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# Regional Issues, National Norms

## A Four-Region Analysis of U.S. Environment Reporters

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Does a national norm exist for environment reporters, or do they differ by region? This study used a census approach to examine environmental journalists in four regions of the United States. Across all four regions, these reporters spent much of their time covering nonenvironment stories. They relied more often on local and state sources than on national sources and used a variety of story frames and angles to construct their reporting. In discussing barriers to reporting, they were more likely to cite such issues as time constraints or the size of the news hole rather than interference by editors or advertisers. Most felt the need to remain objective, rejecting calls for advocacy or a civic-journalism approach. The study found more similarities across the regions than differences, suggesting that there is a national norm for covering the environment.

**Keywords:** *environment; reporters; journalists; risk; newspapers; television; communication*

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Environmental concerns can vary widely across the different regions of the United States. Do regional differences affect how newspaper and television reporters cover the environment? Or, do journalists, who generally have received standardized professional training, bring a consistency to their work regardless of the issue or locale? This project began with an examination of New England environment reporters first published in this journal in 2002 (Sachsman, Simon, and Valenti 2002). The research continued as a nationwide series of regional studies conducted over time in which all available newspaper and television environment reporters were interviewed in the Mountain West, the Pacific Northwest, and the South, in addition to New England.

Who are the environment reporters in the twenty-eight states of these four regions,<sup>1</sup> and for whom do they work? What are their job titles, and what are their duties? How satisfied are they with their jobs, and how much freedom do they have to pursue stories and decide which aspects should be emphasized? Which news sources do they say they use most often, and how do they frame their stories? What concerns do they have for the state of environment reporting? What are the similarities among environment reporters across these four regions, and what are the regional differences?

## **The Environment Beat**

As early as the 1930s, scholars began tracking science writers: who they were, how they were trained, and their impact on science and the mass media (Krieghbaum 1940). By the 1980s, this experienced, well-educated group of journalists, who had nonadversarial relationships with their sources, reported that they were devoting nearly a quarter of their time covering environment and energy subjects, primarily in breaking news or feature stories (Storad 1984). But although many environmental stories were written by science writers, a separate environment beat was emerging. By the early 1990s, those attending the annual convention of the Society of Environmental Journalists were writers interested in politics, land use, transportation, and economics, as well as science.

From the 1930s to modern times, the nature and focus of reporting changed. A review of the history of how the media presented engineering research to the public from the 1930s through the 1950s (LaFollette 2004) applies equally well to the environmental issues of the time. Media then celebrated engineering accomplishments, featured famous engineers, discussed failures and problems overcome, identified engineering progress

with prosperity, and emphasized the practical applications of research findings. Most notably, corporations (DuPont, General Electric, AT&T, and Westinghouse) sponsored or served as underwriters for broadcast series on both radio and television that dramatized engineering achievements, even venturing into descriptions of mathematical principles and mechanics. “Audiences may be sometimes interested in techniques and principles but they are almost always interested in how people . . . succeed,” researcher Marcel LaFollette reported to an audience of scientists, journalists, and others attending the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Seattle, Washington, in 2004. Likewise, a study of environmental coverage found that environment reporting in the 1940s often was dominated by corporate public relations efforts (Sachsman 1973).

By the late 1960s, however, although corporate public relations may still have dominated news stories on engineering, environment reporting was based on conflicting statements from a wide variety of sources, ranging from environmental activists to government officials and business leaders (Sachsman 1973). In 1971, Richard W. Darrow, President of Hill and Knowlton (then the nation’s largest public relations firm), called it the “Great Ecological Communications War” and told the Economic Council of Forest Products Industry:

We will do those things that earn us attention and gain us understanding, or we will live out the remainder of our professional lives in the creeping, frustrating, stultifying, stifling grasp of unrealistic legislative restraints and crippling administrative restriction. A public that ought to understand us—and thank us for what we are and what we do—will instead clamor for our scalps. (Sachsman 1973, 8)

A study of health reporters at local television stations showed a continuing reliance on public relations and sources for story ideas (Tanner 2004). Special interests personally contacted these health and medical reporters, thus playing a significant role in setting the agenda for local television news coverage of health. Little actual newsgathering occurred. Tanner concluded that these beat specialists partake in a “passive news discovery process” rather than conducting enterprise journalism (p. 360). Tanner also found that health-beat reporters (like environmental journalists) spent much of their time covering other stories. Only one-third said that they concentrated solely on health reporting. Tanner’s fifty-some respondents also reported having little or no formal education in health or medicine.

Earlier research on the health and medical beat found that size matters; some larger markets even employed physicians to report health information

(Schwitzer 1992). Dorothy Nelkin (1995) pointed out that medical researchers and other scientists rely on the media to get news of their work to the public, the symbiotic relationship between the media and scientists ultimately shaping what and how much the public knows. In the case of television news, a health reporter's decision to cover a story or not may depend entirely on the availability of video or "humanization opportunities" (Tanner 2004, 361).

The news media serve as gatekeepers and the primary brokers of information on science, risk, hazards, and technology (Hornig 1990; Singer and Endreny 1987; Slovic 1987). Communicating with the public by way of science reporters, health reporters, or environmental journalists presumably enhances public understanding and affects the content of mediated messages (Valenti 2000). This interface of experts and journalists is often complicated by disciplinary barriers and the fragmentation of knowledge within the scientific community (Kafatos and Eisner 2004). Suzuki (2003) faulted narrow training within the sciences and noted, "Unfortunately, the public receives science messages in a disjointed and disconnected way" (p. 1289).

The 1995 International Social Survey polled citizens in twenty countries on knowledge of the environment and what affects it, ranking the U.S. public in seventh place ("Environmental Knowledge Gap" 1995). The 2002 report of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press on what Americans feel about science indicated a very high level of interest: 92 percent reported that they were interested and 72 percent said that they thought science was beneficial. However, only 30 percent felt that they understood the scientific process, and only 14 percent felt well informed. Earlier research (in 2001) indicated that people got their general information about science and technology primarily from television (44 percent), newspapers (18 percent), magazines (16 percent), the Internet (9 percent), and books (2 percent). That means that 89 percent of science information arrived by way of the media; the remainder came from family, friends, or other sources.

