lies in how many people you reach. If we can add elements to the paper that will make us more attractive to more people, then I think we're doing a better job."

"There is a lot of preaching to the converted that goes on in the newspaper industry," he adds. "If you look at the demographics of

any survey that any newspaper does, the young people are not embracing what we're doing. We need them as customers. They need to be informed.

"I don't think it's patronizing if we need to break stories up and hand them over in a more visual format," he continues. "Some people think that's like TV, and maybe it is, but if we can get more people in the fold and provide more information then I think that's good.

Hurd also says that "a lot of this is evolving, and I'm not sure what's real effective and what isn't. I do know that we're trying a lot of different things."

"If this way isn't working," says Devlin, "then I'm all for the new way as long as it doesn't trivialize serious things. I don't think you have to make serious environmental stories into something happy and frivolous," she says. "I think they can still be presented in a serious manner--and I can't imagine the Missoulia ever being something like USA Today."

The Team Concept of Coverage

"The Missoulia had an environmental reporter long before there was generally such a thing," says Sherry Devlin. "We started back in the '60s and have a tradition that a lot of newspapers don't."

Regardless, even the Missoulia hasn't solved all the challenges of such a beat.

Summarizing what hampers her environmental reporting, Devlin says "the sheer lack of staff, lack of time, and I guess I'm not particularly being of a mind to donate my services beyond what I'm paid for. I do have a life outside the paper that I'd like to continue, also.

"Frankly," she asserts, "we are considerably better reporters if we have the other life, too—like we know real people in Missoula and we know what they might be thinking and know what they might want to read about in the paper."

Devlin says that the reporters at the Missoulian put in more than 40 hours a week. "At some point, though," she adds, "you've done all that you can possibly do for one week. There are always a dozen or so stories on the list that I didn't have time to do, and everybody else in here has their own beat in which they have equal trouble getting done."

Amidst such conditions, which are certainly not unique to their paper, Missoulian editors are formulating a new approach to coverage.

"Don Baty, Jim Ludwick and I are part of a team that they have established," Devlin says. "Don is in charge of city government, Jim is in charge of business, and I am in charge of the environment, but because we're on a team together it's our responsibility to communicate with each other and fill in for each other."

"We're a coverage team," she says.

While the team approach is still in the development stage, Devlin says, "in retrospect we can see that the team would have worked when the Ross Electric controversy came up because it was an environmental story, it was a city government story, and it was also a business story."

Had there been a team assembled, she says, "the notion would have been that when this controversy came up I would have taken the lead on it because of the serious environmental issues, but we would have also sat down as a team and decided who would have done what and coordinated our approach."

i.
070.4493337

H5986

Having a team assembled might also allow for the sharing of duties. "It would be up to me to ask for help," Devlin says. "Or the city editor, Mike McNally, might recognize my workload and say, 'Geez, Sherry is covering five different things today, perhaps she wants some assistance.' He would then suggest that I talk to Jim, and he's been doing this recently."

The team approach "was designed to help a group of individuals keep a good dialogue on coverage issues and be able to back each other up and collaborate," says Brad Hurd. "If I can use an example of timber supply—it's a forest practices issue and it's a logs for the mills issue. Sherry's beat and Jim Ludwick's beat, the business beat, dovetail a lot.

"What we're trying to achieve," he says, "is that synergism that people working together get."

"Having a team helps in some respects," Devlin says, "but it also depends on how much is going on for the rest of the team."

She says that while the team approach creates the opportunity for more in-depth coverage of some issues, it also presents a potential trade-off.

The idea behind the team "was to allow more flexibility," says Devlin, "but then you have to pass it around. After I have my two months, say, studying the Clark Fork River, or whatever, and coming up with a series of stories, then Baty can spend two months looking at the housing authority and I'm going to have to cover city council in addition to the environmental beat. So it works both ways."

Still, Devlin says that she and her partners are optimistic about the prospects of a team endeavor: "The three of us like the idea and

think it will work. We just haven't gotten to the point where any of us has felt ready to try it out."

When they get to that point, perhaps there is already a good place to start. As Devlin herself says, "I've always felt that it's a shame that there isn't at least one reporter at one newspaper in Montana that is assigned to cover Superfund as their actual job. That could easily be someone's full-time job. Maybe not at the Missoulian, it probably needs to be somebody at the Butte paper."

The Standard's Duncan Adams leans in the same direction. "We don't do a lot of pro-active planning around Superfund coverage," he says. "I would like for us to do more. That's one thing that I've sort of differed with Rick Foote about—I thought it would be really good to have one reporter on the environmental beat.

"This is the largest Superfund project in the country and it would be helpful to have one person focus on it almost exclusively," Adams continues, "but the reality is that we just don't have that kind of budget."

The team approach, in some form, might be part of an answer to the question: "How can complex environmental issues, such as the Superfund program, be covered in sufficient depth?"

Analysis

The Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition has a rather close-knit relationship with the Missoulian and the Montana Standard. Reporters at these papers rely on the Coalition to do some of the initial digging into and development of Clark Fork River issues, and the Coalition staff,

to a certain extent, arrange their agenda with regard for the marketing philosophy of each newspaper.

As then-Coalition Executive Director Peter Nielsen said in May of 1991: "There are things we are dealing with that the Missoulian would never be interested in that are downstream, and there are things upstream that they aren't interested in for that matter. So we have to prioritize what we deal with by considering what's going to be of most interest to readers in this market."

Coalition representatives strive to put out the message that the Clark Fork River is something that binds all of the people who live along it, but they are the only ones who are really explaining the commonality of river issues and it is disturbing to think where we'd be without them.

Neither the Missoulian nor the Standard have a reporter who is solely dedicated to covering the environment, and the reporters at these papers who are assigned to the issues face time and resource constraints.

Subsequently, these papers are unable to fully cover all of the numerous wildlife, public lands and air quality issues in the area--let alone the details that are buried in the waste piles of the country's largest geographic Superfund site.

Pam Hillery, who works for the E.P.A. and is the community involvement coordinator for Superfund in this area, says that it took her more than a year of full-time work before she felt comfortable talking about Superfund issues. She thinks that the time constraints reporters face and reporter turnover are the main things that hinder coverage of Superfund.

Further, Hillery feels that a reporter would probably have to cover the issues for several years, and do so on a regular basis, in order to adequately understand and portray the Superfund process.

A few years back, the Missoulian had an environmental reporter who covered one primary environmental area in depth. There are some who claim that this approach created an atmosphere in which a lot of issues were overlooked. Currently, the newspaper has an environmental reporter who tries to cover every issue at least a little bit, and there are people who claim that this approach doesn't expose the issues thoroughly.

There are potential solutions to this dilemma. The Standard's Duncan Adams and the Missoulian's Sherry Devlin both offered the idea that it would probably make for better environmental coverage if there was a reporter whose sole job was to keep track of one or a few specific issues, and another reporter assigned to grapple with the whole spectrum of daily environmental news.

If the environment is the priority that the editors of these papers make it out to be, this shouldn't be a far-fetched notion. If this notion is deemed unfeasible, however, perhaps the team approach to reporting can be developed to help reporters cover more issues more fully.

A one-paper team approach might allow a reporter covering the gamut of issues to now and again spend time researching a certain topic more deeply. A two-paper coordinated approach, of some form, might allow for someone to **always** be concentrating on the variety of general or breaking environmental news, and for someone to **always** be focusing on the more complex or ongoing issues.

10 248MT
TH 430
06/06 31400-45 NLB

2. THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE COALITION WITH THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

The Players

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) was founded in 1983, and has grown to over 4,500 individual members and 94 member organizations across the United States.¹² The group has a 16-member staff, a 14-member science council and a 19-member board of directors.¹³ GYC's mission is to ensure the preservation of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—one of the largest, essentially intact ecosystems in the temperate zones of the earth.¹⁴

According to Membership and Development Director Ken Barrett, "GYC came together out of the frustrations of watching an area comprised of three states and twenty-some counties being managed by a multiplicity of agencies—the Forest Service, the Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service and others on the national level, along with three states and all of their conservation departments and sub-departments, and a variety of local governments and administrations.

"The whole thing was a nest of groups that often crossed purposes with one another," Barrett says. "There was a need for a new organization that looked at the entire area rather than just a specific area within Greater Yellowstone."

GYC's headquarters are located in Bozeman, Montana—a university town 90 miles northwest from Yellowstone National Park. Surrounded by mountains and forests, and resting in the fertile soil of Gallatin Valley, Bozeman is a mecca for recreationists and a market center of agricultural products.¹⁵

The population of Bozeman is 23,500 and its projected growth rate is 1.7 percent per year.¹⁶ According to Bill Wilke, managing editor of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, "we're getting a lot of new people moving in here from out of state.

"It's a mixed bag of people," he says. "The new people coming in tend to be self-employed people who don't need to live where their work is—they can carry on a business over a telephone or modem or out of a briefcase or fax machine."

Wilke says that there are also a lot of new people who are young and retired. "They are coming here and driving the real estate market crazy because, in general, they are bringing a lot of money with them," he says.

"The third type of people moving in are from the West Coast," says Wilke. "We call them 'the new breed of nouveau riche' because they developed a lot of home equity in very, very expensive California real estate and then they sold it and they brought that home equity here. In California that home equity made them a middle-class citizen, in Montana it made them an independently wealthy person."

Wilke says that while the Chronicle's daily circulation is only about 13,000, market penetration in the Gallatin County area is "a little bit over 80 percent."

The Chronicle is published Sunday through Friday and has a staff of 20 full-time employees, seven of whom are reporters.¹⁷ The paper has had an environmental beat for a little more than three years.¹⁸

Although the staff is somewhat small, Wilke believes that having a designated environmental reporter "is justifiable for several reasons.

H745m

11. 11. 11.
 12. 12. 12.
 13. 13. 13.
 14. 14. 14.
 15. 15. 15.

二

9

"The readership, being the people who live in Bozeman and the southwestern Montana area in general," he explains, "are very interested in issues that involve land management policy in the national forests and parks because they spend a good deal of their time, in the form of recreation and/or work, in public lands."

Coverage of public lands involves "Yellowstone National Park, the Gallatin National Forest, wilderness issues, timber programs, mining activities, and oil and gas extraction issues," Wilke says. "That's enough to keep one reporter busy right there."

The Chronicle is owned by Seattle-based Pioneer Newspapers. According to Wilke, Pioneer's interest in the Chronicle is limited strictly to the commercial aspects of the newspaper.

"They've never participated in any of our decisions in terms of the editorial aspects of the paper," he says.

Speaking as a member of the Chronicle's editorial board, Wilke says that "the only stated thing we try to accomplish is to reflect, in some fashion, the interests of our readers."

Whereas Missoulain Editor Brad Hurd says that "effectiveness lies in how many people you reach," Wilke says that "our most important mission is to stimulate interest and discussion of the issues and make people participate more."

Reaching Out in Polarized Times

GYC's Ken Barrett thinks that "Yellowstone" is a magic word. "I could stand down at the international arrivals building at Kennedy Airport," he says, "and I could say 'Yellowstone' and 'Coca-Cola' and

every single person getting off the plane would know what I was talking about. Those are two icons of American culture.

"Yellowstone was the first national park in the world," Barrett continues. "The Yellowstone Forest Reserve, which later became the Shoshone National Forest, was the first national forest reserve in the world. These places set precedents."

Asked if having "Yellowstone" in GYC's name helps garner support for the organization, Barrett says "oh, sure. If it was the 'Lower Basin Coalition,' it wouldn't be as sexy and sellable."

There is a flip side to GYC's name recognition, however. Scott McMillion, who covers public land issues for the Chronicle, says that a lot of people in Montana "have become anti-environmentalist because they feel that their whole way of life is under attack.

"That's how WETA (the Western Environmental Trade Association) has become so big," he adds. "They're playing on these fears and they hole-up GYC as the big bogeyman--the guy who wants to put them out of work and silence their snowmobiles."

GYC wasn't "as universally hated before WETA and People for the West got organized in this part of the state," McMillion continues. "These groups foment a lot of discontent. A big part of their agenda is to stir up hatred.