Pew researchers in 2004 found that nearly half of the 547 national and local print, online, and broadcast journalists surveyed were pessimistic about the quality of current journalism and felt that news had become thinner and shallower. Some 80 percent of the sampled reporters from a range of national news outlets complained that media are paying too little attention to complex stories, an obvious category for most science or environment stories, yet they dismissed the suggestion that media overall were too cynical. Print reporters were twice as likely as broadcasters to see themselves in the traditional watchdog role (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2004).

Research aimed at demonstrating the processes and effectiveness of environment reporting has been developing since the 1970s (Atwater,

Salwen, and Anderson 1985; Cantrill 1993; Cohn 1990; Friedman 1990; Greenburg et al. 1989; Sachsman 1976; Taylor, Lee, and Davie 2000; Valenti 1995, 1998). Hansen (1993) edited a compilation of work, primarily from European and Canadian researchers, that offered insights into how environmental journalism in the international arena affected and was affected by the overall environmental agenda. This study, as a sequel to Hansen's efforts and as an extension of the longitudinal research of Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) and Weaver et al. (2005), should prove useful in understanding this specialty beat and those who cover environment issues for public consumption.

## Method

This survey research project adopted the ambitious goal of using a census approach to interview every environment reporter at every daily newspaper and television station with a news director in the regions examined. There is no single list of such reporters. We used a multistep process to gather names from multiple sources, including the membership lists from the Society of Environmental Journalists and the National Association of Science Writers, reporter lists from state and federal environmental offices, and a commercial guide to media organizations.

A list of all newspapers and television stations was also created from annual listings in *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook* and *Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook*. If a potential environment reporter had been identified for a given media outlet, that person was called and asked two screening questions: did he or she work full-time there, and "Do you cover the environment on a regular basis as part of your reporting duties?" The latter question was designed to cast a wide net for reporters and not to focus solely on full-time beat specialists.

If no one had been identified, the interviewer spoke to a high-level news person (usually a managing editor for newspapers or a news editor or assignment editor for television), described the screening questions, and asked if any reporter qualified. Any qualified reporter was then interviewed. At the end of a telephone interview, the reporter was asked whether any other reporters at the news organization met the criteria in the screening questions and if there were reporters in the region who attended environment-oriented news conferences and might qualify.

The interviewers consisted of a coauthor of this article and trained graduate students and undergraduate honors students. Reporters were called at

least three times; their responses were entered manually on a survey form and then entered for computer analysis (using SPSS). Reporters who had recently switched from the environment to new assignments were excluded, as were reporters on sabbatical and reporters who did not complete the interview process.

The method yielded an unusually high response rate, as required for a census approach. In New England, 55 reporters were identified, and all 55 were interviewed in 2000. In the Mountain West, 91 of 91 reporters were interviewed in 2001. In the Pacific Northwest, 57 of 60 reporters were interviewed in 2002 (a 95.0 percent response rate). In the South, 151 of 158 reporters were interviewed in 2002-2003 (a 95.6 percent response rate). Therefore, the response rate varied from a low of 95.0 percent in the Pacific Northwest to a high of 100 percent in New England and the Mountain West.

## Findings

### Covering the Environment: Newspapers versus Television

Across all four regions, newspapers were far more likely than television stations to have a reporter covering the environment on a regular basis. In the Pacific Northwest, 70.0 percent of the daily newspapers had at least one environment reporter, the highest percentage of the regions covered (see Table 1). Environment reporters also were found at 51.2 percent of New England newspapers, 50.9 percent of those in the Mountain West, and 40.6 percent of those in the South.

The use of environment reporters tended to increase along with the size of the 550 newspapers examined. Most of the newspapers with daily circulations of less than 14,000 did not have environment reporters<sup>2</sup>; in contrast, in every region, at least 85 percent of the newspapers with weekday circulations of more than 60,000 had at least one environment reporter.

At the 347 television stations examined, environment reporters were the exception rather than the rule (see Table 1). TV stations with news directors were most likely to have an environment reporter in the Pacific Northwest, where 21.4 percent of stations had such reporters, compared with New England (12.1 percent), the Mountain West (11.8 percent), and the South (11.7 percent). Network affiliates also were more likely than noncommercial stations and unaffiliated stations to have both a news operation and an environment reporter.

**Table 1**  
**Breakdown of Environment Reporters by Medium, by Region**

Variable	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
1. Number of environment reporters in each region by media				
Newspapers	51	81	51	131 <sup>a</sup>
TV	4	10	9	27
Total	55	91	60	158
2. Number of newspapers/ number of papers with at least one environment reporter	82/42	108/55	50/35	310 <sup>b</sup> /126 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage of newspapers with environment reporters	51.2	50.9	70.0	40.6
3. Number of TV stations/ number of TV stations with at least one environment reporter	33/4	76/9	42/9	196/23
Percentage of TV stations with environment reporters	12.1	11.8	21.4	11.7

a. The numbers of reporters and newspapers are not consistent because some newspapers had more than one environment reporter, while a few shared a single reporter.

b. One newspaper was not contacted because of language barriers.

## Juggling Other Duties

Although 46.9 percent of the newspapers and 13.0 percent of the television stations studied had reporters covering the environment on a regular basis, these percentages mask the fact that many of these reporters must also juggle other duties. Project researchers asked reporters for their specific job titles and then combined all titles that contained the word *environment*. This method increased the number of “environment reporters” by folding in environment-science and environment-health reporters. Even with the expanded definition, a minority of the journalists in all four regions were called “environment reporters” or “environment writers” in their own newsrooms. The percentage ranged from a high of 33.8 percent of newspaper and

**Table 2**  
**Job Titles of “Environment Reporters” (in percentages)**

Job Title	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
Environment reporter, writer; all environment combos	18.2	28.6	29.8	33.8
Natural resources writer	0.0	8.8	10.5	8.6
Science reporter or writer	9.1	0.0	1.8	0.7
Health reporter or writer	3.6	0.0	1.8	0.0
Reporter, general-assignment reporter, staff writer	54.5	46.2	38.6	47.7
Specialized reporter (business, politics, sports)	10.9	8.8	10.5	3.3
Specialized editor (state editor, city editor)	3.6	7.7	7.0	6.0
Total	99.9 <sup>a</sup>	100.1 <sup>a</sup>	100	100.1 <sup>a</sup>

Note: Reporters were asked, “First, what is your exact job title at [name of organization]?”

a. Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding.

television reporters in the South to a low of 18.2 percent in New England (see Table 2). An additional subgroup was labeled as natural resource writers or reporters, especially in the Pacific Northwest, South, and Mountain West.

Many environment writers had official titles such as general-assignment reporter, staff writer, or simply reporter. These more general titles were given to 38.6 percent of the environment reporters in the Pacific Northwest, 46.2 percent in the Mountain West, 47.7 percent in the South, and 54.5 percent in New England. Some environment writers had official titles such as business writer and politics writer; others would spend some days covering the environment and other days as state or city editors.

Although there were some differences among regions (a lack of “natural resource” reporters in New England, no environment reporters called “health reporters” in the Mountain West and South), the percentage of reporters in each title category did not vary much across regions.

One reason for the varied titles may be that these reporters often had duties that go far beyond covering the environment. Many reporters said that they would arrive for work to cover that day’s breaking stories, whatever they might be, and that any environment-oriented stories would be given to them. Sometimes the other issues were related to the environment, such as stories on science and health. But as generalists, they also covered



**Table 3**  
**Percentage of Time Spent on Environment Stories, by Region**

Percentage of Time Spent	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
0 to 33	58.2	37.4	35.1	51.7
34 to 66	23.6	31.9	24.6	18.5
67 to 100	18.2	30.8	40.4	29.8
Total	100	100.1 <sup>a</sup>	100.1 <sup>a</sup>	100
Mean	37.9	49.96	53.7	44.2

Note: Reporters were asked, "Do you cover the environment on a regular basis as part of your reporting duties?" If a reporter answered "yes," he or she was asked, "Looking back on the past year, about what percentage of your time has been spent on reporting environment stories?"

a. Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding.

**Table 4**  
**Experience Level of Environment Reporters, by Region**

Variable	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
Years in journalism (median/mean)	15/15.8	13/14.4	15/14.7	12/13.5
Years covering the environment (median/mean)	9/10.2	6/8.8	5/7.6	5/7.9
Median age	45	39	41	41

a wide range of other topics. The percentage of time spent on environment stories in the preceding twelve months ranged on average (mean) from 53.7 percent in the Pacific Northwest to a low of 37.9 percent in New England (see Table 3).

Whatever their titles, most of the environment reporters studied here were veteran journalists. Specialized reporting assignments, such as covering the environment, often go to more experienced reporters. In all four regions, environment reporters had an average (mean) of between 13.5 and 15.8 years experience in journalism (see Table 4). Their experience in covering the environment varied, on average, from a mean of 7.6 years in the Pacific Northwest to a mean of 10.2 years in New England. Again, the typical reporter also handled many nonenvironmental stories.

**Table 5**  
**Satisfaction Level of Environment Reporters,**  
**by Region (in percentages)**

Variable	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)	U.S. Journalists (2002)
Very satisfied	20.0	33.3	26.3	34.0	33.3
Fairly satisfied	65.5	52.2	57.9	52.7	50.6
Somewhat dissatisfied	12.7	13.3	15.8	8.7	14.4
Very dissatisfied	1.8	1.1	0.0	4.7	1.7
Total	100	99.9 <sup>a</sup>	100	100.1 <sup>a</sup>	100
Mean	1.96	1.82	1.89	1.84	NA

Note: Reporters were asked, “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your present job—would you say 1) very satisfied, 2) fairly satisfied, 3) somewhat dissatisfied, or 4) very dissatisfied?” NA = not available.

a. Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding.

The greater experience of New England reporters may be an artifact of their age. The median age of New England environment reporters was forty-five years, compared with forty-one for those in the South and the Pacific Northwest and thirty-nine in the Mountain West.

### **Job Satisfaction and Characteristics in Evaluating a Job**

Most environment reporters in all four regions were satisfied with their jobs, as were U.S. journalists in general responding to a national survey in 2002 (Weaver et al. 2005).<sup>3</sup> At least 84.2 percent of environment reporters in the four regions said that they were fairly satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 83.9 percent of the U.S. reporters. About one-third of the environment reporters in the Mountain West and South said that they were very satisfied, as did 33.3 percent in the United States in general (see Table 5). The mean scores of the regions ranged from 1.82 to 1.96 (1 = very satisfied, 2 = satisfied), showing the consistency of the evaluations.

Being an environment reporter supplies extrinsic rewards such as salary and fringe benefits, plus intrinsic rewards such as satisfying a desire to help people. Project interviewers asked reporters to rate which characteristics were important to them in judging jobs in their field. Ratings ranged from “very important” to “not important at all.” Table 6 focuses on the percentages of reporters saying that the characteristics were very important, comparing them

**Table 6**  
**Environment Reporters Versus U.S. Journalists in General, by**  
**Characteristics in Evaluating a Job, by Region**

Characteristic	Percentage Saying Characteristic Was "Very Important"					
	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)	U.S. Journalists (1992)	U.S. Journalists (2002)
Amount of autonomy	50.9	47.8	35.1	37.7	51	56
Editorial policies	50.9	44.0	37.5	35.1	69	69
Chance to help people	29.1	39.6	24.6	37.3	61	63
Chance to develop a specialty	34.5	24.2	21.1	22.5	40	41
Chance to influence public affairs	29.1	22.2	14.0	20.7	NA	NA
Job security	18.2	17.8	14.0	21.2	61	58
The pay	10.9	14.3	7.0	11.3	21	18
Fringe benefits	12.7	13.2	5.3	8.8	35	29
Chance to get ahead	16.4	4.4	1.8	11.3	39	35

Note: In 2000, 2001, and 2002 to 2003, reporters were asked, "Now I'd like to find out how important a number of things are to you in judging jobs in your field, not just your job. For instance, how much difference does [the pay] make in how you rate a job in your field? Is [the pay] very important, important, neither important nor unimportant, not important or not important at all?" In 1992, reporters were asked, "I'd like to find out how important a number of things are to you in judging jobs in your field, not just your job. For instance, how much difference does [the pay] make in how you rate a job in your field? Is [the pay] very important, fairly important or not important at all?" (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, 101, 257). NA = not available.

with the findings of the 2002 national study of U.S. journalists in general (D. H. Weaver, personal communication, June 7, 2005).