"GYC doesn't stir up hatred against snowmobilers," he says, "they just don't give much thought to the fact that somebody is going to lose his favorite snowmobiling spot that he's had for twenty-five years. That really doesn't factor into their position.

"There are a lot of people who automatically sneer at anything GYC says," McMillion continues, "and there are a lot of people on the other side who sneer at anything with a WETA or a People for the West label on it.

"There are also a lot of people who could give a shit," he adds.

Facing the challenges of hostile and indifferent segments of the population, GYC has been traveling a course that they believe is leading toward greater understanding of and respect for their message.

"If we want to get anywhere," GYC's Communication Director Bob Ekey says, "we certainly want to work with folks and have them understand what we're doing. We believe, whether it's the ag community or what have you, that we have a lot more common ground than we do different ground.

"We have a project called 'Greater Yellowstone Tomorrow' and the people involved with that are working on a blueprint for the management of Greater Yellowstone," Ekey continues. "The whole thing there is to get the communities involved in what we're doing."

Ekey says that GYC has identified six project communities and is working to bring business, social and political leaders together in order to have them articulate their personal visions for the future.

"Organizations have learned in the past that one can't go out and dictate to other people how they should live and what they should want," says Ekey. "Rather, it has been learned that it works better to go out and listen to what they have to say and then see if there is some common ground that can be addressed."

It is noteworthy that GYC's board of directors includes ranchers, business people, a resort owner, a real estate salesperson, an attorney,

a college professor, an author, a photographer, a media executive and a wildlife researcher.

"One of the things that people accuse us of all the time is that we want to stop all logging, all mining, and all exploitation of natural resources. Nothing could be further from the truth," Ekey says. "They're always pointing the finger and saying that all we want is recreation, but many of us have seen the nightmare called Aspen. Many of us have seen the nightmare called Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We are by no means people who only want recreation.

"We would like to maintain a diversity in the economy here," he says emphatically. "We would like to see logging done on a sustainable basis and we would like to see any mining done with the utmost care and consideration for all of the other resources, but we are certainly not naysayers."

Blending Energy with Experience

GYC staff members have been employed in a vast array of fields that include international conservation efforts, journalism, business, and law.

Ken Barrett has a degree from Cornell University in environmental education and biology; he has worked in commercial real estate; he helped found and nurture a business; he's been involved in television production; he's been involved with various kinds of venture capital work; he's run nature centers; he's just had his first story published in an anthology of writers from around the country; and he has been with GYC for almost five years.

"I came into this job with a unique combination of experiences," Barrett says, "and I think I am somewhat indicative of the different kinds of people here.

"The person who runs our Greater Yellowstone Tomorrow Project worked first for the Peace Corps and came out of that and got a graduate degree and then went to work for a couple of conservation organizations and ended up as kind of a program director for the World Wildlife Fund."

Barrett says that GYC's network is based on the national science and, to some degree, the international science.

"We're in the know," he says. "Most of the people here don't have ten years of experience—it's more like twenty or twenty-five years of real hard-core experience in various fields."

"I guess I am somewhat of an exception to that," says GYC's 25-year-old Dave Gaillard. "I graduated from college in Massachusettes a couple of years ago...and just started knocking on doors here in Bozeman about a year ago."

"This is kind of an organization in its prime years," says Barrett. "There are a lot of folks around with vast experience but they're out of energy because they're old, and then there are people who have enormous energy but not much experience. I think we have a fine balance of experience and energy."

Knowledge of the Media

Bob Ekey covered the Bozeman bureau for the Billings Gazette from 1984 to 1990. Before that, he worked as an environmental reporter for a newspaper in Ohio. He knows media life.

The Chronicle's Scott McMillion says he deals with Ekey on a regular basis. "Ekey's real careful about making sure that what he says is accurate," McMillion says. "He's an old newsman. He knows how everything works."

According to Ekey, it's essential to have "realistic expectations" of reporters. "When they do a story, it's not going to be slanted and it's just going to put all this stuff out there. While you expect them to be fair with you, you have to be fair with them and not take things personally."

Ekey says that the same basic rules apply to relations between any institutions or people, and that "there are times when it works well and times when it doesn't."

"It's a question of expectations too. We can't expect to have any reporter in our pocket," he says. "Our greatest challenge is getting them to write the story. Once they decide to write the story, we hope it will be fair and that our point-of-view will be represented."

"My strategy, for the most part," he continues, "involves getting issues to the press. We're confident enough that we're right on issues, so the big thing is getting the Chronicle and others interested in doing them."

Ekey says that GYC representatives provide response and story tips to reporters "when it's appropriate. If they call, we rarely say 'no comment' or 'we'll get back to you next week on that.' Being a former journalist, I understand their deadline pressures."

"As a newsman," McMillion says, "you have to fill up a page. When a story breaks or an event happens, somebody on the GYC staff is

070.449324
L8976b

always willing to give you a position. They understand deadlines—they're always there and they're informed on the issues.

"On the other side, look at WETA or People for the West or groups like that," he continues. "They do a lot of complaining because they don't get their name in the paper enough, but they're not prepared to take a position."

McMillion says that when a major story broke regarding the sale of a Plum Creek mill, GYC's Bart Koehler faxed him a press release within an hour.

On the other hand, he says, "I called two or three People for the West groups or their affiliates, and it was twenty hours after the sale had been announced, and they didn't have a comment. They didn't know what to think about it.

"GYC, the Wilderness Society and some other groups are two or three steps ahead of the press on several issues, whereas, the people on the other side of the environmental debate are always two or three steps behind the press," McMillion says.

"It's not their size so much as their level of sophistication," he adds. "Also, the environmental groups have had several years of experience with the press and these other groups are newer."

Asked whether GYC representatives contact him more often than he contacts them, McMillion says that "it's maybe 50-50.

"They like having their name in the paper," he adds, "and they like being called for a comment on pretty much any environment-related issue.

"And to give them credit," McMillion says, "they're always very well informed. Well, they're not always very well informed, but they're **always** ready to take a position on almost any issue."

"I think that our reputation among the media," says GYC's Ken Barrett, "is that we're pretty straight shooters, and if you ask us a question you are going to get an answer."

"Something that I've seen in this office which I really like," he continues, "is that I'll get a call from someone because no one else is immediately available, and I will say to the guy, 'I'm sorry, but I can't answer that question. I don't know enough to answer that question, but I will get someone to respond to you just as soon as I possibly can. Please give me your name and your telephone number and we'll get right back to you.'"

Barrett describes GYC staffers as straightforward, intelligent and determined.

"Some are more forceful than others and some are more politically left or right than others," Barrett says while laughing, "but they are all straight shooters—to use a Western term."

"They're good at getting their name in the paper," McMillion says of GYC representatives, "and they do that by being very well informed and by being ready to take a position."

"We don't jerk the media around," Barrett says. "If they make a request, we respond and do so as thoughtfully, vigorously, intellectually and honestly as we can. We treat the media fairly and we expect the same. All of us have had experience with the media."

"They know the press," McMillion concurs. "Anybody in the public eye is going to manipulate the press, and they're better at it than most."

"It's hardly magic," Ekey says regarding the methods GYC employs to contact newspapers. "There are letters to the editor and pitching editorials to the editors, trying to pitch story ideas to the reporters, press releases, and op-ed pieces. We exercise all of these options."

"You can overuse these too," he adds. "We don't write three letters a week. We try to space them out and write them when issues are pertinent."

Asked if he tries to develop stories for reporters, Ekey reveals a reporter/source relationship different than the one in the preceeding case study: "We don't do their work for them. It's kind of a pride thing with reporters."

Ekey, the veteran newsman, believes in respecting the individual integrity of others in the discipline. He doesn't worry too much about what reporters might write once they decide to cover a story, he only concerns himself with getting them to cover the story in the first place.

"You can pitch the story and explain where you're at on it and why you think it's a good news story and it's obvious that you hope they call you for a comment if they get around to writing it," he explains, "but they have to do the first-hand investigation and calling around."

Ekey says that he generally passes along information to reporters by telling them something along the lines of 'Hey, I heard this is going on,' and then letting the conversation progress from there. "You kind of release the rabbit," he says with a knowing grin, "and then let the hounds go after it."

"Everybody thinks there is all this spin doctor stuff involved, but it's pretty straightforward," he adds.

Regarding how responsive certain newspapers are to the ideas he passes along, Ekey says "well, it varies, you know, but I'm not going to be critical of them. Sometimes they'll get on something and sometimes they won't. Sometimes we'll issue a press release on an issue and it will be all over the front page, and the next time we issue a press release they might pick it up as a brief in the back or something like that.

"I understand, and the people here understand," he says, "that there are a lot of other factors at stake. When Los Angeles is running amuck with riots, you can't expect your story to get on the front page."

Ekey will try to capitalize on a slow news day, however: "If I see that things are slowing down over the holidays or whatever, then we might get a little more pro-active on some stuff."

Ekey and his cohorts are aware of the media's priorities and needs. GYC staffers are involved in a somewhat broader array of issues than the staff at the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition and, combined with the fact that several of the issues they are concerned with overlap with the interests of neighboring conservation groups, this causes them to use a little more restraint in passing along leads to the media. They do their homework, nonetheless, and are always ready to take a stand when an opportunity arises.

"About a month ago," Ekey says, "a big report was released that was critical of the National Park Service. The Park Service essentially did the report criticizing themselves, and there were some examples from Yellowstone that I tried to illuminate."

Ekey says that while his efforts resulted in some television play and a little newsprint, the media didn't bite on his ideas as hard as he thought they would. Regardless, he says that GYC's leads usually get followed up.

"We probably have three dozen media contacts in the Montana, Wyoming and Idaho region that we work with regularly, and this includes daily newspapers, television stations, radio stations and weeklies," he says. "If we give them a well written press release, it will run."

"Bob Ekey was a newsman for a long time and he knows what a news story is," the Chronicle's McMillion says. "He tells me about things that he hears about. Sometimes he's right and sometimes he's wrong, but I check it out."

"It's mutually beneficial to have good relationships," Ekey says of his contacts.

"We just expect to be treated fairly. We don't like cheapshots. That's their end of the bargain," he adds. "Our end of the bargain is to give information that's credible. If we don't know, we say we don't know. If we don't have a position, we say we don't have a position. All of the information we put out is credible."

Beyond Knowledge of the Media

The Chronicle's editor, Bill Wilke, says that more important than GYC's media awareness is their knowledge of their subject area.

"The Greater Yellowstone Coalition is most intereseted in what is going on around Yellowstone National Park and their people are very knowledgeable on those issues," he says.

GYC's staff is large enough, and hungry enough, to take on the full plate of issues that exist in the Yellowstone Ecosystem, and their representatives are known for having a lot of data available to them on almost any given subject in that area. Having a 14-member science council available to help compile and/or double-check their information is an added bonus.

"In terms of the science we put out and the facts we use, those are the best there is," Ekey says. "When people come to us, we speak for 90 member organizations and 4,500 individual members and we speak with authority."

He says that GYC staffers each have their own areas of expertise and, for the most part, handle the public relations on related issues.

"Sometimes reporters call up and say 'I'm on deadline and I need a quick paragraph of what your folks position is with regards to so and so,' and rather than me running around to find somebody, I'll give them the quickie--the 10 or 20 second soundbite--and that's all they want.

"For the most part though," Ekey says, "the reporters want to deal with our issues people directly because they have more of a science background. If it's about wilderness, it's Bart. If it's geothermal, it's Louisa. If it's park issues, it's Jeanne-Marie.

"Were not shy of issue here," Ekey concludes.

Tactics

One of the group's issues involves a grizzly bear project called "Wild Forever," which is a cooperative effort sponsored by the Greater

Yellowstone Coalition, the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society. Dave Gaillard is working on the project for GYC.

Gaillard has been in a period of training with some of the more experienced staffers. "When I was getting up to speed on stuff," he says, "I would go with Louisa Wilcox to various conferences and meetings with the Forest Service and the Park Service. She's extraordinarily articulate and effective, so there was a lot to pick up."

One thing that Gaillard picked up on, along with the plight of the grizzly bear, is the issue of habitat. "You can do all you want in terms of management of bears and trying to reduce mortality," he says, "but their habitat is shrinking daily.