The results were remarkably consistent across all four regions. A desire for autonomy and the editorial policies of a news organization were two of the top three characteristics in each of the four regions. Also topping the list in the South, Pacific Northwest, and Mountain West was the chance to help people; in New England, the chance to develop a specialty was among the top characteristics.

The responses of environment reporters were similar to the U.S. journalists questioned in the 2002 study, in which editorial policies and the chance to help people were listed as two of the top characteristics. But job security was much more important for U.S. journalists in general than for environment reporters, perhaps reflecting a real difference between the two groups.

**Table 7**  
**Autonomy in Story Selection, by Region**

Percentage Saying They Had	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)	U.S. Journalists (1992)	U.S. Journalists (2002)
Almost complete freedom in selecting the stories they work on <sup>a</sup>	21.8	42.2	24.6	33.1	44	37
Almost complete freedom in deciding which aspects of a news story should be emphasized <sup>b</sup>	29.1	40.7	35.1	37.1	51	38
Almost complete freedom in following up on a story <sup>c</sup>	23.6	38.5	29.8	33.8	55 <sup>d</sup>	48 <sup>d</sup>

Note: Each number represents the percentage of respondents who said they had “almost complete freedom” in dealing with the issue.

a. Reporters were asked, “How much freedom do you usually have in selecting the stories you work on? Would you say: 1) Almost complete freedom, 2) A great deal of freedom, 3) Some freedom, 4) Not much freedom, or 5) none at all.”

b. Reporters were asked, “How much freedom do you usually have in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized? Would you say: 1) Almost complete freedom, 2) A great deal of freedom, 3) Some freedom, 4) Not much freedom, or 5) none at all.”

c. Reporters were asked, “If you have a good idea for a subject which you think is important and should be followed up, how often are you able to get the subject covered? Would you say: 1) Almost complete freedom, 2) A great deal of freedom, 3) Some freedom, 4) Not much freedom, or 5) none at all.”

d. They are almost always able to get a story covered that they think should be covered.

Autonomy may be one of the highest rated factors among environment reporters in judging jobs in their field, yet Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 62-63) in their 1992 study of U.S. journalists in general spoke in terms of “autonomy’s decline” in the time period from 1982 to 1992.

The current study and Weaver’s 2002 data suggest that the decline in the degree of autonomy is continuing among environment reporters and U.S. reporters in general (see Table 7). In all four regions, and in the 2002 study of U.S. journalists in general, on all three questions asked, lower percentages of reporters said they had “almost complete freedom” to pursue a story, to pursue a story angle, and to follow up on a story, compared with the reporters examined in the 1992 survey.

Some regional differences did emerge. A higher percentage of Mountain West reporters said that they had almost complete freedom to select stories, decide which aspects of stories should be emphasized, and follow up on stories than environment reporters in any other region. On all three questions, the lowest percentages of reporters saying that they had complete freedom were in New England. Southern reporters were in second place across regions on all three questions, while Pacific Northwest reporters ranked third.

### **Sources: Stress on the Local and State**

The reporters were asked specifically about twenty-nine sources, ranging from federal, state, and local government agencies through environmental and business groups to academics. Reporters were asked to judge whether they used such sources always, often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

Table 8 summarizes the most used and least used sources (ranked by mean score) in each of the four regions. There was some consistency across regions. State departments of environmental quality, local environmental groups, and local citizens active on the environment were among the most used groups. The results were a bit more varied at the bottom. Greenpeace was one of the least used sources in all four regions. The Chemical Manufacturers Association, the National Health and Safety Council, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration were near the bottom in two regions, and two national agencies, the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances, were near the bottom in a single region.

An examination of the use of all twenty-nine sources in each region showed an emphasis on local and state sources. Among national sources, only the Environmental Protection Agency was ranked between 2.0 (often) and 3.0 (sometimes) in all four regions.

### **Framing Stories: Using Multiple Angles**

The environment reporters said that they framed their stories in many different ways. Sometimes they used solely environmental frames. Other times, they added elements involving government, human interest, business and economics, nature and wilderness, pollution, politics, science and technology, health, and risk assessment angles.

Interviewers asked reporters to look back on the stories they had done and to estimate how often, using a five-point, Likert-type scale ranging from "always" (1) to "never" (5), their stories involved one of nine angles.

**Table 8**  
**Summary of Most Used and Least Used**  
**Sources (mean scores), by Region**

	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
Most used	1. State departments of environmental quality (1.98)	1. Local environmental groups (2.21)	1. Local environmental groups (2.18)	1. State departments of environmental quality (2.18)
	2. Local environmental groups (2.29)	2. Local activist citizens (2.29)	2. State departments of environmental quality (2.21)	2. Local activist citizens (2.34)
	3. State departments of natural resources (2.32)	3. State departments of environmental quality (2.31)	3. Local activist citizens (2.49)	3. Local environmental groups (2.36)
Least used	27-28. Chemical Manufacturers Association; U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances (4.18) <sup>a</sup>	27. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (4.14)	27. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (4.23)	27. National Health and Safety Council (4.09)
		28. National Health and Safety Council (4.27)	28. Greenpeace (4.42)	28. National Science Foundation (4.17)
	29. Greenpeace (4.31)	29. Greenpeace (4.45)	29. Chemical Manufacturers Association (4.58)	29. Greenpeace (4.30)

Note: Reporters were asked, "Now I am going to read you a list of potential *sources* that you might use on environmental stories. Please tell me if you always use the source in your reporting, often use it, sometimes use it, rarely use it or never use it. For example, [the Environmental Protection Agency]. Would you say that you 1) always use [the Environmental Protection Agency] as a source, 2) often use it, 3) sometimes use it, 4) rarely use it or 5) never use it?"

a. These sources were tied in frequency of use.

Across the four regions, the importance of government in environment stories becomes clear (see Table 9). Government ranked first or second in all four regions, with the lowest mean scores (2 = often, 3 = sometimes, 4 = rarely). Human interest and business and economics also ranked near the top in some regions. Receiving the lowest ranking in all four regions

**Table 9**  
**Story Angles, by Region (mean scores)**

New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
Human interest (2.18)	Government (2.01)	Government (2.00)	Government (2.11)
Government (2.24)	Business/economic (2.22)	Business/economic (2.30)	Human interest (2.16)
Pollution (2.33)	Nature/wilderness (2.36)	Politics <sup>a</sup> (2.35)	Pollution (2.30)
Nature/wilderness (2.38)	Human interest (2.37)	Human interest <sup>a</sup> (2.35)	Business/economic (2.37)
Health (2.53)	Politics (2.41)	Nature/wilderness (2.40)	Nature/wilderness (2.58)
Business/economic (2.57)	Science/technology (2.70)	Pollution <sup>b</sup> (2.74)	Science/technology (2.79)
Science/technology (2.62)	Pollution (2.73)	Science/technology <sup>b</sup> (2.74)	Health (2.80)
Political (2.69)	Health (3.02)	Health (2.93)	Political (2.81)
Risk assessment (2.98)	Risk assessment (3.16)	Risk assessment (3.36)	Risk assessment (3.04)

Note: Reporters were asked, "Sometimes environmental stories deal only with the environment. Sometimes they also deal with other issues. Looking back on the stories you have done, how often would you say they also involve a [business or economic] angle? Would you say your environmental stories 1) always have [a business or economic angle], 2) often do, 3) sometimes do, 4) rarely do, or 5) never have [a business or economic angle]?" (2 = often, 3 = sometimes, 4 = rarely).

a. Politics and human interest angles were tied.

b. Pollution and science and technology angles were tied.

was risk assessment, although the distance between the means of the high-est ranked angles and the lowest ranked was not that great.

## Handling Problem Stories

Environment reporters were divided as to how they handle "problem" stories and whether they felt that such stories are blown out of proportion (see Table 10). Regional differences emerged when reporters were asked whether they agreed that "an environmental problem is generally a better news story than an environmental success." Some 51.0 percent of Pacific Northwest reporters agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, compared with 50.7 percent in the South, 49.0 percent in New England, and a low of 31.8 percent in the Mountain West.

**Table 10**  
**Handling of Stories on Environmental**  
**Problems and Risk (in percentages)**

Variable	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
1. See environmental problems as better stories than environmental successes <sup>a</sup>				
Strongly agree	5.9	2.4	0.0	10.7
Agree	43.1	29.4	51.0	40.0
Disagree	43.1	60.0	47.1	44.3
Strongly disagree	7.8	8.2	2.0	5.0
Total	99.9 <sup>b</sup>	100	100.1 <sup>b</sup>	100
<i>n</i>	51	85	51	140
2. Concentrate too much on problems and pollution versus helping public understand research and issues <sup>c</sup>				
Strongly agree	1.9	4.9	2.0	3.6
Agree	55.8	45.7	58.8	55.4
Disagree	42.3	45.7	37.3	36.7
Strongly disagree	0.0	3.7	2.0	4.3
Total	100	100	100.1 <sup>b</sup>	100
<i>n</i>	52	81	51	139
3. Have overblown environmental risks, unduly alarming the public <sup>d</sup>				
Strongly agree	0.0	0.0	3.6	0.7
Agree	25.0	16.9	18.2	20.7
Disagree	66.7	72.3	72.7	68.9
Strongly disagree	8.3	10.8	5.5	9.6
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	48	83	55	135

Note: The questions offered four potential responses and no neutral category. Responses of “no opinion” were counted as missing.

a. Reporters were asked, “An environmental problem is generally a better news story than an environmental success. Do you . . . ?”

b. Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding.

c. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists generally concentrate far too much on problems and pollution rather than writing stories to help the public understand research or complex issues. Do you . . . ?”

d. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists generally have overblown environmental risks, unduly alarming the public. Do you . . . ?”

A narrow majority of reporters in all four regions agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement “Environmental journalists generally concentrate far too much on problems and pollution rather than writing stories to help the



public understand research or complex issues.” The percentages ranged from a low of 50.6 percent in the Mountain West to a high of 60.8 percent in the Pacific Northwest.

There was much less support for the statement “Environmental journalists generally have overblown environmental risks, unduly alarming the public.” Of the 321 reporters who responded, only 3 strongly agreed with the statement. In contrast, 83.1 percent of environment reporters in the Mountain West disagreed (or strongly disagreed), as did 78.5 percent of reporters in the South, 78.2 percent in the Pacific Northwest, and 75.0 percent in New England.

## **Overcoming Barriers to Environment Reporting**

Whether covering the environment or working as general-assignment reporters, journalists have to overcome a variety of barriers to perform their jobs. This study identified which barriers were cited most often by environment reporters. Reporters were asked about seventeen potential barriers, ranging from outside factors such as advertisers and government sources to internal factors such as their editors and publishers or station managers. The study also looked at workplace factors such as time constraints and the size of the news hole. The percentage of reporters saying that an item was always or often a barrier was used to rank-order the barriers.

The results were fairly consistent across regions (see Table 11). The issue of time constraints was the number one factor in all four regions, while financial, travel, and resource concerns were number two. The size of the news hole was a top barrier in three regions, while in the South, the audience’s lack of technical knowledge on environmental issues was a top barrier.

There were also similarities across regions in terms of the lowest ranked barriers to environment reporting. Such factors as a reporter’s colleagues, university sources, and environmental activists were cited as being among the lowest barriers in at least three of the four regions. Other factors ranked as not being of major concern in some regions were the publisher or station manager, legal concerns, the competition, government sources, and advertisers.

Are editors and other supervisors barriers to environment reporting? In each region, editors were ranked as the eighth or ninth highest barrier of the seventeen examined. Editors and supervisors were cited as barriers by 3.6 percent of reporters in New England, compared with 3.3 percent in both the South and Mountain West and 1.8 percent in the Pacific Northwest.