"I have learned that if you're all wrapped up and close to a specific issue and you're really frustrated, it's important to be able to step back a bit and consider things from a more long-term perspective," Gaillard says. "The Coalition would really be damaged if we were always getting in the papers and talking about how grizzly bears are going extinct over this thing and that thing, because that can get to look like we're crying wolf."

Gaillard says that he was taught to resist the temptation to exaggerate issues and make things splashy.

"GYC is unlike other groups because we're very concerned with trying to maintain an image of being open-minded," he says. "We're trying to be perceived as not being anti-hunting or anti-logging or anti-ranching, but rather as sticking to the idea of a coalition. And so, at times, I certainly have been 'reamed-in' by Louisa and Ed [Lewis] and Bob.

"It can be a little frustrating at times," he adds, "but hopefully this way, when we do get into the papers, we can really shout and scream and really get their attention."

Gaillard says that while the gains of this approach are often kind of long-term and indirect, he does sense that GYC is making progress.

"For example," he says, "when we're taking on the Targhee Forest, where they have a renegade timber program that is operating way beyond sustainable levels and where we're trying to get them to bring back the cut dramatically, one way to bring them to the table is through this huge coalition of not only GYC, but also the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, the Idaho Conservation League and all these other local groups down in Idaho."

Gaillard says that presenting a unified front like that is an effective way to get issues on the table. "Then again," he adds, "we've gone to the table and it's gotten us nothing so far. So, maybe it's time to try a new tactic."

"In the grand scheme of things, however, we've developed a good working relationship with the Forest Service and so now they take our input seriously. They haven't gone far enough in terms of implementing what we want them to, but maybe we're moving in that direction more so than if we were perceived as beating up on them all the time in the press."

"Like I said," Gaillard adds, "I've been 'reamed-in' several times."

Explaining this training ritual, Gaillard says that "it might involve changing things, like adjectives or the tone of an article, away from confrontation and towards a more productive stance."

Words of Praise and a Note on Journalistic Pride

"There are good environmental groups and there are bad ones," the Chronicle's Bill Wilke says. "The two here in town, the Wilderness Society and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, have a lot of class.

"They're well-healed, they're staffed by educated people and, generally speaking, I think they're forthright and honest when they provide evidence for or against whatever they're pushing on a particular day," Wilke says. "I've also had experience with environmental groups that aren't so forthright and honest.

"You can shoot yourself in the foot in a big hurry if you indulge in any kind of deception or do too much doctoring of the facts to suit your agenda," he adds.

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition presents itself very well, Wilke says. "They're respected and when they come out with something people listen, even people they don't like."

Scott McMillion says that GYC has "a lot of great, capable people and they work hard."

Nonetheless, McMillion says that the first time that he ever dealt with anybody at GYC a problem arose. "Louisa Wilcox was at a meeting on timber issues, and she teed-off on Bob Gibson pretty good and I was sitting there taking notes," he says. "I quoted her the next day in the paper and she calls up and says, 'I didn't say that.' I wouldn't interview Louisa now without a tape recorder.

"I don't run many corrections," he adds, "that's something I take pride in. I've run maybe four in the last four years."

An Environmental Reporter who Enjoys the Job

Scott McMillion, who has been covering the environmental beat for the Chronicle since near the beginning of 1992, grew up in Yellowstone Country. His family has ties to the area that go back four generations.

"It's a pretty good job," McMillion says. "I went to a convention in Spokane two weeks ago and found out that reporters all over the country would kill for this job."

According to the Chronicle's editor, Bill Wilke, McMillion has good relations with people from environmental groups and industries alike.

"Scott's a very bright guy," Wilke says. "He has a knack for seeing all sides of a question and I think he does a very good job of convincing the news sources and our readers that he's impartial on the issues."

McMillion says that he approaches most issues from "a layman's viewpoint." The most common ways he comes up with story ideas to pursue are through discussions with his editors and with his friends--"just things that you hear about on the street that you realize people are concerned about.

"A lot of times," he says, "you'll hear people talking about something and you'll realize that they don't quite have it right or that there is a misconception somehow, and a lot of times you can clear that up."

McMillion says that while his supervisors at the Chronicle try to limit his pay to forty hours a week, he puts in more than forty. "And sometimes I can weedle a couple hours of overtime out of them," he adds.

"I report directly to Gail Schontzler, the city editor, and she's good at her job—which is to be a pain in my ass," McMillion says. "She always wants more and more and Bill Wilke is on the other side saying 'no overtime, no overtime' in an effort to keep expenses down." He says that a compromise is usually found.

The Bozeman Daily Chronicle is known as "a writer's paper" and McMillion has taken advantage of this acknowledgement.

While overtime restrictions can effect his reporting, he says that they don't stop him from doing investigative work. "Last week I spent pretty much the whole week on one story," McMillion says.

The story was "a profile of the prospective new owners of the Plum Creek mill in Belgrade," he says. "It was an expensive story for the Chronicle. It probably cost an extra \$300-\$400. I don't really feel constraints that way.

"It's more like Gail wants stories on eight different things, but I can't do them all and we have to make some decisions," he adds. "Unlike the New York Times, where it's 'all the news that's fit to print,' at the Bozeman Chronicle it's 'all the news that fits.' We're a small paper."

McMillion says that if a story is important, though, he'll get it done.

"There are a lot of great stories," he adds. "I get national stories every month, but it drives me crazy. It's hard work and it never stops."

While he doesn't have time to do much pleasure reading anymore, McMillion says that he gets to review the new Rick Bass book. "It's about wolves," he says excitedly.

"I mean it's a lot of fun too," McMillion says of his job. "This past winter we went down to Centennial Valley and helped biologists catch some trumpeter swans. It was the nicest day of the whole winter, and I got paid for it.

"I got to go snowmobiling out at West Yellowstone one day, canoed the Shields [River] and did a story about that last year," he continues. "A lot of it's fun.

"Of course, a lot of it's dull as church," McMillion adds with a laugh.

A Writer's Paper in a Writer's Market

Asked whether the Chronicle is moving toward the USA Today-style of newspaper journalism, McMillion says "not too much so far." Then he knocks twice on the table and adds "touch wood" to complete his train of thought.

"We've stayed away from that pretty well," he continues. "Somebody could come in and buy the paper at any time and change everything, but as of yet I regularly run 20-inch stories," he continues. "The Chronicle is real good about allowing me to go in-depth into issues."

"USA Today rarely runs a story that's over 10 inches in length," Bill Wilke says. "That's an extremely short news story and you can't get into an issue with any depth at all with that kind of length.

"We'll turn reporters loose on all kinds of projects," Wilke adds. "This past Sunday, Scott wrote a story about Tim Blixseth, who is negotiating to purchase the Belgrade sawmill and all of the Plum Creek lands that go with it."

The story was 52 inches and included a 20-inch side-bar story, Wilke says. "USA Today would never run anything like that.

"And we only had a black-and-white photo to go along with the story," he adds. "It actually played rather nicely with the story but, again, USA Today would never consider doing something like that."

The Chronicle is, nonetheless, continuing in the process of converting over to a MacIntosh front-end system which, Wilke says, is producing "the crispest photographs" the paper has ever had.

"We had an old main-frame computer system that was about ready to blow up on us and we had to make a switch and the technician here lobbied heavily to go entirely MacIntosh," Wilke says. "So the Chronicle is a visually flashy newspaper right now, but that's because of the technology we've acquired."

He says that the paper looks "very different" than it did a few years ago. "A lot of the page layout styles and those sorts of things were all influenced by what's happening to newspapers like USA Today," Wilke says, "and so we are becoming more modular and, hopefully, more eye-appealing, and we are leaning more towards the use of graphics to help illustrate stories."

Wilke thinks that graphic elements that are visually attractive, whether they be photographs or charts or graphs, can draw readers into stories more quickly. "Hopefully," he says, "once you have them you can keep them long enough to expand their horizons on whatever subject you're dealing with."

"I would like to see more graphics, but we just don't have anybody with the time to do them right now," says Scott McMillion. "I'd like to

be able to do more maps for my specific areas of coverage, because you start to talk about a specific drainage or something and a lot of people just don't know where the hell it is.

"You file a story at ten. The paper goes to bed at noon. You get somebody to sit down at the Mac and look at a map and get it done right and get it clear," he offers. "We don't have that and it's a big weakness at the Chronicle."

Bob Ekey is hoping that GYC can capitalize on such openings: "If newspapers need a more graphic presentation, then we should think about how we present our material. We're trying to do more presentation of graphics. For instance, we're making maps of the ecosystem available.

"Maybe they'll use our map and give us credit," he says. "That's a positive thing for our credibility and acceptance in the community. If we can be credited as the supplier of a map in a newspaper, that's good. Little, subtle stuff like that is important."

Regardless of the visual changes that are going on now and those that are yet to come, Wilke is sincere when he says that the Chronicle's "journalism hasn't changed toward the USA Today sort of thing.

"This is still very much a reporter's newspaper," he says. "If people would fault us, it would be because we bend too far backwards to accomodate the reporters and that we sometimes let them go on too long about subjects."

Wilke says that USA Today is aimed at mobile people who don't have much time to read and at people in huge metropolitan areas who are constantly exposed to flashy local television.

"As far as newspapers in Montana are concerned," he says, "we have a huge advantage because the television and radio stations—God bless them, they work real hard—aren't up to the level of coverage that you see in big metro areas, and so I think people are far more dependent upon newspapers here than they are in big cities.

"USA Today may be targeted at a person who rides the commuter train for seventeen minutes while traveling between a suburb and downtown Philadelphia," he adds, "but we're not."

Wilke says that the Chronicle lands on porches at five in the evening and that most of its readers have time to sit down and really look it over.

Looking Past the Talking Heads

"I personally get a little tired of hearing what we call 'react stories,'" Wilke says. "We get some policy from Washington about the introduction of another wilderness bill, and it contains another 1.2 million acres of new wilderness, blah, blah, blah, and there is a tendency on the part of newspaper reporters to get a lot of cheap and easy ink out of going to the environmental groups and the pro-development groups and asking them, 'What do you think of this?'"

Wilke says that television reporters are famous for this method of reporting. "They stick microphones in their faces and say, 'What's happening here?' It's all so predictable," he says. "It's pretty damn obvious what the environmental groups are going to think."

Wilke says that he discourages reporters from constantly seeking reactions from special interest groups.

"I've always encouraged our reporters to try and make time to do more independent research, especially on environmental issues," he says. "I suggest that they become amateur scientists, do a little research on their own, lay the facts out there, let the readers draw their own conclusions and forget about what everybody else thinks."

"Something that I have to be careful about in my coverage," says Scott McMillion, "is that I spend a lot of time talking to partisans on one side of the issue or the other and tend to get caught up in the belief that a lot of people really give a shit. This guy down here running Anthony's store, he doesn't care if the wilderness bill passes or not."

McMillion admires Michael Scott of the Wilderness Society because "he has the ability to incorporate all views into his analyses. He takes the arguments and then intelligently makes comments on them and adds other suggestions. And he takes other arguments seriously—I've never seen him smirk."

Wilke is similarly impressed with the work of Wilderness Society representatives. "They came out with a great economic study of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem about five or six months ago," he says, "and it was a great piece of work for an environmental group because there was a lot of empirical data about the population demographics of Greater Yellowstone."

"It was jaded," he adds, "and we called it that in an editorial. We said that it was a great piece of work but something that you'll want to take with a grain of salt because the interpretation of the data certainly had the Wilderness Society's spin on things, but it was a great study."

Environmental groups "should do a lot less shrieking and a lot more nose-to-the-grindstone research to prove their points with hard data," Wlike says, "because you can convince a lot more people here that way than you can by screaming at them."

McMillion says that GYC is one of the groups that conducts independent research. "Occasionally," he says, "they come up with a report and then we'll take the news story from there."

Bob Ekey says that he would eventually like to use GYC's data-filled newsletters as a way to cultivate media interest in the group's issues.

GYC's staff members, much like the "water quality guys" at the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition, blend their emotions with logic by fiercely clawing into the issues they're involved with and coming up with reputable information.