## **Objectivity versus Advocacy**

The journalists were asked several questions exploring whether environment reporters try to be objective in their coverage or feel that they should

**Table 11**  
**Summary of Barriers in Reporting**  
**on the Environment, by Region**

	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
Highest barrier	1. Time constraints (42.6%)	1. Time constraints (55.0%)	1. Time constraints (52.7%)	1. Time constraints (51.0%)
	2. Financial, travel, or other resource constraints (22.2%)	2. Financial, travel, or other resource constraints (28.6%)	2. Financial, travel, or other resource constraints (45.6%)	2. Financial, travel, or other resource constraints (30.4%)
	3. Size of news hole (14.5%)	3. Size of news hole (25.3%)	3. Size of news hole (29.8 %)	3. Audience's lack of technical knowledge on environment (28.8%)
Lowest barrier	15-17. Your colleagues; university sources; legal concerns; environmental activists; your publisher or station manager (0.0%) <sup>a</sup>	15-16. University sources; the competition (1.1%) <sup>a</sup>	15-17. Your colleagues; government sources; advertisers; environmental activists (0.0%) <sup>a</sup>	15-16. University sources; environmental activists (1.3%) <sup>a</sup>
		17. Your colleagues (0.0%)		17. Your colleagues (0.7%)

Note: Numbers are percentages of reporters saying that variable was “always” or “often” a barrier. Reporters were asked, “I’d like to find out whether certain people, problems and institutions are a barrier in reporting on environmental stories. For instance, [the size of the news hole]. Would you say [the size of the news hole] is . . . always a barrier in reporting on environmental stories . . . ?”

a. These variables were tied in frequency of being mentioned as barriers.

be supporting the environment (see Table 12). The journalists relied on their own definitions of objectivity. Across the four regions, all but two of the environment reporters agreed that their peers needed to be as objective as other journalists, and all but two said that reporters needed to be fair to both corporations and environmental activist groups. A majority rejected the idea of working with community leaders to solve environmental problems

**Table 12**  
**Reporters' Attitudes about Job Values, by Region (in percentages)**

Job Value	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
1. Need to be as objective as other journalists <sup>a</sup>				
Strongly agree	70.9	69.7	87.7	82.1
Agree	27.3	29.2	12.3	17.9
Disagree	1.8	1.1	0.0	0.0
Strongly disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	55	89	57	151
2. Should sometimes be advocates for the environment <sup>b</sup>				
Strongly agree	4.1	1.3	1.9	5.8
Agree	36.7	36.7	17.3	37.0
Disagree	42.9	40.5	48.1	43.5
Strongly disagree	16.3	21.5	32.7	13.8
Total	100	100	100	100.1 <sup>c</sup>
<i>n</i>	49	79	52	138
3. Need to be fair to corporations <sup>d</sup>				
Strongly agree	46.3	41.8	52.6	61.7
Agree	53.7	58.2	45.6	37.6
Disagree	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.7
Strongly disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	54	91	57	149
4. Need to be fair to environmental activist groups <sup>e</sup>				
Strongly agree	46.3	36.3	56.1	58.0
Agree	53.7	63.7	42.1	41.3
Disagree	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.7
Strongly disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	54	91	57	150
5. Should work with community leaders to solve environmental problems <sup>f</sup>				
Strongly agree	2.2	3.7	0.0	6.8
Agree	28.3	24.4	13.7	32.6
Disagree	56.5	64.6	72.5	47.7
Strongly disagree	13.0	7.3	13.7	12.9
Total	100	100	99.9 <sup>e</sup>	100
<i>n</i>	46	82	51	132

(continued)

**Table 12 (continued)**

Job Value	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)
6. Are too green, slanted in favor of environmentalism <sup>g</sup>				
Strongly agree	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.8
Agree	46.5	36.6	44.7	41.4
Disagree	53.5	57.7	53.2	54.1
Strongly disagree	0.0	4.2	2.1	3.8
Total	100	99.9 <sup>c</sup>	100	100.1 <sup>c</sup>
<i>n</i>	43	71	47	133
7. Are too brown, slanted in favor of industry <sup>h</sup>				
Strongly agree	2.0	2.5	8.7	5.2
Agree	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Disagree	87.8	88.8	87.0	85.1
Strongly disagree	8.2	8.8	4.3	9.7
Total	100	100.1 <sup>c</sup>	100	100
<i>n</i>	49	80	46	134

Note: The questions offered four potential responses and no neutral category. Responses of “no opinion” were counted as missing.

- a. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists need to be just as objective as journalists in general. Do you . . . ?”
- b. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists sometimes should be advocates for the environment. Do you . . . ?”
- c. Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding.
- d. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists need to be fair to sources such as corporations. Do you . . . ?”
- e. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists need to be fair to sources such as environmental activist groups. Do you . . . ?”
- f. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists should work with community leaders to help solve environmental problems. Do you . . . ?”
- g. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists tend to be too ‘green’—meaning slanted in favor of environmentalism. Do you . . . ?”
- h. Reporters were asked, “Environmental journalists tend to be too ‘brown’—meaning slanted in favor of business and industry. Do you . . . ?”

and rejected the idea that environment reporters sometimes should be advocates for the environment. Nevertheless, in all four regions, sizable minorities favored working with community leaders and advocacy reporting.

In all four regions, the reporters were split more evenly on whether their counterparts were too “green” (slanted in favor of environmentalism; see

Table 12). A substantial minority of reporters agreed or strongly agreed with that statement in each region, ranging from 38 percent in the Mountain West to 46.5 percent in New England. An overwhelming majority of reporters in all four regions, ranging from 91.3 percent in the Pacific Northwest to 97.6 percent in the Mountain West, rejected the notion that environment reporters are too “brown” (slanted in favor of industry).

### **Uniformity in Demographic and Attitudinal Characteristics**

The study found consistency across all four regions in many demographic characteristics of the reporters (see Table 13). For example, the environment reporters ranged in median age from thirty-nine in the Mountain West to forty-five in New England. The median age in the Pacific Northwest and the South (forty-one) was identical to that of U.S. reporters in general (Weaver et al. 2005). A college degree was the norm for environment reporters and U.S. journalists in general. Ninety-eight percent of Mountain West reporters had college degrees, compared with 93.3 percent in the South, 93.0 percent in the Pacific Northwest, 89.1 percent in New England, and 89.3 percent among U.S. reporters in general. The percentage of environment reporters with advanced degrees ranged from a high of 30.9 percent in New England to a low of 14.6 percent in the South compared with 16.5 percent among U.S. journalists in general in 2002 (D. H. Weaver, personal communication, June 7, 2005).

Environment reporters were overwhelmingly white in all four sections of the country. Nonwhite reporters totaled less than 4 percent in New England, the Mountain West, and the South and hit a high of 7.1 percent in the Pacific Northwest, in each case lower than the percentage of U.S. journalists of color (9.5 percent) in 2002 (Weaver et al. 2005). By better than a two-to-one margin, environment reporters were more likely to be male than female, very similar to the male/female ratio of U.S. reporters in general.