Analysis

The relationship between GYC and the Bozeman Daily Chronicle is more detached than the one between the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition and the daily newspapers in Missoula and Butte. The circumstances that surround these relationships are, likewise, different.

Unlike the "water quality guys," the staffers at GYC aren't the only organized conservationists working on their issues of concern.

The situation is also different from a reporting standpoint. The Chronicle has an environmental reporter who covers environmental issues almost exclusively. The Missoulian and the Standard, on the

hand, have primary environmental reporters who are assigned to cover more things outside of the environmental beat.

Out of these circumstances, Chronicle readers seem to receive a more consistent and complete view of Yellowstone Ecosystem issues than Missoulian or Standard readers get regarding Superfund issues.

It's important to note, however, that Greater Yellowstone has been examined by the press and others for decades while the Superfund sites that stretch between Butte and Missoula were only designated as such in the 1980s. Similarly, the Clark Fork River isn't considered to be "an icon of American culture."

Then again, is public awareness of the threats to the Clark Fork River any less important than public awareness of the threats to the Yellowstone Ecosystem?

If the environment is to be covered in a more complete sense, then human reverence for certain **parts** of the environment, and this ties in quite closely to the corporate ownership trend in the newspaper business, should not be the dominant perspective from which most of the decisions regarding "what issues to cover and how to cover them" are made.

Besides, newspapers that are truly interested in making profits on a sustainable basis should heed reports that an overwhelming majority of Americans consider themselves to be environmentalists. These people know that it's not time to "fun-up" and look at environmental issues as vague and entertaining battles between extremists. Rather, they realize that it's time to turn the finger-pointing inward and take some personal responsibility for a change.

3. THE MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION'S FLATHEAD CHAPTER WITH THE DAILY INTER LAKE

The Players

"The Montana Wilderness Association has been around since 1958, and for several years the group focused on trying to get wilderness areas protected," says Steve Thompson, field representative for the Flathead Chapter of the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA).

"Every wilderness area in this state is, directly or indirectly, the result of actions taken by MWA and its members. The Scapegoat, the Bob Marshall, the Cabinets, and the Great Bear were very much MWA efforts," he says. "However, efforts such as these have always been on a piecemeal basis."

Thompson says that the general understanding of wilderness and its values has expanded in recent years.

"It's not just a beautiful place where you go to catch fish out of alpine lakes," he says. "While that's still important, that place is also part of a broader ecosystem."

MWA eventually decided to pay more attention to what was happening around wilderness areas, Thompson says, "because what's going on outside the wilderness affects what's going on within the wilderness."

"MWA went some twenty-odd years without any staff people," he continues. "Then, about ten years ago, the first staff positions were created. One-and-a-half positions were established in Helena, and just recently it was decided that we need to get our grassroots chapters going because they are just sort of floundering out there and they need to get going."

"Things are a little bit in flux right now. The Flathead program and my position here are recent creations," says Thompson, who was hired by MWA in the summer of 1991.

"It's still a volunteer-driven group, though, much more so than most groups," he says. "Our spokespeople are volunteers and the people who make decisions and set policy and everything are the state council or, locally, the chapter board."

Thompson's office in Kalispell lies in the heart of the Flathead, where he says about 250 to 300 of MWA's 2,000 members live.

Kalispell is the main trade center in Northwest Montana.¹⁹ The city has a population of nearly 12,000 and the "Greater Kalispell" area has roughly twice that many residents.²⁰

According to "Community Profile 1991," put out by the Kalispell Area Chamber of Commerce, the wood products and metal refining industries make up over half of the region's economic base.

The daily newspaper in Kalispell is the Daily Inter Lake. It's managing editor, Dan Black, says that the paper's primary distribution area is comprised of Flathead County, Lincoln County and a little bit of Lake County. Circulation is about "13,600 daily and somewhere over 15,000 on Sundays," he says.

While the Inter Lake has always covered the environment in some manner, Black says that he has put "a little bit more emphasis on it" since becoming the editor about ten years ago.

"I didn't think that the previous editor was covering such issues enough," Black explains, "and they're important to the economy, they're

important social issues, and people are very interested in them and want to read about them."

Black says that the duties for the Inter Lake's environmental reporter include covering Glacier National Park, the Flathead National Forest, and the various public agencies in the area. He says that there is also a reporter "who covers things like the Flathead Basin Commission and some of the water quality issues."

"The entire news staff," Black says, "is made up of 15 people."

A Passionate and Energetic Visionary

"My parents took us backpacking," Steve Thompson says with a gleam in his eyes. "They learned how to backpack with my brother and I being used as guinea pigs. We had some horrific experiences and I'm amazed that I ever stuck with it, but that's where I developed my love for the wilderness."

"I've become addicted to it," he adds.

Thompson was born in Ohio, and lived there and then in Illinois through high school. "As soon as I graduated from high school," he says, "I went to this funky little college out in Eastern California, right along the Nevada border, called Deep Springs College."

"I went there for two years and then I started working for the Park Service and worked seasonally as either a ranger or on the trail crew at Zion National Park in Utah, Isle Royale National Park up by Lake Superior, and then at North Cascades National Park in Washington," he says.

"I eventually graduated from Cornell University in New York, and then I went back out West again and continued to work for the Park Service," he adds.

Thompson then took work as a newspaper reporter in Idaho. "We worked 60 to 70 hours a week," he says of the reporters there. "We worked long weeks and put a lot of effort into it and had a lot of pride in the work, but I was reporting what was happening rather than being a part of what was happening.

"I have a deep commitment to wilderness and to protecting our natural heritage," he continues. "So I figured that as long as I was going to be putting all this effort into it, and not getting paid much, I might as well be doing something that I really love.

"Then I saw this job opening listed in High Country News and it fit everything I wanted and needed—it was made for me," Thompson says enthusiastically.

While MWA's Flathead Chapter has its own president and board of directors, Thompson says that it's his responsibility to make things happen.

"MWA is sort of the grandfather of all the conservation groups in the Flathead," he says, "but because of internal bickering that took place primarily in the '80s, all of these splinter groups formed. Right now we have about ten or eleven different conservation groups in the valley."

One of Thompson's interests has been to get all of these groups working together and communicating with each other again.

"I'm a subscriber to what is called the 'niche theory,'" Thompson explains. "You need to have different groups along different lines of the spectrum. You need to have some who are pushing the envelope, groups that politically will never get it accomplished but they're out causing all sorts of trouble—Earth First! or even the Alliance for the Wild Rockies.

"Then you need groups that can probably get something done politically and that might have more respect in that regard," he says. "That's probably where MWA has traditionally been situated."

Thompson thinks that it's a good thing to have several different groups, as long as they're coordinating their efforts.

"We've created something called 'Flathead Forest Watch' and we're just getting started. We just had our second meeting last night, and all these different groups are now working together to monitor the forest.

"We have to work together and get beyond some of the personality conflicts," he adds, "and I'm happy with the direction in which things are going now."

Thompson says that another aspect of his job is getting people involved with MWA and encouraging them to participate in the group's activities. "I'm a contact person for people who are interested in finding out more," he says. "I also help set things up with the media."

Media Relations and the Importance of Public Involvement

"We've had different contacts with different people at MWA over the years," the Inter Lake's Dan Black says. "Steve Thompson arrived about a year ago and he has been a good one.

"He came in initially and we had a good conversation and I've talked to him several times since," Black says. "I think Steve has been a good spokesman. We've had other people from their organization that we've been in touch with as well and I think we've had a good relationship with them.

"They don't always agree with me and I don't always agree with them," he adds, "but I think we've had a fairly open and honest relationship."

"I was a reporter for the Idahonian newspaper in Moscow before I came here," Thompson says, "so dealing with the media is probably one of my strong points because I have some understanding of how it works.

"I'm not really a PR person for MWA, though," he says. "I'm more of an organizer. For me, personally, it's much more important to have the members and volunteers working with the media than it is to have me working with them.

"Right now, the situation is such that I am comfortable with the media and we just happen to have a chapter board where nobody is really comfortable with that role yet," he adds.

Thompson is teaching other MWA activists some of his media skills by hosting media workshops and encouraging volunteers to step up to the microphone. "Thinking of the board members," he says, "I've had five out of seven of them working with the media at some point."

Thompson feels that it's vital for MWA to speak through a variety of volunteer spokespeople who have actually experienced the areas they speak out about.

"For an environmental group, I think you're much more credible and have much better public relations, and you have a better organization, a much more true organization, if it's based upon the membership," says Thompson.

"If everytime there is a story involving MWA we have another person speaking for us in a way that sounds intelligent," he explains, "then I think that builds our credibility."

Dan Black thinks that MWA is perceived as a "moderate" and "credible" environmental group.

Black also thinks, however, that the majority of people in the Flathead look upon both MWA representatives and timber industry officials as people who do not speak for them.

"They choose to endorse neither side or choose to accept neither side, because those aren't the things that they hold near and dear," he says. "They're neither making money off of the forest, nor do they look at the forest as some kind of sacred or ideal kind of a place.

"They would only choose a side because they feel that they were being forced to," he says. "I think that many people are just tired of hearing debates over the issue. I think that they have probably been compelled at some point to say, 'Well, I believe this,' but I don't think they are strongly held beliefs."

Black feels that timber issues can be equated to the abortion issue in this regard. "There are people who, if you ask them how they feel about abortion, will say, 'Well, I'm pro-choice' or 'Well, I guess I'm pro-life,' but they're not really zealots for either side," he says.

"I think that the Montana Wilderness Association has done a good job, however," Black adds. "They have found a balance of inviting people into not only their organization, but into the wilderness as well. They have taken this approach rather than just beating them about the head and shoulders and saying 'this is a life-or-death issue.'"

MWA recently completed the 29th season of its "Wilderness Walks" program. According to this past season's brochure, "There's a great variety to the program: day trips, two and three day backpacks, walks for toddlers, vigorous hikes for the fit and hardy, trips to learn about geology, wildflowers, birds and animals, and the history of these places in the wilderness movement in Montana."

"We invite people to go with us on guided hikes," says Thompson. "The hikes are educational and free. Some people have joined MWA because they like to go on hikes and they sort of see us as kind of a hiking club and that was their motivation to become a member."

"Now," he adds, "they're starting to get involved in protecting the areas they like to go hiking in."

"I don't mean to diminish the impact that they have made," Dan Black says, "but I think MWA has done a good job of presenting themselves as a moderate organization even though I know that individually they hold very, very strong beliefs about wilderness and its values."

According to Thompson, MWA does have its share of so-called radicals: "There is a fellow in Columbia Falls named Loren Kreck who's been fighting the fight for 30 years. He's seen what has happened to wild lands as they've been eroded and eroded and eroded, and roaded

and roaded and roaded. He says 'you've just got to say no. You've got to stand up and fight these folks'—and he has."

With only a couple of staffers, MWA draws its experience from its volunteers. Kreck, who led the group's first hike up to Jewel Basin in 1962, is now in his seventies. Thompson calls him a "firebrand."

A Troubled Relationship

During Thompson's first half year with MWA, Bill Morgan was the Inter Lake's environmental reporter.

"I knew the things that he had to deal with," Thompson says. "He needed to come up with decent stories that had good angles, and he needed to have them in time to meet his deadlines. I dealt with him professionally, knowing what his needs were.

"I had some problems with Bill, though," Thompson adds. "He had been on the job for awhile and he was pretty jaded."

Thompson says that, to a certain extent, he had similar problems with Dan Black. "With regard to the [Montana] wilderness bill," he says, "I think that Bill had the same attitude as Dan: 'The wilderness bill is something that we've got to get past us, and who cares about the specifics of it.'

"Back in September," he explains, "Senator Baucus came out with a wilderness bill and Black came out with an editorial that said, 'We finally have a wilderness bill that looks good, let's pass it'—that was the jist of it. Two months later, Baucus and [Senator] Burns came out with a compromise bill that cut out a lot of areas.

"The Swan Crest, from just east of town all the way up to Columbia Mountain, was listed for wilderness designation in the September version of the bill," Thompson says. "In the compromise bill, everything north of Jewel Basin, almost the entire range that the people in Kalispell can see from their backyard, was cut out of the bill."

After the second bill came out, says Thompson, "Dan Black wrote another editorial saying, 'Yea, they came out with a compromise. Let's support it. Let's pass it. Let's get done with it.'"

"I wrote him a memo that said: 'For Christ's sake, this is a local paper. People have been muddled to death. People are confused. No wonder people want to solve this because all you guys do is throw around acreages and quotes and report that "this side says this and that side says that." Except you don't really quote what we're trying to say, which is "let's look at the areas."'

"'First Columbia Mountain is in, then it's out,'" he continues with the memo. "'Why don't you do a story that reports what the people for wilderness designation of Columbia Mountain say, what the people opposed to wilderness designation say, and then debates the **specific issues** rather than, "Oh, we're tired of this issue, let's just resolve it. Anything they come up with is fine." That's not good journalism.'"

Thompson says that there was a long lull between bills and that the media lost interest in the details of the second bill.

"They never really were that interested," he adds. "They just said, 'Oh, 1.2 million acres—that's all we need to know.' Well, where? What are the boundaries? What's in? What's out?"

"They just sort of said, 'Swan Crest: this many acres.' They didn't really say where it is or how it effects people. They never did a story on the pro's and con's of the specifics."

Thompson says that while media representatives were claiming that the public was tired of wilderness bills, they were simultaneously neglecting their duty to tell the public what was actually in the bills.

Thompson says that Bill Morgan's attitude was reflected in a story about the Plum Creek timber program. "There had been good stories done in the past about how Plum Creek wasn't practicing sustained-yield harvesting and that they were doing an accelerated harvest in the '80s and, basically, liquidating all of their timber here," Thompson says. "This stuff was well known.

"Well, Bill Parson, who is the Plum Creek manager up here, was quoted a couple of years ago getting exasperated and saying, 'Listen, we're not on a sustained yield program. We never have been and never will be. We're a big, major corporation and we cut trees. We're not worried about tomorrow, we're worried about today.' That's basically what he said. It was a great quote and it was quoted many times, and Bill Parson got in a lot of trouble for that."

After this incident, Thompson says, there were major stories about Plum Creek in the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times that caused Plum Creek's stock value to go down.

"So Plum Creek hired big PR people to train people like Bill Parson to tell lies," Thompson asserts. "Mostly, they said, 'Parson, don't talk to the media anymore. We'll talk to them from Seattle.'"

"Well, Bill Morgan later did a story with Parson on environmental forestry, or something like that, and gouted Parson as saying 'We're on a sustained yield program now.' It's like, hold it a second, but Morgan didn't question him on that. He didn't raise the many facts to the contrary, and just sort of put it on the record that now Plum Creek is doing things right and everything's fine and they're on sustained yield."

Thompson says that he has since spoken to people from Plum Creek who said Bill Parson was the laughing stock of the plant because everyone knew that he was lying. These people "were amazed that he could get away with it," reports Thompson. "For me, Bill Morgan was the laughing stock because he let that guy get away with it."

Bill Morgan resigned, after five years as the Inter Lake's environmental reporter, in January of 1992. According to Dan Black, he moved when his wife received a job transfer and now lives in the Portland area.

"I think it was time for Bill to move on," Thompson says. "He was tired of this job and didn't have any energy. [Inter Lake reporters] work 40-hour shifts, which is nice. It's human. And, of course, with newspapers that size you work your butt off, but Bill just didn't go after things and that was frustrating—especially for a former newspaper guy. I was very aggressive and I really went out and dug things up. He didn't do anything that was investigative."

Thompson has kinder words for Ben Long, the new environmental reporter at the Inter Lake with whom he is trying to initiate and form a mutually beneficial relationship: "Ben has covered things a little more closely. He seems to ask more difficult questions. He's willing

to challenge us, as well as the other side, a little bit and to play the devil's advocate and to get them to do more than just spout rhetoric.

"Bill Morgan seemed to just be happy with the rhetoric," Thompson concludes.

Finding Ways Around the Problem

Steve Thompson put in long hours as a reporter in Idaho before coming to MWA. A news junkie, he continues to put in long hours looking into issues. When people ask questions, he is either ready to respond on the spot or willing to search through his files and dig out some answers. When no one is asking questions, he comes up with his own.

"I got hold of a memo in which the Congress was asking different Forests how much timber they were capable of producing this next year," Thompson says, "and what they said was significantly less than what the Bush Administration wanted money for."

Thompson says that the Flathead Forest reported that the most it could cut, while still being able to protect the resources of the forest and follow the environmental laws, was 65 million board feet. "The Bush Administration," he says, "was asking money for about 85 or 90 million board feet."

Thompson says that he leaked the story to Bill Morgan.

"The next thing I read, is not that the Bush Administration's political pressures are telling the professionals to cut more than they think they can," he says. "Rather, his story is saying that the guys on the ground aren't willing to do what they're supposed to do. He just twisted it around 180 percent."

"His story went out on the wire." Thompson adds. "Eventually, the Missoulian did the story and they got the angle on it right."

He says that Morgan "confused the issue" by putting the blame on the professionals instead of on the politicians.

"Fortunately," Thompson says, "he left just about the time that I said wasn't going to work with him anymore."

Thompson gets frustrated with reporters when they aren't out pounding their beat and asking hard questions. Still, he is determined to get MWA's issues into the public forum and confident that he can find reporters who are interested in what the group has to say.

"Near the end of Morgan's time here I was saying that we can work with the Bigfork Eagle, the Hungry Horse News, the Missoulian and the TV and radio stations," says Thompson. "In fact, I started timing things that we were putting out in order to make sure that they didn't fall on his cycle. He was hurting us. His stories in the afternoon paper would go out on the wire, and so his version of a story would go all over the state."

Thompson says that he has a lot of respect for the weekly Bigfork Eagle. "One of their first editorials when I was here blasted me and MWA, but for legitimate reasons. We had organized a meeting with Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, and I got five different groups together along with the Blackfeet Tribe and went to talk to Lujan about protecting the Badger-Two Medicine and the entire area around Glacier."

Representatives agreed to Lujan's request to keep it a private meeting, Thompson says. "That was stupid. We should have let the media come into it. The Bigfork Eagle said, 'They're going into these closed

meetings and they're no better than anybody else.' I was like, on second thought, they're right."

Thompson says that the Bigfork Eagle presses for good government and has an aggressive reporting style. "If I give them a good story—and I know what a good story is—they'll do something with it," he says. "I may not agree with the way they do it, but at least I know that they're going to dig into it and ask some hard questions."

Environmental advocates, Thompson says, "need to get to know the people that they work with" and should try to build up a personal rapport with them.

"If you give them fluff stories or things that don't make good news," he says, "then they're not going to listen to you the next time you call. Or if you give them some stuff that's factually erroneous in any way, then that's not going to help either."

"There are things that they have to do to earn my respect as well," Thompson says. "Take Bill Morgan, for example. If I give him something good and then he sort of uses it against me, in a way that I don't consider legitimate at all, then I lose respect for him and I'm going to go to somebody else who's willing to challenge the status quo."

Thompson says that he deliberately slighted the Inter Lake in order to get information out through other contacts. "One time after Bill Morgan had left," he says, "I was working with the Missoulia's Don Schwennesen on a story and told him that we had something coming up that he would be interested in. After we knew that Schwennesen had it and we had an idea on when he was going to run with it, then I did a press release."

Thompson says that he faxed it to a couple of media outlets, but mailed it to the Inter Lake so that they would receive it on the same day that the Missoulian was going to run it in the paper.

"Sure enough," Thompson says, "we ended up getting a call from the general reporter, who was sort of filling in the environmental beat at the Inter Lake, and she said, 'We're disturbed that we're getting a press release on the same day we're reading about it in the Missoulian, and this is the second or third time this has happened.' I replied, 'I'm glad you noticed that.'"

Thompson went on to tell her that the relations between Inter Lake staffers and MWA members lacked "the mutual give-and-take that a good reporter/source relationship should have."

"I told her that straight out and the next thing we knew," says Thompson, "we started getting calls from them and they were interested in covering some of our stuff, and all of a sudden they were being a lot more respectful."

"I think that now I can call Dan Black and say what I want to say, and he'll return my phone calls," he adds. "I think that I sent a real strong message that, 'Listen folks, you're just starting to realize it, but I'm a good source of a lot of good stories.'"

Thompson hasn't stopped wearing his reporter's cap just because he works for a conservation group now. Although he has only been working in the Flathead for a little more than a year, he has already broken some big news stories.

"I broke the story out of the Spokesman Review about the Joslin Report, which is about how the Forest Service wants to get rid of timber

sale appeals," Thompson says. "There was a national committee appointed to look into appeals, and the committee recommended keeping the appeals system and just streamlining it a little bit. Well, I found out about this report. It had been buried. It had been covered up."

Thompson says that he told the Missoulian's Sherry Devlin about the report and that she was interested in the story but didn't develop it.

"I didn't know any of the details, I just knew that this committee existed," he says. "I dug it up and was so exasperated with her, because I had given it to her a month before anybody else and she couldn't get her act together, that I called Scott Sonner with the AP in Washington and I called Jim Lynch over at the Spokesman Review and they said, 'Hey, that's a damn good story.'"

Thompson says that these reporters did a little digging on their own, and in combination with what he gave them, developed stories on the report. "That's an example of a good relationship," he adds. "I didn't even go to the Inter Lake with this."

Recapping his efforts, Thompson says: "I had a couple of lucky breaks in digging it up, but I broke it. I called this guy down in the regional Forest Service office in Utah and he said that I was the first guy to call him on it and he confirmed everything that I had found out. It was like, 'Wow, check this out,' but Sherry could have done that."

Thompson, who has a file of paperwork and clippings about the story, says that the Missoulian ended up running Scott Sonner's story off of the AP wire.

"Meanwhile," he says, "I had been talking to [Senator] Max Baucus' office and I got Baucus to write a letter challenging the chief forester. The office sent me a copy of the letter as well."

Thompson says that he called Sherry Devlin with information about the Baucus letter and that she told him to fax it to her.

"I faxed it to her," Thompson says, "and she never did anything on it."

"I gave it to the Inter Lake a few days later and they ran the story and it went out on the state wire," he says. "The Missoulian ran the AP version."

"It was objectively a good story," Thompson continues. The Inter Lake's "Ben Long saw that and wrote a good story on it and I say, 'Well, good, I'm glad to see that Ben Long can recognize a good story and is willing to do something with it.' I'm willing to work with people like that."

Thompson says that the Inter Lake is now "checking in" with him on a regular basis and asking questions, and that his relationship with the paper has improved.

"The one thing that I appreciate about Ben," Thompson adds, "is that he hasn't quoted me at all yet. I've said, 'Why don't you call the president of our chapter, he's been working on this' or 'Why don't you call our Wilderness Walks coordinator,' and Ben will do that."

"He understands that when staff are the spokespersons for a group, you lose some of your credibility. It's much better to have volunteer leaders represent the group, and Ben knows that whereas Bill would just call me—if he would call at all."

Getting the Message Out

Dan Black grew up in Northwest Montana and has lived most of his life there. He has dealt with several environmental groups during his years at the Inter Lake.

"In most cases," he says, "I think that MWA and other conservation or environmental groups are more effective [at expressing their messages] than would be the people who profess to be their adversaries.

"I think that there may have been some change in that in recent years, but I think that they are adept at using the media, at making themselves available to the media, and at taking advantage—and I don't mean this in a negative way—of the openings that they find in the media.

"And they've worked at it," he adds.

Swaying the Citizenry

Along with their media efforts, Thompson and the Flathead Chapter volunteers have worked at personalizing MWA activities.

"We need to be well-regarded by the community in order to advance what we want," Thompson says. "Education is a big part of what we do.

"We've done Wilderness Walks and we've done various other public programs to let people know that what we are proposing is really not all that radical.

"We are not trying to create anything, we are just trying to protect what we have now," he says. "We think that we have a message that, if it gets across, most people will agree with and say, 'Yeah, that's true.'"

Analysis

Steve Thompson, representing the Flathead Chapter of the Montana Wilderness Association, has had a rocky but evolving relationship with the Inter Lake. His past troubles with the paper's personnel stemmed from what he claimed was a lackadaisical attitude on the behalf of their former environmental reporter, Bill Morgan.