The interviews also served as a reminder that journalists' salaries are modest. The percentage of reporters making more than \$60,000 a year peaked at 15.1 percent in the Pacific Northwest and ran as low as 4.8 percent in the Mountain West.

There were regional differences in the religions of environment reporters. But those differences seemed to parallel the religious differences of people living in those regions (e.g., more Catholics and Jews in New England). In addition, the environment reporters differed regionally and trailed U.S. journalists in general (in 1992 and 2002) and the U.S. population (in 1992) in terms of the importance of religion and religious beliefs. Although 35.4 percent of

**Table 13**  
**Demographic Differences among Environment Reporters, by Region**

	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	Pacific Northwest (2002)	South (2002 to 2003)	U.S. Journalists (2002)	U.S. Population (2002)
Age (mean/median)	42.45/45	39.25/39	40.49/41	39.88/41	NA/41	
Education						
Percentage with college degrees	89.1	98.0	93.0	93.3	89.3	25.6
Percentage with graduate degrees	30.9	22.0	15.8	14.6	16.5	
Political party identification						
Democrat	30.9%	32.2%	17.0%	38.2%	37.1%	32.0%
Republicans	5.5%	5.7%	10.6%	9.7%	18.6%	31.0%
Independent	63.6%	49.4%	68.1%	47.2%	33.5%	32.0%
Other	0.0%	12.6%	4.3%	4.9%	10.5%	1.0%
White <sup>a</sup>	98.2%	92.3%	87.7%	92.1%	90.5%	69.1%
Nonwhite <sup>b</sup>	1.8%	3.3%	7.1%	3.3%	9.5%	30.9%
Male	70.9%	73.6%	71.9%	68.2%	67%	
Income > \$60,000/year	13.2%	4.8%	15.1%	6.3%	NA	
Religion						
Protestant	38.2 %	36.7%	56.9%	65.5%	53.0%	
Catholic	40.0%	28.9%	19.6%	19.6%	25.0%	
Jewish	10.9%	6.7%	2.0%	2.7%	2.0%	
Percentage saying religion is "very important"	18.5	26.4	22.6	35.4	36.3	
Most read newspaper, per week	1. <i>New York Times</i> (67%) 2. <i>Boston Globe</i> (49%)	1. <i>New York Times</i> (45%) 2. <i>Denver Post</i> (21%)	1. <i>New York Times</i> (65%) 2. <i>Oregonian</i> (44%)	1. <i>New York Times</i> (42%) 2. <i>Washington Post</i> (23%)	1. <i>New York Times</i> (38.1%)	

a. The categories other than white were "black/African-American," "Hispanic/Latino," "Asian/Asian-American," "Native American/Indian," "other," "don't know," "not applicable," and "refuse."

b. Nonwhite categories include "black/African-American," "Hispanic/Latino," "Asian/Asian-American," and "Native American/Indian."

environment reporters in the South said that religion was very important to them, only 26.4 percent in the Mountain West, 22.6 percent in the Pacific Northwest, and 18.5 percent in New England said that religious beliefs were very important, compared with 38.0 percent of U.S. journalists in 1992, 36.3 percent of U.S. reporters in 2002 (D. H. Weaver, personal communication, June 7, 2005), and 61.0 percent of the U.S. population as a whole in 1992 (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996).

The environment reporters' political party identifications differed by region and often differed from the party identification of U.S. journalists in general and the U.S. population in 2002 (see Table 13). There was a different story in each of the regions:

- In the Pacific Northwest, an overwhelming percentage of environment reporters (68.1 percent) identified themselves as independents, and a far smaller portion of environment reporters identified themselves as Democrats than in any other region; as a result, the difference between Democrats (17.0 percent) and Republicans (10.6 percent) was not as sharp.
- In New England, a similar 63.6 percent of the environment reporters identified themselves as independents. Of those remaining, the portion identifying themselves as Democrats (30.9 percent) was far greater than the handful of Republicans (5.5 percent).
- In the Mountain West, a surprising 12.6 percent of environment reporters volunteered that they belong to an "other party" aside from the two traditional parties. (They were not pressed on whether it was specifically the Green Party.) Another 49.4 percent called themselves independents. Of those remaining, self-identified Democrats (32.2 percent) outnumbered Republicans (5.7 percent).
- In the South, the percentage of independents (47.2 percent) was the lowest of any region. Of those identifying with parties, Democrats (38.2 percent) outnumbered Republicans (9.7 percent) by about a four-to-one margin.

The environment reporters also were asked about their use of the news media. One daily newspaper towered above all others as a source of information for these environment reporters. The *New York Times* was the most read newspaper, regardless of where the environment reporters worked or how far they lived from New York City.

While 67 percent of the reporters in New England said they read the *Times* at least once a week, 65 percent of those in the more distant Pacific Northwest also cited the *Times*. In the Mountain West, the comparable percentage was 45 percent; in the South, it was 42 percent. In all four regions, the percentage of environment reporters reading the *Times* exceeded the 38.1 percent of general U.S. journalists who read the *Times*, on average, in the 2002 survey.

No other newspaper came close to the readership of the *Times* across the four regions examined. The environment reporters generally were more likely to rely on major papers in their regions rather than to read other papers with national audiences, such as the *Wall Street Journal* or *USA Today*. In New England, the most cited newspapers after the *Times* were the *Boston Globe*

(49 percent) and the *Wall Street Journal* (20 percent). In the Mountain West, the most cited papers were the *Denver Post* (21 percent) and the *Rocky Mountain News*, the *Arizona Republic*, and the *Salt Lake Tribune* (each with 14 percent). In the Pacific Northwest, 44 percent of the environment reporters read the *Oregonian*, and another 39 percent read the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and/or the *Seattle Times*. In the South, 23 percent reported reading the *Washington Post*, 13 percent the *Wall Street Journal*, and 11 percent read the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. (The *Miami Herald* trailed at 9 percent.)

### **The Special Case of the Pacific Northwest**

This study suggests general consistency across environment reporters in the four regions. Yet there is evidence in the data that some regional differences do exist and that one region in particular differed from the others. The Pacific Northwest had a far higher percentage of newspapers with environment reporters (70.0 percent) than any other region. The region also had a higher percentage of television stations (21.4 percent) with environment reporters. These reporters typically spent greater percentages of their time on environment stories (with a mean of 53.7 percent) than their counterparts in the Mountain West (49.96 percent), the South (44.2 percent), and New England (37.9 percent). The environment reporters in the Pacific Northwest were more likely to be paid in the highest category (15.1 percent earned more than \$60,000 a year) and least likely to consider themselves Democrats (17 percent).

Pacific Northwest environment reporters were more likely to say that they would like more training (82.1 percent) compared with those in New England (75.9 percent), the Mountain West (78.0 percent), and the South (77.5 percent). They were more likely to have majored in journalism or mass communication as undergraduates (68.0 percent) compared with those in New England (37.1 percent), the Mountain West (65.9 percent), and the South (43.2 percent). And they were more likely (93.0 percent) to say that their editors felt that “environmental stories are important and worthy of prominent play” compared with 86.8 percent of reporters in the Mountain West, 85.4 percent in the South, and 78.2 percent in New England.

## **Discussion**

Newspapers with large circulations in all four regions usually employed environment reporters during the period studied. Newspapers with very



small circulations (less than 14,000) generally did not have environment reporters, except in the Pacific Northwest, where eight of eighteen newspapers with circulations of less than 14,000 did have environmental journalists. Roughly half the daily newspapers in New England and the Mountain West employed environment reporters, compared with 70.0 percent in the Pacific Northwest and 40.6 percent in the South.

Most television stations in all four regions did not employ environment reporters during the years examined. The numbers were consistent in three of the four regions, where only 11.7 to 12.1 percent of the television stations employed environment reporters. In the fourth region, the Pacific Northwest, 21.4 percent of the television stations had environmental journalists.

The environment reporters in all four regions generally covered the environment only part of the time, and their job titles often reflected their diverse reporting responsibilities. They were usually veteran journalists, with considerable environment reporting experience. Most were satisfied with their jobs, as were U.S. journalists in general in roughly the same time period. They often used similar characteristics in evaluating their jobs, although there were some regional differences. Many used similar news sources when preparing environment reports and showed some consistency in ignoring others. They generally used multiple angles in framing their stories, with government and human interest leading the list and health and risk assessment at the bottom, although the statistical distance between the highest ranked angles and the lowest ranked was not very great.

The environment reporters in three of the four regions split almost equally as to whether environmental problems are better stories than environmental solutions; only in the Mountain West did a substantial majority of the reporters disagree that environmental problems are better stories than solutions. A majority in all four regions said environmental journalists generally concentrate far too much on problems and pollution rather than writing stories to help readers understand research or complex issues, although in one region, the Mountain West, the results were very close to an even split. A strong majority in all four regions disagreed with the statement that environmental journalists generally have overblown environmental risks, unduly alarming the public.

Some reporters appeared to be drawing fine lines, first recognizing the news value of environmental problem stories, then chastising their peers for spending too much time on such stories, while still arguing that reporters handle these stories without overblowing risk.

The reporters responded fairly consistently when asked to identify which people, problems, and institutions were barriers to reporting environmental

news. Time constraints were seen as the most significant barriers in all four regions (by 42.6 to 55.0 percent of the reporters), and financial, travel, or other resource constraints were number two. On the other hand, editors and supervisors were called barriers by only 1.8 to 3.6 percent of the journalists, and many potential barriers were listed even lower. All but two of the respondents in the four regions agreed that environmental journalists need to be just as objective as journalists in general, and all but two agreed that environmental journalists need to be fair to both corporations and environmental activist groups. A majority disagreed with the idea of working with community leaders to solve environmental problems and with the statement that environmental journalists sometimes should be advocates for the environment. However, substantial minorities in all four regions said that environmental journalists should work with community leaders and sometimes should be environmental advocates. Although simple majorities in all four regions disagreed with the idea that environmental journalists tend to be too green, sizable minorities agreed with the statement. Almost everyone agreed that environment reporters are not too brown.

This research is based on a series of regional studies of environment reporters. We have so far avoided any effort to combine data across regions, which might suggest generalizing the results to represent the nation as a whole. Instead, the analysis is based on the specific regions examined. This project will continue region by region until a censuslike national study of environment reporters has been compiled. At that time, the regions will be compared, contrasted, and finally combined to give national data.

This study found uniformity across all four regions in many demographic and attitudinal characteristics of environment reporters. Because the four regional studies were conducted in successive years, from 2000 to 2003, the consistency of the results points to similar consistency across time. In fact, this research did not find major differences that could be attributable to time, from spring 2000, when New England was studied during the end of the Clinton administration, to spring 2003, when the South was completed under President Bush's term. But some regional differences do exist. In the Pacific Northwest, a far greater number of newspapers and television stations employed environment reporters than in the other regions, whereas in the South, a smaller number of newspapers (only 40.6 percent) employed environmental journalists than in the other regions. Although there are many indicators in which Pacific Northwest reporters were consistent in their attitudes and work habits with reporters in the other areas, regional differences appear to set the Pacific Northwest apart in important ways. Not only was it an area where newspapers and television

stations were more likely to hire environment reporters, but also these Pacific Northwest reporters were higher paid, more likely to have been journalism majors, less likely to be Democrats, and more likely to see their editors as supporting environment stories.

Nevertheless, the essential findings of this study are those of similarities rather than differences. This may be due to the kind of people attracted to the beat, the training they receive, or newsroom routines. The goal of this project is to create an accurate database of environment reporters in the United States. Thus far, it appears that when this nationwide environmental journalism project is completed, the results generally will reflect national tendencies rather than regional differences.

## Notes

1. The states in New England were Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; those in the Mountain West were Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; those in the Pacific Northwest were Alaska, Oregon, and Washington; and those in the South were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

2. These numbers were consistent across regions except for the Pacific Northwest, where eight of eighteen newspapers with circulations of less than 14,000 did have environment reporters.

3. Indiana University professors David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit conducted important surveys of American journalists in 1982 and 1992 (published in full detail in their 1996 book *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era*). In 2002, Weaver et al. (2005) again surveyed American journalists, releasing initial findings as *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: Key Findings*.

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