While efforts to reach Morgan for rebuttal were unsuccessful, Thompson's examples of how Morgan and other media representatives have oversimplified environmental issues are compelling.

Thompson believes that the press, in their eagerness to please the public, called for the passage of a statewide wilderness bill without looking into the specific details and ramifications of the bill.

Also, Thompson brought up several instances in which he uncovered stories that environmental reporters had either overlooked or did not have the time or motivation to investigate.

Again, as with the preceeding case studies, questions regarding whether or not the environment is being thoroughly covered are raised.

Do we have an uncritical mass media? Do they straddle the political fence between polarized forces? Do they willingly accept and institutionalize rhetoric and clichés?

Thompson thinks that while the answer to these questions is "yes" in some cases, there are still other reporters to seek out who will go beyond this approach and challenge the status quo.

Via hard work, determination and self-confidence, Thompson has found such individuals and, in the process, turned his relations with the Inter Lake around.

3. FRIENDS OF THE BITTERROOT WITH THE RAVALLI REPUBLIC

The Players

The mission of Friends of the Bitterroot (FOB) is to improve the quality of life in the Bitterroot by being stewards of the valley's forests, watersheds and air, and by being advocates of a sustainable economy. Since forming in 1989, the group has primarily been involved with the management of public lands.²¹

FOB is guided by a 35-person steering committee and has about 700 members. The group's president, Donnie Laughlin, says that the membership base is activist-oriented.

The Bitterroot's population of 25,000, on the whole, appears to be rather outgoing. According to "Bitterroot Valley: The Best of the Last Best Place," put out by the Bitterroot Valley Chamber of Commerce, community organizations in the area include the Elks, the Eagles, the Masons, the Shriners, the American Legion, the VFW, the Women's Club, and Eastern Star.

The principal industries in the Bitterroot are wood products, log home manufacturing, agriculture, medical research, electronics, small-scale product manufacturing, tool and die, machinery, plastics, metal fabrication, sporting gear and windsocks.²²

The valley has one weekday newspaper—the Ravalli Republic. Headquartered in Hamilton, Montana, the paper's main geographic area of coverage is comprised of Ravalli County. The Republic's managing editor, John McConnaughey, says that while there are only 5,000 daily subscribers, he would wager that 90 percent of the people in the valley read the paper.

Regarding coverage of environmental issues, McConnaughey says that all four of the newspaper's staff reporters have responsibilities of some kind.

The Republic is part of the Scripps League newspaper chain. "The only corporate philosophy that I know of is to make as much money as we possibly can," McConnaughey says. "As far as the home office is concerned, they don't interfere with our editorial product or our advertising or anything else. We are pretty much out here on our own."

As far as in-house principles are concerned, McConnaughey says that "accuracy and fairness are what we all strive for."

A Grassroots Operation

"Friends of the Bitterroot doesn't have an office," says Donnie Laughlin. "We have a post office box and work out of our houses. We have an unusual structure in that we have a steering committee, made up of over 30 members, that acts as the governing body, and so we have a pretty high level of participation as compared to a lot of groups."

FOB has grown steadily during its first three years of existence and has a lot of supporters in the Bitterroot Valley.

"We've been spreading out, too" Laughlin says. "Our members have been involved in statewide efforts to train people in doing Forest Watch as well as training people about organizational structure and about how you involve people and get the most out of them and treat them right and stuff like that."

Run primarily by volunteer activists, FOB has garnered political authority by networking a diverse but unified membership base.

"The most effective use of the media," Laughlin says, "often comes when you have a team of local citizens and a diversity of people involved in your activities—land owners, home owners, farmers, ranchers, sportsmen, conservationists and environmentalists, of all stripes, all seeking to tell their side of the story and to get their message out before the public."

This approach demonstrates the diversity of local people who are interested in the issues, Laughlin says, "and the media, constrained as they are by the soundbite method which limits the amount of information that can presented, are very receptive to it."

Dealing with the Press in a Divided Community

"We have had several press conferences since we've been in existence," FOB's Laughlin says. "We had some of the early ones here in Hamilton, but over the last year and a half or so we've held all of our press conferences in Missoula because of the TV and radio coverage we get there."

He says that while the group invites Republic reporters to the press conferences in Missoula, "they don't seem to come down much lately. So what we do after our press conference is have somebody stop by there and drop off a press release and if they want to ask that person some questions, they do."

Apart from their press conferences, he says that FOB has held joint press conferences with other organizations, purchased ads in both the weekday and weekly Bitterroot papers, produced publications that were inserted into papers, and bought radio time.

Laughlin, who has lived in the Bitterroot for the past twelve years, says that the community is "divided" on the issues that FOB is involved with. "We get a lot of respect and a lot of support," he says, "but we also get a lot of disagreement and a lot of people don't like us.

"What we experience in this community is what environmentalists in general experience in Western states," he says. "People accuse us of wanting to shut the timber industry down and of not wanting any logging, of being against all industry and of trying to shut things down in order to make a private reserve for rich people."

Laughlin says that several misconceptions were revealed when the group ran some advertisements. "We got calls from millworkers and loggers and people working in the woods," he says, "and their first question was always, 'Are you against all logging?'" They assumed we were, and were surprised when we said we weren't."

Laughlin says that a lot of the callers were hostile and seemed to have preconceived ideas about what FOB was up to. "It's just like all of their prejudices came out," he says. "In a way, it was a great thing to be able to talk to them.

"There was another organization that formed in response to Friends of the Bitterroot called Grassroots for Multiple Use, and we had tried several times to talk with their board but they had refused to talk with us for over two years," he adds. "We've talked with a few of their members on the telephone now."

According to Laughlin, some misconceptions are due in part to "unfair" coverage by the Ravalli Republic. More specifically, he says

that FOB has had "differences" with the Republic's Ruth Thorning, who has covered Forest Service and environmental issues at the paper for several years and is now in the process of switching to another beat.

"The reporting has been much fairer since McConnaughey has been the editor," Laughlin says. "Before, our positions were misrepresented and we were quoted out of context.

"We've talked with [Thorning], too," he says. "She knows that we've been dissatisfied and in her last few stories that have had things about us she's been fair."

In reflection, Laughlin makes these suggestions to environmental advocates: "If you're going to have a press conference, rehearse. Pick a few points that you really want to make. Try to write up your press release with your main points in mind. Speak from the heart. Be real. Be honest. Always assume that the press is neither for you nor against you—they are just the press."

Laughlin says that media representatives aren't always on the same wavelength. "You may have said ten things that you thought were really important and they may just report one of them and it may be what you consider to be the least important thing you said," Laughlin relates, "so you really have to know what you want to get across.

"Also," he concludes, "you have to treat reporters decently and be polite to them and just be glad they came."

From the Reporter's Viewpoint

"The Friends of the Bitterroot perceive me as an enemy because my husband drives a chip truck," says the Republic's Ruth Thorning.

"They've done a lot of complaining over the years about stories I've done, and the boss has probably gotten just as many complaints from the timber industry."

Thorning maintains that she has always tried to be as neutral as possible. "I simply report the facts, or try very hard to report the facts, and so you wind up with people on both sides very angry at you and complaining about you," she says.

"I can't ever pin them down to specifics," Thorning adds. "I can't get them to show me that something I wrote was incorrect or in error, but I can get them to complain and that's fine because both sides complain."

Thorning says that representatives of any group, "whether its FOB or the Women's Club or the Darby Civic Group," want their position presented in the most favorable light. "If you can't present it their way," she says, "they perceive you as someone who is not a friend. I get the same thing from Grassroots for Multiple Use.

"Some of [FOB's] people won't talk to me, just like there are some on the other side," she says. "There are individuals from these groups who think that I have horns and a tail. There are people who feel very, very strongly that I don't represent them well."

Regardless, Thorning says that she has never really worried about what her strengths or weaknesses with these groups are. "They're not my boss and they don't pay my paycheck. I'm not concerned about how they feel about me, I'm concerned about covering them accurately.

"Whether the Friends of the Bitterroot perceive me as a friend or an enemy, I think that I've earned their respect," Thorning concludes.

A Determined Approach

Donnie Laughlin says that it's "a waste of time" to get down on media representatives.

"A lot of communities in Montana have press that are against the environmentalists and you just have to keep going back to them," he says. "If you have other press that you can go to, then go to them."

Laughlin says that FOB representatives have "gone around" the Republic to get stories out and, in the process, forced the paper's personnel to deal with them more fairly.

"There are the TV stations and KUFM, and the Bitterroot is part of their broadcast area," he says. "People can thus see something on the TV, read something in the paper and maybe hear something on the radio.

"Make use of the press—that's the big thing," he says. "You can make use of the press because they are there and they are looking for stories. Most of the time, they are looking for stories but they aren't out in the community looking for stories, rather they're sitting in the office and they're busy. So 99 times out of a 100, you've got to contact them."

The Dynamics of a Small Newspaper

"A normal reporter's output here is three to five stories a day on just that many issues—three to five stories on three to five issues," Ruth Thorning says. "It doesn't give you the luxury of spending a great deal of time developing one particular story."

Thorning says, however, that Republic reporters are still able to do in-depth reporting. "We've done a number of series that we've tried to

make as educational as possible," she says. "We just did a four-part series on growth and how it has effected all of the resources in the valley. It was made up of four eight-page supplements to the paper. The first part was on resources. The second on business. The third on people. The fourth on the future."

Thorning says that while the staff at the Republic is aware that "people live in a very fast-paced world and want 30-second stories," it believes the paper has cultivated a steady reading audience by offering something more substantial.

"A story on an environmental issue such as a timber sale, an appeal, a water problem or something like that, would probably run 25 to 30 inches, and there's been no pressure on us to cut that," says Thorning. "If we think it takes something more than that, then we do a feature."

"We have a lot of older readers," Editor John McConnaughey says, "and I think that people in the Bitterroot Valley are different than people in a lot of other places in that they get involved in what's going on. They have feelings about the issues, and they are very vocal about them."

McConnaughey, who has been in the newspaper business for 28 years, says that he doesn't necessarily agree with the philosophy of USA Today. "It's okay in metropolitan areas where people want to pick up the paper and glance over the front page and see what's there," he says, "but our readers will take a lot more time with the newspaper and we think that they want to know about things that effect them in more depth."

A Few More Words from the Editor

"I come from Indiana," the Republic's John McConnaughey says, "and in Indiana we don't have to worry about timber sales or the spotted owl or whatever. When I came out here two years ago, this was all new to me—you had the timber and the water and all the various things associated with those issues."

McConnaughey says that Stewart Brandborg and others with Friends of the Bitterroot have helped him better understand what the issues are all about.

"At the same time," he says, "I have had people from the other side tell me about their views."

"So I am able to see both sides, and I'm hoping for a compromise somewhere down the road," he adds with an uncertain laugh.

"One of the problems the Republic has had with FOB," McConnaughey says, "is that [group representatives] hold their news conferences in Missoula. I can't take someone away for a news conference in Missoula at eleven o'clock in the morning, so what I have to end up doing is relying on them to provide me with a news release, which is okay," he says, "but I would much rather have somebody there and have them be able to ask questions and better ascertain what is really going on."

Nonetheless, McConnaughey says he understands that the relative abundance of media outlets in Missoula make that city a more desirable place than Hamilton in terms of holding a news conference.

McConnaughey also says that while FOB members are "really good" about contacting the Republic with at least something from their press conferences, they are like most people outside of the newspaper industry

in that they don't always recognize things like deadlines particularly well.

His concluding advice for environmental groups: "Be open. Be honest. Tell it like it is."

Difficulties of the Beat

Ruth Thorning was born and raised in Hamilton. She started working for the Republic by filling in for a friend. When her friend quit, Thorning was offered the job. She took the position and has been with the paper for the last ten years.

Thorning is one of four staff reporters at the Republic. With an impending change in personnel, these reporters are in the process of rearranging the beats. "For the moment," Thorning says, "I still cover environmental issues."

Covering those issues has not been an easy assignment, and the challenges of the job are compounded by other responsibilities.

"Among other things, I cover the cops, the Darby City Council and the Darby School Board," Thorning says. "One of my favorites is a beat called 'kooks, cults, and crazies.' We all do feature writing. I have also been sports editor, church page editor, and school page editor—in a small newspaper you do it all."

She says that during the latter half of the 1980's she started covering primarily the Forest Service and related issues.

"As environmental groups got more and more involved with the Forest Service, it spread out and broadened to include covering whatever they were doing," she says. "Then about two years ago we had another

group form here, a multiple-use group, so they were brought in under the same umbrella.

"I spent five years covering the Forest Service beat," Thorning says, "and that's long enough."

The job involves "a tremendous amount of research and reading," she says, "and I'm looking forward to the challenge of doing something new."

"No one else ever wanted the Forest Service beat because of the amount of work involved in it," she adds. "I read 1,200 words a minute with retention, but if a new E.I.S. (Environmental Impact Statement) comes along I can figure putting in eight hours reading it, highlighting it, marking it, and trying to develop a story out of it."

"The last E.I.S. I got weighed two-and-a-half pounds," she says. "I'm not going to miss that."

Regarding her experience with FOB, Thorning says that "they're very, very sincere about what they want to accomplish. They're like any other group with a single goal--sometimes that helps to develop tunnel vision in a big way."

"It's rather interesting to watch the two groups here face-off because they are so far apart I sometimes wonder if they will ever be able to get together," she says, "and then every now and then there is a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel."

Thorning says that representatives of the two groups once joined forces and were able to secure a \$65,000 economic opportunity grant to be administered by the Forest Service.

"They received the grant in order to do a future study here for diversification and value-added products in the timber industry," she says. "It was great. Things like that really help—when you can get folks working together."

According to Thorning, it is "an extremely eclectic group of people who live in the Bitterroot. You can't make generalities about the people who live here because we have such a mixed group. There are four reporters on this staff and all four have different opinions about the environment, four different ideas about how things should be done, and I think that's very typical of what you'll find here in the valley."

She thinks that Friends of the Bitterroot and Grassroots for Multiple Use "each draw people to them who are on either side of the issue" and that "there is an enormous spectrum in the middle who just flat don't care one way or the other."

Thorning says that people occasionally tell her to stop writing about certain issues.

"When you get tied up in a beat and spend a lot of time with it, there are times when you feel like it's the most important thing in the whole valley and you end up trying to get story after story after story after story out to the people," she says with a mock sense of urgency in her voice.

Over the course of her years as an environmental reporter for the Ravalli Republic, Thorning says that she has gained and lost many friends on "both sides" of the debate.

Looking for Credible News Sources

"The people who did most of the talking at the time the Friends of the Bitterroot was forming were John Grove and Stewart Brandborg—very credible people," Thorning recalls. "They were knowledgeable, spoke well, made their points well, and they had a lot of respect in the community."

She says that while Vince Moorhouse didn't know a whole lot when he joined FOB, he made an effort to learn and became another effective voice for the group.

"I guess that what you do is not only try to find the most credible people in an organization, but also the people who are willing to talk to you," she says of her reporting technique.

According to Thorning, some FOB members aren't ready or willing to speak.

She says that FOB recently constructed a timber sale appeal and that she called the names on the document. "The five people I called said, 'Oh, they just asked me to sign and they needed some names. Why don't you talk to so and so,'" Thorning says. "All of them referred me back to the same person."

Thorning says that one man who signed the document had been out of town prior to the appeal and didn't know much about it. "There's not a lot of credibility in that person's involvement," she remarks.

"I think that when you're looking at issues the way to go is to try and find the most credible people you can," Thorning says. "A John Grove is credible because he has an extremely extensive background—he is a retired forester. He is also credible because he's received major environmental awards and lives the ethic he preaches."

She says that Vince Moorhouse was an excellent spokesperson for the group because "he was very involved in making sure that the media knew what was going on and was very quick to call and very open. Vince had been a city planner in California and he understood the value of working with the media and of consensus building and of trying to get people to work together."

"Stewart Brandborg is my primary contact," John McConnaughey says. "I consider Stewart to be somewhat of a moderate voice in the organization and that's why I like to talk with him, because I consider myself pretty much of a moderate and it's easier for me to understand where he's coming from."

Ideas of a Veteran News Source

Stewart Brandborg recently served two one-year terms as president of Friends of the Bitterroot. His new role, in his own words, is to "advise, counsel, serve on the steering committee and provide insightful direction.

"I'm a fourth generation Montanan," Brandborg says. "I was raised in the Bitterroot.

"I spent thirty-odd years in Washington, D.C.--some twenty of those years with the Wilderness Society, twelve as its director; four years in the Department of the Interior; and three and a half years as a special assistant to the director of the National Park Service."

Brandborg has been working in the environmental field for more than 45 years, starting as a wildlife biologist in Oregon, Montana and

Idaho. This early biology experience, he says, provided "invaluable background" for his work at the Washington level and within leadership circles of the national environmental movement.

Brandborg says that he has worked closely with the television networks—ABC, NBC, CBS—on issues involving national forests, national parks, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas.

"A lot of people in the media show a real commitment to getting the word out so that the public can make informed decisions and respond to the Congress or local entities of government or whomever is in charge," he relates. "That commitment on the part of media people is invaluable and their involvement is a tremendous resource."

According to Brandborg, the media "are the vehicle through which citizen conservation groups can reach the public.

"One of the big opportunities we have in social change work and in environmental work," Brandborg says, "is that of developing working relationships with media people--apprising them, keeping them informed, and doing our very best to give them a depth of understanding by means of regular contact, providing materials, and taking them on field trips in the case of those resource issues where a hands-on feeling for a subject is necessary."

Brandborg and his cohorts at FOB believe in vehicle maintenance. "In the case of the White Stallion field trip," says Brandborg, "we had about 150 members of the public and invited representatives of the Ravalli Republic to be there. They covered the field trip and an evening meeting, picnic and gathering that included a discussion of the issues."

He says that the paper was thorough in its coverage of what went on—"mainly the protest by a diversified group of people that included farmers, ranchers, irrigators, land owners, home owners, sportsmen and conservationists."

Republic representatives "sought to present the case of why these people were disturbed about the proposal to cut this essentially wild and roadless area," Brandborg says. "They were invaluable."

On another occasion, he says, FOB representatives encouraged the Republic's editor and publisher to gain an overview of the Bitterroot National Forest and the logged over areas that the group was concerned about: "A member of our steering committee is a good mountain pilot and he rented a plane and we flew the Bitterroot National Forest to give them a firsthand view of what had taken place."

Brandborg says that environmental advocates should take the time to develop relationships with individuals in the media and to "encourage their deep involvement and interest in the issues."

In conclusion, he says to "keep your feet on the ground in giving them opportunities to develop story lines; be soundly based in what you have presented to them; nurture them through regular contact and have a relationship that goes beyond your need for them to cover your stories; be of assistance at times when your particular ox is not being gored or nurtured; and maintain a good week-by-week relationship with them, again, making sure that they've got as much background information as possible so that when things break it fits into what they understand and know about the issues."

Analysis

The relationships between FOB personnel and Ravalli Republic representatives are varied, but there is definitely a sense of tenseness that pervades these relations and exudes from the Bitterroot population in general.

To a certain extent, the Republic's reporting seems to focus on the "two sides" of the environmental debate.

This confrontational type of coverage approach is of the kind that pits "owls against jobs" and fits issues into neat packages that are labelled with simplistic titles such as "environmentalists versus loggers." Such reporting often focuses primarily on the short-term economic prospects of a given situation. It identifies human conflicts, but doesn't explore the core issues that brought these conflicts about.

To give due credit, the Republic's staff has done several pieces that depict the long-term prognosis for various environmental subjects. This coverage approach broadens the discussion to include such things as how human population growth and consumption effect the health of the land and how everyday lifestyle choices are connected to ecological dangers.

FOB is trying to foster this broader style of journalism. Their activists know the importance of taking people, including members of the press, out into the areas they are concerned about and giving them the chance to connect with the issues on a personal level.

By encouraging first-hand experiences, they hope to increase the public's understanding of environmental topics and to tear down the wall of polarity that divides the Bitterroot community.

III. DISCUSSION

1. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Daily Newspapers are Providing Incomplete Coverage of Environmental Issues

The daily newspapers in this study lack the commitment of staff, resources and time that is necessary to adequately cover all of the environmental issues in western Montana.

Environmental reporters at these papers have to make daily choices regarding which leads they will look into and which ones they will have to move down or off of their priority lists. Sometimes they don't even get to their lists because of other reporting assignments. The environmental issues that they manage to attend to are, for the most part, revealed through special interest soundbites.

There is very little time and newspaper space being devoted to investigative journalism, and the end result is that issues are neither covered thoroughly nor followed-up on a regular basis.

Environmental Groups are Pandering to the Weaknesses of Daily Newspapers

While press limitations can cause problems for environmentalists, they can also be perceived as a blessing in disguise because they provide advocates with the opportunity to help reporters out and to establish themselves as dependable news sources in the process.

Environmental groups in this study that are doing independent research and investigative work and, further, those that are willing and able to initiate and develop stories for reporters, are gaining a slight coverage edge over other advocacy groups.

The Public is Receiving a Distorted View of Environmental Issues

To a certain extent, there is an unhealthy alliance between the daily newspapers and environmental groups in this study. While papers are neither reporting on the full spectrum of environmental issues nor giving the issues they do spend time on thorough coverage, environmental groups are playing politics with their agendas in order to acquire as much press attention as they can get.

What does this mean in terms of the public? It means that we cannot rely solely upon daily newspapers to give us an adequate understanding of the issues.

What does this mean in terms of the environment? It means that we cannot depend solely upon conservation groups to protect the health of the planet.

2. SUGGESTIONS FOR DAILY NEWSPAPERS

Reveiw the Fundamentals of Good Journalism

Newspaper managers in this study aren't committing the personnel, time and resources that are needed to fully cover all of the environmental issues in western Montana. Their behavior calls into question the type of journalism they are creating and their bottom-line motives.

Are newspaper managers doing their best to reveal environmental subjects in their entirety or are they assigning only as many reporters as it takes to look at a few bits and pieces of the puzzle? Are they doing all they can to expose the root causes of environmental degradation or are they giving reporters only enough time to cover the superficial

aspects of issues. Are they upholding the journalistic principles of fairness, accuracy and truth, or are they exchanging these principles for short-term profits?

The answers to these questions are not all that simple and there are a lot of gray areas that come into play. The questions themselves are valid, nonetheless, and deserve further contemplation.

Devote more Personnel, Time and Resources to the Issues

Should newspaper reporters be the tools of special interest groups, or should they be using more of their own training and doing more of their own investigative work? Newspaper reporters should take a more participatory role in covering the environment.

If reporters were assigned exclusively to the environmental beat and coordinated their coverage with other reporters, they could begin to reflect the deeper levels of environmental issues.

Develop Team Approaches to Coverage

Many of the issues that the environmental reporters in this study cover are highly contested and to write about them on a sustainable basis reporters are relying upon a thick layer of skin for protection. Many of the issues are also highly complex and to address them reporters are depending heavily upon special interest groups for information.

Newspapers managers in this study are experimenting with ways to help reporters more effectively deal with the challenges of the job. Some of the newspapers are trying formal or informal team approaches to covering the environment, which can allow for a sharing of the burden

or at least provide some flexibility in one's reporting schedule. There is potential in the development of team approaches to coverage.

A one-paper team approach might allow reporters to occasionally research certain issues in depth, and could encourage a better balance between coverage of immediate and more ongoing issues. A multiple-paper coordinated approach, on the other hand, might do more than help balance the coverage between short-term and long-term environmental news. It could also put previously neglected issues into print for the first time.

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

Review the Code of Environmental Ethics

Conservation advocates in this study sometimes arrange their agenda with regard for a given newspaper's commitment to environmental coverage. Their behavior calls into question the brand of advocacy that they are buying into.

Are conservationists doing their best to fully present their issues of concern? Are they staying true to the goals espoused by their organizations? Or are they catering to the marketing philosophies of newspaper management?

The answers are not black and white but, again, the questions are worthy of further consideration.

Keep Working Hard

The environmental groups in this study are doing a lot of good things to advance their causes. They are doing pro-active research, establishing niches of expertise, networking on the grassroots level,

cultivating local involvement and support, and finding ways to get at least some newspaper coverage.

Stay Focused on the Message

Problems that environmental groups in this study are experiencing center around attempts to fit their messages into the limited spaces that newspapers give them.

With the mass media's current emphasis on soundbites, talking heads and rhetoric--a practice highly criticized and at times overthrown during the 1992 political campaigns--advocates must be very careful in choosing their words for the public record.

To keep their ideas from being fragmented, and to broaden the issues within the context of limited space, environmentalists must stick to their fundamental messages of coalitions, watersheds, ecosystems and interrelationships.

4. EVOLVING ROLES

Dick Manning was a natural resources reporter for the Missoulian. During his four years with the paper, many of his stories earned regional and national awards.

Manning wrote an investigative series in the spring of 1988 that documented the overcutting of private timberlands in western Montana. In the summer of 1989, he decided to resign from the Missoulian rather than accept reassignment to another beat. Manning charged that Missoulian editors were "caving in to open demands of the timber industry" by means of forcing him off the natural resources beat.

"My approach to covering the environment emphasized covering the science behind the issues," Manning says of his newspaper days. "I was really concerned that there seemed to be, in some cases, right and wrong answers, and so it was important to me to try and get behind the headlines and the controversy that was going on, and the confrontational kind of politics that went along with it, and to try to develop an understanding of the mechanisms of the environment."

Manning says that the current role of an environmental reporter ought to be broadened.

"The traditional role of a newspaper reporter," he says, "is to model coverage after all of the other kinds of coverage that we do, particularly political coverage.

"The traditional role of a reporter is to, what I call, 'round up the usual suspects.' In other words," he explains, "go out and talk to the timber industry and talk to the environmental groups and maybe talk to the regulatory agencies, and then write the story based on what they had to say. That's covering confrontation, and I think it skews the issue away from what's really valid or what's necessary."

Manning says that while reporters cover the human concerns of issues, they really don't cover what is happening to the environment.

"It's a necessary role for any environmental reporter to go behind the confrontation and write about what actually happens out there and look at some of the science that's involved," he says.

"Reporting takes its model from political coverage," Manning says, "but I think environmental reporting ought to take its model from nature and be less anthropocentric.

"It's really a time for retrenchment and rethinking about what we do as reporters," he continues. "I don't think that we do an adequate or credible enough job in the formats that are developing—especially the USA Today or broadcast formats.

"The time simply isn't there, the attention isn't there, and the depth of thought isn't there," he explains. "Nor is there a willingness to tackle the controversial **specifics** of the issues."

Manning says that broadcast-styled newspaper reporting glosses over the issues and comes up with pat answers or answers that people want to hear.

"It's fast-food journalism," he says, "and I don't think it serves the environment at all. I don't think it's adequate to cover the complexity that's out there. I think that the only way to adequately cover the environment is to avoid those formats completely."

Manning's advice for reporters: "Work in depth and don't be afraid to ignore the obvious path—the obvious path being to go to the meeting and cover the hearing and write what the people have to say.

"Don't be afraid to ignore that," Manning reiterates, "even at the peril of getting beat on the story. What I mean by that is, as a newspaper reporter, if you don't cover that hearing and all the TV stations have it on the air that night, then you're beat on the story. Don't worry about that."

He says that it's more important to "work the background of the story as deeply as you possibly can. Try to come to an understanding and remember that, ultimately, with regard to the environment, we are writing about science and in science there is often a 'right' answer.

"That's heresy to say that to a reporter," he adds. "They always say that 'there are two sides to every story,' and I say 'that's nonsense.' There are two views or five views or whatever to every story, but at the bottom the facts are there. I would recommend to go for those facts."

"The other thing I would tell reporters," Manning says in knowing tone, "is to be prepared to change jobs--be prepared to walk off, to be fired, to quit."

"Take it as far as you can," he concludes. "You have to maintain an effective voice, not your paycheck."

Manning's ideas for rethinking and retrenchment are aimed at more than media representatives, they are part of a general philosophy to explore the world that lies beyond the soundbites.

"We need to go into more thoughtful kinds of communication formats," says Manning. "Reporting is just communication, and that's what we're talking about. The more traditional approach, and by that I mean not so much in the newspaper sense, involves simply sitting down and talking to people, which is another valid approach to communication."

"There is much to be gained, especially among environmental organizations, by sitting down and talking with groups of people as opposed to trying to get headlines in the newspaper."

Manning says that there is a lot of misunderstanding about environmental issues.

"There needs to be the kind of give-and-take discussion that helps clarify the thinking that's going on," he adds, "and so we need to start concentrating on those forms of communication that bring people

together. We need to begin encouraging involvement in the process and the formation of relationship with the issues.

"What happened over the course of the '80s," Manning says, "was that more and more environmental groups spent all of their time trying to get their message out and not enough time on having a good or valid message."

His advice for environmental advocates: "Stop thinking about working effectively with the media, and start thinking about working effectively. Quit worrying about your press relationships so much and just go out there and do good work, whatever that is for you. Find what that is and **take action**. If you take action, the press will come on its own."

¹Murray Carpenter, development director, Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition, from April 14, 1992 interview.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Brad Hurd, editor, Missoulian, from April 27, 1992 interview.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Missoula Community Profile, Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Butte-Silver Bow, Montana: Community Profile, Butte-Silver Bow Chamber of Commerce.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Rick Foote, editor, Montana Standard, from May 3, 1992 interview.

¹¹Peter Nielsen, Missoula County environmental health supervisor and former Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition executive director, from April 30, 1992 interview.

¹²Greater Yellowstone Report: The Quarterly Journal of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, volume 9, number 1, winter 1992.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Bozeman Area Data, Bozeman Chamber of Commerce, June 1991.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Bill Wilke, managing editor, The Bozeman Daily Chronicle, from May 20, 1992 interview.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Community Profile: 1991, Kalispell Area Chamber of Commerce.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Donnie Laughlin, president, Friends of the Bitterroot, from June 9, 1992 interview.

²²Bitterroot Valley: The Best of the Last Best Places, Bitterroot Valley Chamber of Commerce.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Books

Haberman, David and Dolphin, Harry. Public Relations: The Necessary Art. Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1988.

Manning, Richard. Last Stand: Logging, Journalism, and the Case for Humility. Peregrine Smith Books, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1991.

Interviews

Adams, Duncan, Anaconda bureau reporter, Montana Standard. Interview by author, May 3, 1992, Anaconda, Montana.

Barrett, Ken, membership and development director, Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Interview by author, May 19, 1992, Bozeman, Montana.

Black, Dan, managing editor, Daily Inter Lake. Interview by author, June 11, 1992, Kalispell, Montana.

Brandborg, Stewart, environmental consultant and former president of Friends of the Bitterroot. Interview by author, June 24, 1992, Missoula, Montana, telephone interview.

Carpenter, Murray, development director, Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition. Interview by author, April, 14, 1992, Missoula, Montana.

Devlin, Sherry, environmental reporter, Missoulain. Interviews by author, May 14, 1991 and April 27, 1992, Missoula, Montana.

Ekey, Bob, communications director, Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Interviews by author May 19, 1992, Bozeman, Montana, and June 3, 1992, Missoula, Montana, telephone interview.

Farling, Bruce, conservation director, Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition. Interview by author, April 14, 1992, Missoula, Montana.

Foote, Rick, editor, Montana Standard. Interview by author, May 3, 1992, Butte, Montana.

Gaillard, Dave, bear issues coordinator, Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Interview by author, May 20, 1992, Bozeman, Montana.

Gibson, Jeff, editorial page editor, Montana Standard. Interview by author, May 3, 1992, Butte, Montana.

Hillery, Pam, Superfund community involvement director, Environmental Protection Agency. Interview by author, December 2, 1992, Missoula, Montana, telephone interview.

Hurd, Brad, editor, Missoulain. Interview by author, April 27, 1992, Missoula, Montana.

Kirkpatrick, Dave, political reporter and part-time environmental reporter, Montana Standard. Interview by author, May 3, 1992, Butte, Montana.

Laughlin, Donnie, president, Friends of the Bitterroot. Interview by author, June 9, 1992, Hamilton, Montana.

Manning, Richard, author and former natural resources reporter at the Missoulain. Interview by author, July 21, 1992, Missoula, Montana, telephone interview.

McConnaughey, John, managing editor, Ravalli Republic. Interview by author, June 9, 1992, Hamilton, Montana.

McMillion, Scott, environmental reporter, Bozeman Daily Chronicle. Interview by author, May 20, 1992, Livingston, Montana.

Nielsen, Peter, Missoula County health supervisor and former executive director of the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Coalition. Interviews by author, May 15, 1991 and April 30, 1992, Missoula, Montana.

Thompson, Steve, field representative, Montana Wilderness Association, Flathead Chapter. Interview by author, June 11, 1992, Kalispell, Montana.

Thorning, Ruth, reporter, Ravalli Republic. Interview by author, June 9, 1992, Hamilton, Montana.

Wilke, Bill, managing editor, Bozeman Daily Chronicle. Interview by author, May 20, 1992, Bozeman, Montana.

Newspapers

Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Bozeman, Montana. Owned by Pioneer Newspapers, Seattle, Washington.

Daily Inter Lake, Kalispell, Montana. Owned by the Hagadone Corporation, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Missoulain, Missoula, Montana. Owned by Lee Enterprises, Inc., Davenport, Iowa.

Montana Standard, Butte, Montana. Owned by Lee Enterprises, Inc., Davenport, Iowa.

Ravalli Republic, Hamilton, Montana. Owned by Scripps League Newspapers, Inc., Herdon, Virginia.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A - Basic Questions for Advocates

- * Can you tell me a little bit about your position here?
- * What type of education and/or training have you had for this line of work?
- * What attracted you to this group?
- * Describe the people who work here: What types of personalities do they have? What are their interests?
- * What is the mission of this organization?
- * What geographical area is the group concerned with?
- * How do you go about looking into the issues you are concerned with?
- * What roles do the individual staff members here play?
- * How do you get your information out to the public?
- * Tell me a about your relations with the daily newspaper(s) in this area: Who in your organization works with their representatives? How do you approach them? How long have you known them? How has your relationship changed or evolved over time? How responsive are they to the leads you give them? How are you trying to make them more responsive?
- * Tell me a little about some of the individual press members you have come across. What are some of the strengths in your relations? What are some of the weaknesses?
- * In the age of USA Today and what some call a shift in the newspaper business toward a broadcast style of journalism--more color, more graphics, more sidebars and summaries, and shorter stories--do you this see happening to any extent at the newspaper(s) in this area and, if so, is it influencing the coverage of environmental issues or the behavior of your organization?
- * What is the public support for your organization like? Do local citizens get involved in and support your efforts? Can you give me some examples?
- * How effective would you say your group is at getting your agenda of messages out to the public?
- * Summarize what you consider to be the key ingredients of an effective advocacy effort.

Appendix B - Basic Questions for Media Personnel

- * What is the geographical distribution of the newspaper like?
- * Can you give me a market breakdown and some demographical information about your readership?
- * How long have you lived in this area? How would you describe the people of this community? What are their environmental concerns like?
- * How is the environmental coverage handled here?
- * What are your reporting responsibilities?
- * What kind of education and/or training have you had for this job?
- * How long have you been covering these issues?
- * How do you come up with leads into environmental issues?
- * Do you keep in regular contact with the conservation group(s) in this area?
- * What helps or hinders your reporting of environmental issues?
- * What determines what leads or issues you'll look into on a given day?
- * What is your approach to covering the environmental beat: Do you cover stories as they break or do you have some kind of long-term plan for covering the issues?
- * In the age of USA Today and what some would call a shift in the newspaper business toward a broadcast style of journalism—more color, more graphics, more sidebars and summaries, and shorter stories—has this paper undergone any such changes and, if so, how has that influenced your environmental coverage?
- * How would you define your role as an environmental reporter?
- * What are your relations with [paired environmental group] like?
- * When did you first come across [paired group] and how has your relationship evolved since then?
- * What are the strengths and weaknesses in the relationship? Can you touch on some examples?
- * Do you have any advice for environmental groups regarding how they might present their messages more effectively?